

UBIQUITOUS ART

by Charlie Finch

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The idea of art is everywhere these days. I turn on CSPAN and there is John Updike, lecturing at the National Institute of Humanities on American painting. He divides, with flinty irritability, our painting history into "lineiness" (horrible word!) and "painterliness." Updike ridicules John Singleton Copley's startling and surreal portrait of Nathaniel Allen (1763) for its heightened artifice and then rips into Charles Sheeler and Thomas Hart Benton.

I switch the channel. Brooklyn Museum czar Arnold Lehman is lambasting the press, at a Crain's press breakfast, for reducing the Brook's curations about graffiti and Star Wars to a few sensationalistic headlines. Chill, Arnie: the press is your friend and, apparently, your breakfast.

Cherubic, red haired artist Marc Seguin tells me, "I'm famous in Canada and Europe. François Pinault collects my work." And what is Marc's medium? "I shoot crows at my farm on the Canadian border. I get up at dawn to do it. If I don't kill the first crow with one shot, the whole flock eludes me." Seventy-two dead crows, formed into one giant crow on the wall, comprise Marc's new work. He's also constructing large heads of the Popes in his Brooklyn studio.

A buxom young collector shows me her latest acquisitions on her BlackBerry. "I can remember the art, but have a hard time with the artists' names," she tells me. "Here's a guy who does sculptures of the first hundred numbers, made of little iron men. I bought number 59." Her art adviser is David Hunt, who is curating summer shows at Tracy Williams Ltd. and three other New York spaces.

Carol Vogel writes in *The New York Times* about the "mystery" of guessing which pieces plutocrats Roman Abramovitch bought at the London auctions. I guess Mussolini also seemed mysterious until he invaded Ethiopia. Carol's colleague Roberta Smith writes that the J.M.W. Turner retrospective at the Met left her cold.

At a girls' camp in Massachusetts, professor and sculptor Elliott Arkin asks his ten-year-old students to name the greatest living artist. One bright young thing raises her hand and answers, "Rothko!" Arkin demurs, "He's dead. Have you ever heard of Jeff Koons?"

Art and its discourses are plainly all around us. Even the old guy next to me in the Internet cafe is wearing a Patrick Mimram T-shirt. (Mimram is the eccentric who buys up all that Chelsea billboard space to post messages attacking the art establishment.) We live in a civilization drenched to the brim with material things, where Oscar Wilde's "price is everything and value: nothing." Talking about art is our way to elevate the world of things into the realm of the spirit. So far, even a collapsing economy can't drag down this self-willed levitation. But time, art's illusory enabler, will surely tell, won't it?

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artnet



John Singleton Copley
Nathaniel Allen, 1763
Honolulu Academy of Arts



Brooklyn Museum director Arnold Lehman addresses a Crain's New York Business Breakfast on "publicity vs. substance"



Marc Seguin
Astral Death, 2008
Naturalized crows and plastic diamonds on canvas 84 x 120 inches
Courtesy: Charest-Weinberg, Miami