

THAT CAGEY GIRL

FROM THE PRODUCER OF "THE BLOG" COMES A STORY OF...STUFF

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 2010

Me talk smart one day

I started writing this last Friday, but it was very late and I was very tired and so it never got quite finished, so I post it now.

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I had a really good experience today going to Apexart to see [The Incidental Person](#). The number and variety of works was impressive, and what seems to have held them all together (as it was meant to, I believe) is a certain fundamental assumption about the nature and uses of creativity. Indeed, I got to talking with Steven, the guy who runs the place, an exceptionally friendly, nice, and open man, who gave just that answer when I brought up again the question of "quality" (do you care about it and by what criteria) that an art student he was talking to a minute earlier had mentioned. What matters to the gallery, according to him -- and, presumably, the artists in the show and, incidentally, to one of the people I interviewed over the break -- is the quality of the creativity rather than the resultant product. In these beliefs, the people involved are not unique, but I do think that seeing this show sort of helped me encapsulate and crystallize in my mind this set of values with a new clarity. And they are values I subscribe to. I pretty much have to. I don't think holding this set of values dear is an exclusive proposition or that it precludes me from also craving scale and grandeur and craft and nuance and intellectual rigor from "products," even if the latter create a significant need for and justification of a professionalized art world (about which Steven was none too enthusiastic). But I do think, that given the choice between spectacle and process, these days, I'd take process. I came to that reckoning as I was walking home (2.4 miles from 96th St!) and listening to a [story about the new Dallas Cowboys stadium on Studio 360](#). I found their attempt to buy cultural prestige really depressing...

All of which is not to say that I don't find what I'll provisionally call the process paradigm troubling in certain ways, as well. Even if we leave aside the visual forms that art-as-a-social-activity (for example) takes, I find that its focus on its own extended process makes it quite difficult (at least for someone with mild OCD) to process. There is often more information than a person just exposed to the material can possibly manage, which makes it difficult both in terms of logistics (it demands more time than most of us can -- or are willing -- to give) and in terms of justifying to yourself why this particular information, taken from the world saturated with it and presented seemingly at random based on the interests of someone I don't know, should matter and should get my attention. Ironically, I think a big part of the impetus that lies behind the works in the show is to show that the quality of the attention one is willing to pay -- to almost

anything, from life-and-death politics to creating cheers for strangers who need cheering up -- is what matters and what has transformative power. The idea is that if you can get yourself to really pay attention in the gallery, you'll be able to transfer that skill to your own life. The rightness of this assumption is not smth I'm yet ready to discuss, and it doesn't change the fact that our willingness to pay extreme, extended attention to the particular topics of the artists' interest is often taken for granted, which I don't think is a safe -- or necessarily dialogue-inspiring -- thing to do.

Which also raises the question of the curator's role and ability to intervene in shaping the presentation of information. (The other day I was talking to a friend who also loved the Bauhaus show, and she said, "It's just so good to go to a real didactic show, walk away feeling like you really learned things." I couldn't help but agree). (This is the bit where I got really tired, and no more thoughts were coming forth, but it's also the bit where I have the most solidified opinions, so I'm ok with not thinking them out through writing).

I'm very glad I went, and the man I spoke with was very encouraging of me coming back to spend more time with the show, which I'd like to try and do. I think the degree to which his interest in the audience and personal warmth predisposes me towards taking an interest in the art is the best proof of the fundamental premise on which he runs his gallery.

These are all things I need to think about.

My visit to the gallery and the conversation (and, I must confess, the fact of getting to take home an awesome neon-green cloth bag) put me in such a good mood that I didn't even get anxious and panicky when I had to hang out in Union Square for a bit till my friend was able to call me and explain the crazy reasons for her not being there. I just got a cup of tea and piece of pumpkin bread from one of the last open farmers' market stalls and hung out. When we did finally meet up, we talked about theory fatigue that much of the art world and, indeed, the humanities seem to be experiencing. She definitely doesn't have that problem and, apparently, neither do I, though I don't like theory quite as much as she does. It was a good conversation and nice walk home and now I'm tired and ready to sleep. Last night, I dreamt that my laptop was going all soft and gooey in my hands. Well, my brain is doing that in my head right now.