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## Publicity In Art...Or, Artists Who Are Famous for Being Artists.

By Daniel Grant

In 1949, Life magazine published an article whose title asked the question "Is Jackson Pollock the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" Although the article seemed to ask readers to answer in the negative, it heralded a new attitude of the news media to the arts. Despite a portrayal of Pollock as a madman whose



JACKSON POLLOCK #5

work and mode of working defied comprehension, the artist was described in terms of his success in selling his works. If he sells, it is assumed, the rest is OK.

Publicity has become a staple in the art world, affecting how artists see themselves and how dealers work. On its good side, it has attracted increasing numbers of people to museums and galleries to see

what all the hullabaloo is about and consequently expanded the market for works of art. More artists are able to live off their work and be socially accepted for what they are.

On the other hand, it has made the appreciation of art shallower by seeming to equate financial success with artistic importance. At times, publicity becomes the art itself, with the public knowing that it should appreciate some work because "it's famous," distorting the entire experience of art.

The artists who were first affected by the media interest in the arts were the Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s. Although their works and goals were almost too diverse to label them truly as a group, these artists who had grown up during the same period and shared many similar experiences were united by a mood that all shared -- morbid and alienated.

The shared isolation and camaraderie were broken up by the new attention they began receiving -- bitterness by some artists who were less successful toward others who were more so, anger at how their seclusion had been destroyed and how their lives had suddenly gone public, and guilty over the feeling that they had become commercial. Feuds and bitterness poisoned their lives. Many -- like Willem de Kooning, Conrad Marca-Relli, Philip Pavia, and Jack Tworikov -- felt themselves passed over by the media for the next generation of artists.

"The art world, by which I mean critics, dealers, everyone except the artist, is interested in the new and forgets everything else," noted Tworikov, who has continued painting. "Some artists got put on the back burner after a while. It is inevitable."

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He pointed out that the art world is immeasurably bigger now than when he first started out, organized and run completely by nonartists.

"Most of the art shows in the '30s, '40s, and even into the 1950s were run by artists," he said. "There were artist juries who picked the work and ran the exhibits. Now, these kinds of shows have the least prestige. Curators pick the shows today by going around to galleries and selecting the biggest names. It's oriented toward the box office."

Whereas the art in the 1950s attracted the most attention -- treated with curiosity, disdain, and bewilderment by a public that was unused to such stuff -- the spotlight shifted in the 1960s to the artist's life. To many, it represented an alternative life for those disenchanted with middle-class society. To others, it became chic for the socially ambitious to rub elbows



**ANDY WARHOL - Marilyn Monroe**

with artists and become trustees at museums. Openings became major social events, and artists were courted by politicians and tycoons.

And Warhol, the Pop artist, was probably the most notable figure of this time, for whom creating an image was more important than creating art. But many others -- some of whom flitted in and out of notoriety -- found that their lives had become a matter of public concern,

with artists and become trustees at museums. Openings became major social events, and artists were courted by politicians and tycoons.

And Warhol, the Pop artist, was probably the most notable

limiting their freedom.

Ivan Karp, an associate director of the Leo Castelli gallery during the 1950s and who set up his own gallery in the '60s, said that "there are colorful figures in the arts, and people court them. The cumulative effect is a mythology around artists."

He added that in the 1960s "the idea of culture became feasible and people looked for icons. And Warhol was famous for being famous, and someone like Larry Rivers, too, depends on his being visible, as his work isn't that good."

Many aspects of the artists' life style -- with the exception, of course, of their general poverty -- became appropriated by the middle class, the most obvious example being loft-living. Artists found themselves priced out of the abandoned warehouse buildings they had settled into as the glamour of living in a spacious loft caught fire in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and elsewhere.

The spotlight in the 1970s shifted from the art and the artist to the buyers of art, largely because of the record-setting prices paid for works. Whether art was bought as a hedge against inflation or as a tax shelter or for more personal reasons, the purchasers of art found themselves the celebrities. The artist's success became their success in being wise or wealthy enough to buy a work. Armand Hammer, Walter Annenberg, J. Paul Getty, Robert Lehman, Norton Simon, David Rockefeller, Alfred Sackler, Joseph A. Hirshhorn -- these were among the most notable buyers of art, and they received considerable attention for the prices they paid for works, the collections they established, and what they did with those collections. Banks and corporations have also gotten into art buying in a big way. They are doing this for a variety of reasons, according to some people in the business community:

"Business art support creates good press and good community relations," says Edward Straus, pres-

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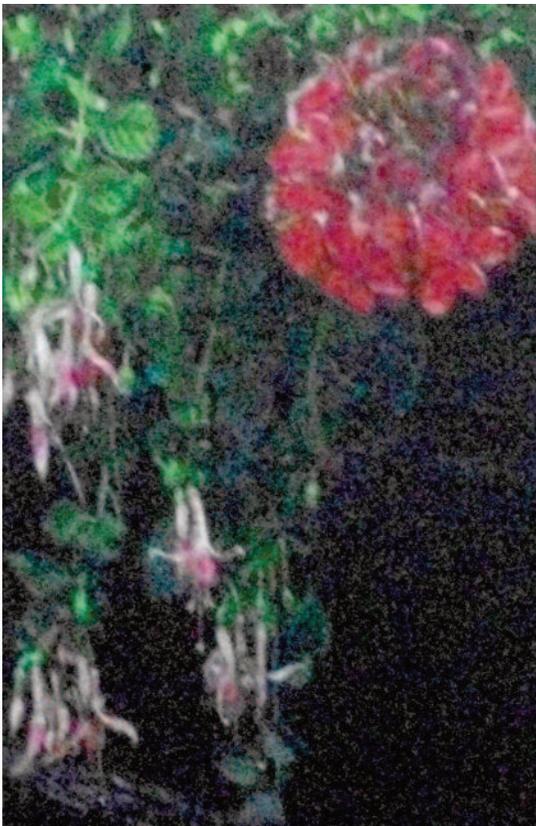
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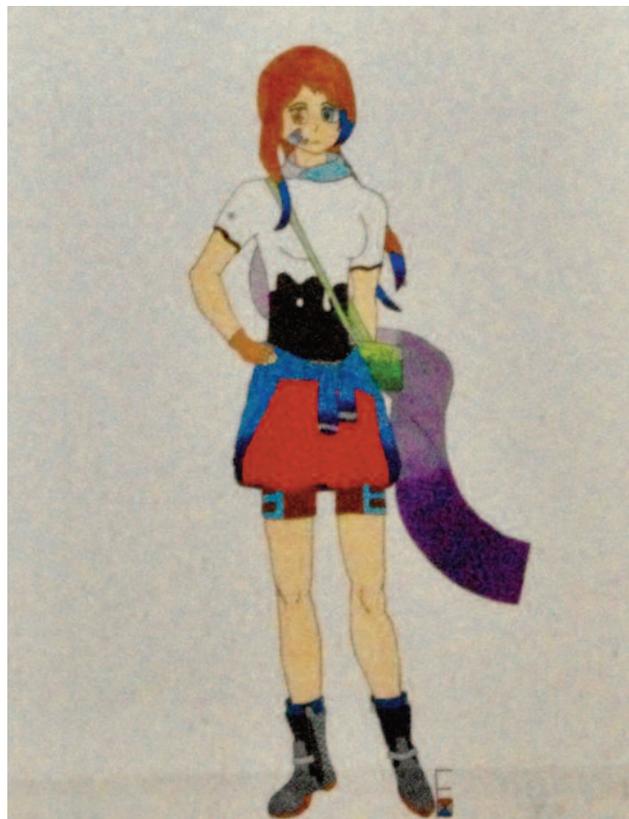
# PVAA MONTHLY SHOW AWARDS



MONTHLY SHOW - 1st Place Award



MONTHLY SHOW - Honorable Mention



MONTHLY SHOW - Student Award

ident of the Business Committee for the Arts, an organization that surveys, and acts as advocate for, arts involvement by the business community. "You couldn't buy the kind of goodwill in dozens of ads that one article in a newspaper can provide just by supporting the arts."

There appears to be such a burgeoning in corporate collections that the Business Committee for the Arts now runs annual seminars on how to manage and build corporate art collections.

Katharine Kuh noted that more and more

books have come out on people who buy art, adding that "collections often think that they become part of the artistic process when they buy works. They're not, but they still think so."

Betty Parsons, an art dealer, says "The publicity attending the sale of pictures is disgusting." She recalled Jasper John's comment on learning that his 1959 painting "Three Flags," which sold originally for \$915, had been recently purchased by the Whitney Museum in New York for \$1 million: "It's very funny, but it has nothing to do with art."

## WORD SEARCH

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