

AD REINHARDT Twelve Rules for a New Academy (1953)

Evil and error in art are art's own “uses” and “actions.” The sins and sufferings of art are always its own improper involvements and mixtures, its own mindless realisms and expressionisms.

The humiliation and trivialization of art in America during the last three decades have been the easy exploitations and eager popularizations of art by the American artists themselves. Ashcan and Armory expressionists mixed their art up with life muckraking and art marketing. Social and surreal expressionists of the thirties used art as an “action on the public,” but succeeded mainly in expressing themselves, and abstract expressionists of the forties and fifties, using art initially as a “self-expression,” succeeded in acting upon the whole world. The business boom of the twenties orphaned the alienated artist, but the Great Depression of the thirties witnessed the tender engagement of art to government. Ten years after that, the ardent marriage of art and business and war was celebrated with Pepsi-Cola in ceremonial contests called “Artists for Victory” at America's greatest museum of art. By the fifties, armies of art's offsprings were off to school and Sunday school, crusading for art education and religious decoration.



From “Artists for Ashcan and Dust Bowl” to “Artist for America-First and Social Security” to “Artists for Victory” to “Artists for Action in Business, Religion, and Education,” the portrait of the artist in America in the twentieth century shapes up into a figure resembling Al Capp's Available Jones, who is always available to anyone, any time, for anything at all, at any price.

(The “ice has been broken,” the ivory tower flooded by unschooled professionals, the walls of the academy washed out by schooled primitives, and the sanctum sanctorum blasphemed by fauve folk, Bauhaus bacchuses, and housebroken samurai.)

The conception of art as “fine,” “high,” “noble,” “free,” “liberal,” and “ideal” has always been academic. The argument of free or fine artists has never been between art and something else, but “between true art and art submitted to some other, quite different values.” “There are not two arts, there is only one.” “No man can embrace true art no he has explored and cast out false art.” The academy of art, whether the Western or Eastern ideal, has always aimed at “the correction of the artist,” not “the enlightenment of the public.” The idea of the “academy” of art in the seventeenth century, of “aesthetics” in the eighteenth, of the “independence” of art in the nineteenth, and of the “purity” of art in the twentieth, restate, in those centuries in Europe and America, the same “one point of view.” Fine art can only be defined as exclusive, negative, absolute, and timeless. It is not practical. useful, related, applicable, or subservient to anything else. Fine art has its own thought, its own history and tradition, its own reason, its own discipline. It has its own “integrity” and not someone else's “integration” with something else.

Fine art is not “a means of making a living” or “a way of living a life.” Art that is a matter of life and death cannot be fine or free art. An artist who dedicates his life to art, burdens his art with his life and his life with his art. “Art is Art, and Life is Life.”

The “tradition” of art is art “out of time,” art made fine, art emptied and purified of all other-than-art meanings, and a museum of fine art should exclude everything but fine art. The art tradition stands as the antique-present model of what has been achieved and what does not need to be achieved again. Tradition shows the artist what not to do. “Pea- son” in art shows what art is not. “Higher education for the artist should be

'liberal,' 'free' and the 'learning of greatness.'" "To teach and enlighten is the task of wise and virtuous men." "No greater painter was ever self-taught." "Artists must learn and learn to forget their learning." "The way to know is to forget."

"The guardian of the true tradition in art" is the academy of fine art: "to give certain rules to our art and to render it pure." The first rule and absolute standard of fine art, and painting, which is the highest and freest art, is the purity of it. The more uses, relations, and "additions" a painting has, the less pure it is. The more stuff in it, the busier the work of art, the worse it is. "More is less."

The less an artist thinks in non-artistic terms and the less he exploits the easy, common skills, the more of an artist he is. "The less an artist obtrudes himself in his painting, the purer and clearer his aims." The less exposed a painting is to a chance public, the better. "Less is more."

The Six Traditions to be studied are: (1) the pure icon; (2) pure perspective, pure line, and pure brushwork; (3) the pure landscape, (4) the pure portrait; (5) the pure still life; (6) pure form, pure color, and pure monochrome. "Study ten thousand paintings and walk ten thousand miles." "Externally, keep yourself away from all relationships, and internally, have no hankerings in your heart." "The pure old men of old slept without, dreams and waked without anxiety."

The Six General Canons or the Six Noes to be memorized are: (1) No realism, or existentialism. "When the vulgar and commonplace dominate, the spirit subsides." (2) No impressionism. "The artist should once and forever emancipate himself from the bondage of appearance." "The eye is a menace to clear sight." (3) No expressionism or surrealism. "The laying bare of oneself," autobiographically or socially, "is obscene." (4) No fauvism, primitivism, or brute art. "Art begins with the getting rid of nature." (5) No constructivism, sculpture, plasticism, or graphic arts. No collage, paste, paper, sand, or string. "Sculpture is a very mechanical exercise causing much perspiration, which, mingling with grit, turns into mud." (6) No "*trompe-l'oeil*," interior decoration, or architecture. The ordinary qualities and common sensitivities of these activities lie outside free and intellectual art.

The Twelve Technical Rules (or How to Achieve the Twelve Things to Avoid) to be followed are:

1. No texture. Texture is naturalistic or mechanical and is a vulgar quality, especially pigment texture or impasto. Palette knifing, canvas-stabbing, paint scumbling and other action techniques are unintelligent and to be avoided. No accidents or automatism.

2. No brushwork or calligraphy. Handwriting, hand-working and hand-jerking are personal and in poor taste. No signature or trademarking. "Brushwork should be invisible." "One should never let the influence of evil demons gain control of the brush."

3. No sketching or drawing. Everything, where to begin and where to end, should be worked out in the mind beforehand. "In painting the idea should exist in the mind before the brush is taken up." No line or outline. "Madmen see outlines and therefore they draw them." A fine is a figure, a "square is a face." No shading or streaking.

4. No forms. "The finest has no shape." No figure or fore- or background. No volume or mass, no cylinder, sphere or cone, or cube or boogie-woogie. No push or pull. "No shape or substance."

5. No design. "Design is everywhere."

6. No colors. "Color blinds." "Colors are an aspect of appearance and so only of the surface." Colors are barbaric, unstable, suggest life, "cannot be completely controlled," and "should be concealed." Colors are a "distracting embellishment." No white. "White is a color and all colors." White is "antiseptic and not artistic, appropriate and pleasing for kitchen fixtures, and hardly the medium for expressing -truth and beauty." White on white is "a transition from pigment to light" and "a screen for the projection of light" and "moving" pictures.

7. No light. No bright or direct light in or over the painting. Dim, late afternoon absorbent twilight is best outside. No chiaroscuro, "the malodorous reality of craftsmen, beg- gars, toppers with rags and wrinkles."

8. No space. Space should be empty, should not project, and should not be flat. "The painting should be behind the picture frame." The frame should isolate and protect the painting from its surroundings. Space divisions within the painting should not be seen.

9. No time. "Clock-time or man's time is inconsequential." There is no ancient or modern, no past or future in art. "A work of art is always present." The present is the future of the past, not the past of the future. "Now and long ago are one."

10. No size or scale. Breadth and depth of thought and feeling in art have no relation to physical size. Large sizes are aggressive, positivist, intemperate, vental, and graceless.

11. No movement. "Everything else is on the move. Art should be still."

12. No object, no subject, no matter. No symbols. images, or signs.
Neither pleasure nor pain. No mindless working or mindless non-working.
No chess-playing.

Supplementary regulations to be followed are: No easel or palette. Low, flat, sturdy benches work well. Brushes should be new, clean, flat, even, one-inch wide, and strong. "If the heart is upright, the brush is firm." No noise. "The brush should pass over the surface lightly and smoothly" and silently. No rubbing or scraping. Paint should be permanent, free of impurities, mixed into and stored in jars. The scent should be "pure spirits of turpentine, unadulterated and freshly, distilled." "The glue should be as clear and clean as possible." Canvas is better than silk or paper, and linen is better than cotton. There should be no shine in the finish. Gloss reflects and relates to the changing surroundings. "A picture is finished when all traces of the means used to bring about the end have disappeared."

The fine-art studio should have a "raintight roof" and be twenty-five feet wide and thirty feet long, with extra space for storage and sink. Paintings should be stored away and not continually looked at. The ceiling should be twelve feet high. The studio should be separate from the rest of the school.

The fine artists should have a fine mind, "free of all passion, ill-will and delusion."
The fine artist need not sit cross-legged.

Ad Reinhardt. Excerpts from "Twelve Rules for a New Academy" (1953), in *ArtNews* 56. no. 3 (May 1957): 37-38. 56; reprinted in Barbara Rose, ed., *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* (New York: Viking, 1975). 203-7.