

The Function Of The Arts In Culture Today

As published in High Performance, 1988.

STATEMENT

Art can be to pacify, to make money, to decorate, to entertain. But I am committed to art as an underground war against fragmentation on all realities. This should be the position of avant-garde art. The goal of this art should be to create alternatives to the fragmented society.

As artists our tools are magic, our bodies, taboos and dreams. We need to be warriors who will go into the areas of taboo, will push beyond where it is comfortable and safe. We must be idealists, willing to live ideals.

In the past 20 years, the calling of art has become the career of art. The passion and idealism became the studying of the trends of what will be “in” next. The passionate vulnerability that creates magic was replaced by a cool and clever intellectualism. We got seduced by high tech...seduced by the modern media, by the quest for large audiences.

Performance is being ruined by trying to package it as off-beat cabaret entertainment. Some performance fits into this slot. But when most performance is forced into neat cabaret format, making performance acceptable and profitable, performance becomes a hip form of nightclub watching, groovy TV watching. Performance is being limited in time and space for acceptability. Performance is in danger of becoming society’s lapdog, instead of a magical lab.

Art is the way society dreams, the way society expands its freedom, explores the forbidden in safety. Society needs its dream art, just as an individual needs to dream or go insane. Our fragmented world needs taboo-breaking dreams to get back to freedom. Our society is at a fork in its growth. It can go deeper into high tech impersonal isolation, or it can rediscover the magic that happens when physical and emotional humans actively and directly link up with one another. Art can either just follow society, recording the trends, or it can take a pathfinder role. We artists must not make cynical statements from our inner worlds about how fucked up the rest of society is. We must create alternative community realities in which people can be actively involved.