

Letters on artistic questions

28 February 2005

The following is a selection of letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site on three articles recently published dealing with questions of art and culture.

On "Arthur Miller, an American playwright"

A singularly brilliant analysis of Arthur Miller's works. I was flabbergasted by its erudition and insight. The review reminded me of the need to critique military historians, all of whom go over the battles of WWII without ever turning their attention to what economic, social, and political forces and dynamics led to WWII.

RLB

Bradenton, Florida

22 February 2005

I thought your article on Miller was very insightful. I was always bored by his plays and couldn't quit figure my own lack of sympathy to his characters. He never "moved" me in anyway. I think dear Marilyn would have been better off marrying T. Williams who certainly would have understood her dimension in a much fuller way.

DM

22 February 2005

Congratulations, David, on yet another brilliant article placing the work of an important writer in his socio-political context. No other recent critic has understood Miller's work in such a profound, well-researched way.

CB

London, England

22 February 2005

Thanks for your revealing, well researched, well thought out, and comprehensive review of Miller's life. Helped me to understand a lot about not only him and his works, but also his society, contemporaries, and his times.

TR

Garland, Texas

22 February 2005

On "Michigan artist sentenced to jail over mural nudity"

I cannot believe that in this modern world we are in, that the artist's right to freedom of speech has been deprived. I did not expect that from a country like the USA. He has a strong case. The paintings are in chapels everywhere and in museums, why not make it available to the public (free). I support the artist and wish him strength. I wish he will win this case.

DL

St. Martin, Caribbean

24 February 2005

That is ridiculous. It's strange that this country would consider itself morally upright by censoring artwork; meanwhile Hollywood and corporate ads exploit sexuality to increase sales and profit. It's plainly hypocritical to send a man to prison for a mural created on his property, meanwhile sexual humiliation is used to torture prisoners in Iraq and at Guantanamo.

AA

Las Cruces, New Mexico

24 February 2005

It seems to me that the real anger over this piece may be less related to breasts than to the depiction of Eve, woman, in place of Adam, man. The fundamentalist tendencies organizing in our government and legal system are doubtless as provoked over nudity (as John Ashcroft was with the lady justice statue) as the symbolic feminist statement made with the substitution of Eve as recipient of the "divine spark" that endows her with a soul. It is also worth noting that in Michelangelo's original, Adam, arm outstretched, is reaching as much to God as to the premonition of Eve, who is gazing back at him from God's sheltering left arm. This type of sensuousness, Catholic, Mannerist, has long been a peeve of the later, puritanical sects of Christianity.

NG

Kentucky

24 February 2005

Sounds like the Taliban has infiltrated the US. What's next?

AMR

Canada

26 February 2005

Throughout history civilizations have been judged by their art, and we also, in the West, judge past civilizations by the art which we display, and too often sadly steal, from other cultures. But as with the Stalinists, the Nazis, the Maoists, and now the Bushites, art is the thing that must go.

It is a curious thing, is it not, that the people who advocate "No Child Left Behind," rid the schools of art and literature, and when they have that under way they begin to attack the working artists that have not fallen under the control of the empire.

Art and literature, theatre and music, these are how we are defined by both ourselves and by the future generations. What will they have left when the art of all of the cultures of the earth

has been pillaged by armies, looted by wealthy collectors, destroyed by insane fundamentalists, and prohibited by tyrants? This can not be allowed to come to pass. We the inhabitants of the earth cannot, indeed must not allow our culture, our history, our very humanity to be destroyed and reduced to “correct” and “acceptable” garbage from philistines of the likes of Bush and his compatriots and masters.

No brothers and sisters, this is more than the imprisoning of an artist in Michigan or Texas. This is taking from us our identity. First our language and then our art until all we have left is what we are told and what we are given. Freedom is slavery. War is Peace. Four legs good, two legs better. George Orwell was an optimist.

RAV

Upper Marlboro, Maryland

26 February 2005

On “An ‘uplifting’ diversion in New York’s Central Park”

I want to commend you on a very well written and informative article. As is the case with most of the articles on WSWS.org this piece makes you think, unlike the art in Central Park. Having spent much time of my career flying in and out of New York City, I can tell you there is not much “uplifting” about poverty, crime, and homelessness. During my last visit there, the lead stories on the news were the football size rats that were playing in the streets and stoops of Brooklyn, a subway razor slasher that was targeting women and the need for the 2012 Olympics. The project in Central Park reminds me of the Regan era propaganda, smoke and mirrors routine. If you are following the distractions you might overlook the real problems that plague the city, state, country and world. Hopefully my comrades in NYC can see beyond the slight of hand routine in Central Park and begin to work on the real problems that plague the workers of their city.

CV

Ouray, Colorado

23 February 2005

Peter Daniel’s review did a commendable job in unlocking the social and historical connections behind Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s “The Gates,” which he aptly labeled “capitalist realism.” However, relative to this work as art, Daniel’s statement that it is “not unpleasant” and “agreeable” calls for some further comment.

Art has multiple layers of significance precisely because it is a social act that expresses an artist’s vision to others. Christo’s projects encourage people to think about the environment, which is necessarily a political act because of the effects of capitalist plundering. Artistically, Christo brings into focus a particular environment and necessarily displays how he views it. It shows whether one likes that environment as it is or whether one thinks it should be changed. In the case of the present project, “The Gates” seem to overwhelm Central Park. Their 16-foot height makes the 12-foot space between each seems so close that one is left in many instances with only a

tunnel view under the gates or a feeling of a barrier wall. Although the fabric used is interesting seen close-up and when seen with the sun passing through, the strong orange color—who could think of them as “saffron”?—is not particularly pleasing against the vista of leafless trees. While this is, of course, a matter of individual taste, the question is whether one is trying to interact with or cancel out the environment. One wonders why green, or even a more pastel orange or yellow, or a transitioning color spectrum, were not used.

The purposefulness of Christo’s design is obvious when compared to his 1991 “Umbrellas.” There, giant umbrellas of blue were attractively scattered across green hills of rural Japan while yellow ones highlighted the golden, grassy desert hills of southern California. The spacing made one appreciate the landscape and its lines even more. The colors complimented rather than clashed with their surroundings. That project showed a sensibility of working with those environments, not over or against them.

The democratic nature that Christo claimed for his project, as well as that it was inventive and fun, attracts some supporters. No one has to buy a ticket to get in, workers were paid union rate, the park would be restored to the people after 16 days as it had been, and all the material used are to be industrially recycled. But Christo’s pretensions to democracy are not born out, even if it was funded by rich clientele willing to pay for his planning drawings. Democracy would require an interaction somehow between the artist and the citizenry, who would have an effective voice. Aside from those who feel \$21 million might have better served other purposes, the “The Gates” poses the danger of an undemocratic precedent for privatization of decreasing public space. One wonders if Disney’s clout would allow for rows of “Micky” flags.

As Daniels pointed out, there is another environment that surrounds “The Gates,” the human one. Having lived and worked within walking distance to Central Park for more than 30 years, I now fear that the increasing destruction of New York’s “rent-stabilization” program will force me to move to another city. Yet I am way more fortunate than many other poverty-stricken and homeless victims of the real estate moguls. Daniels was right in turning the focus at the end of his review to the sense of unreality in the “feel-good” atmosphere promoted by the media and the government.

HL

New York, New York

22 February 2005



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