

Otto Berchem

Untitled (Five-Way Conversation Piece)

VA: A quick note on the introductory entry, before it gets passed aside. Some of these so-called, putative artists (I include myself here) have turned to architecture/design not to renovate/revive/revise art but to escape from art. (...)  
How did this change happen? Let me answer by telling a story, (my quick version of) a history. At the end of the 60s, the reason some artists became re-interested in art - the reason some artists (like me) came to art from another field (in my case, poetry/fiction) - was that art appeared at the time as a 'non-field' field: a field that had no characteristics of its own, except that it was called 'art'. 'Art', then, was a field into which you could import from other fields: from psychoanalysis, from history, from physics, etc. But it started to seem, over the years since, that the direction was wrong: rather than bring those other fields ('the world-around-us') into art, we should have brought art into those other fields. In other words, 'art' should be a verb, and that verb can operate out of other (grown-up rather than childish) fields.

Architecture is a convenient field in which art can be verbified, because the experience of architecture is a verb, is motion, is time, is activity. Architecture is the art of the everyday world, the everyday life-space; everybody knows architecture, whether they realize it or not - everybody knows architecture because everybody has walked through a doorway, everybody has climbed a stairway.

RS: I think that if sculpture has any potential at all, it has the potential to work in contradiction to the places and spaces where it is created. I am interested in the work where the artist is a maker of 'anti-environment'.

LW: Art's not supposed to interrupt the flow of life, it's supposed to bring to you information that changes the next course. Do you understand what I'm saying?

RS: I understand that people are fearful of the pieces, but that has to do with their lack of information about how rigorously the pieces are worked out beforehand.

VA: The problem with art is that it gives precedence to the visual; you stand 'here' and the art is 'there' - so you're always in the position of desire, you can see but you don't dare touch, you're always in the position of frustration.

LW: Art, when it's placed into the context of the world, is not just used in the context of what we know as art history; it is an attempt to place material which could be used to enrich the daily lives of other human beings. This is not to say that as an artist you have some special insights into materials denied to everyone else. But you do have more time to think about what that relationship is.

RS: I was recently in Germany to place a 70-ton forged cube in Berlin. I didn't foresee any difficulties with it, but when you are swinging 70 tons in the air with a large boom on a thin deck, you must have a clear deference for the material. If someone miscalculates any given point of understanding, you can get into trouble.

JB: I wish to go more and more outside to be among the problems of nature and problems of human beings in their working places. This will be a regenerative activity.

DG: When I think of land art I think of hippies moving to the country, abandoning the cities because the cities were in decay.

RS: The history of Modernist public sculptures offers countless examples of these site-adjusted follies. An iron deer on a front lawn has more contextual significance than most arbitrarily placed site-adjusted sculptures.

LW: What do you mean, what did that mean?

RS: Since 1969, I have had everything I've made verified by structural engineers. The work ~always complies with the required standards of safety - even considering things as far-fetched as earthquakes where there-aren't any earthquakes.

VA: I never leave out public opinion, not public appreciation but public consideration, public response, people are part of all the pieces I do. I anticipate a range of responses, or at least actions.

LW: Art that imposes conditions - human or otherwise - upon the receiver for its appreciation in my eyes constitutes aesthetic fascism. My art never gives direction.

DG: As an American artist I like to do things for everybody, for all races, gender, age groups, just like Walt Disney but without the capitalism...

LW: My major concern has been the use factor of art within a society. I'm quite content, as a studio artist, to be working away. But then you come to present something which within its own time will have some use factor, not only within the art world, but within the general idea of the relationships of human beings to objects. For me that is the only reason for the existence of art per se...

DG: I don't totally agree with that idea, or having art reduced to simply use value.

LW: My contention is that perhaps we have to accept that art has become a service industry, rather than a production industry... Its content is its reason for existing, rather than its product. The content of the product is its reason for existence.

RS: I don't know where else it would come from. Where else would content come from if not from experience of perceiving work?

DG: I'm not against the entertainment aspect of public art. Not in any absolute sense, because I think that historically that's always a given - art in an outdoor setting is partly designed to be entertaining, historically speaking - that the work has it as one of its attributes. I've never seen a work that was un-entertaining.

JB: The planting of seven thousand oak trees is thus only a symbolic beginning. (...) The intention of such a tree-planting event is to point up the transformation of all of life, of society, and ecological system. (...) It will be a therapy for all of the problems we are standing before. . . . I wished to go completely outside and to make a symbolic start for my enterprise of regenerating the life of humankind within the body of society and to prepare a positive future in this context.

LW: What do you mean, what did that mean?

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