

Abbie Hoffman (as *The Drama Rev.* ...es have known for some time and the media are beginning to fully appreciate), the Weatherman bombings, Charles Manson, and the storming of the Pentagon are far more effective as radical art than anything artists have yet concocted. The event structure of such works gives them a tremendous advantage over the most graphic of the graphic arts. If the theatre was the deadest art form of all during the '60s (with the exception of a few visually or experience-oriented groups who often worked from or with visual artists' ideas), the visual arts may be scheduled for the same fate in the '70s. This is not to say that good art that gives pleasure and provocation won't be made in the '70s, but that the more the ethics of art as a commodity is questioned, the more frustrated artists become from running up and down the stairs between the ivory tower and the streets, the more artists question their own lack of rights and dignity, then the more that curious combination of freneticism, desperation, and apathy characterizing the art world these days may be threatened. The end of art is not, luckily, in sight. But only the hangers-on and profiteers would mourn the demise of the "art world" as we know it now. Perhaps as an artist's time becomes increasingly divided between the studio, the school (necessary to keep the majority alive and in a studio at all), and the streets (or whatever the artist's equivalent of the streets turns out to be), less time will be available for the social amenities demanded by the elaborate system of money-power-social contacts that nourishes the public image of artist and art world. Just as some artists are still social climbing, some will always remain to bolster the old image, the collector's ego, the institution's elitism, and get fat off it. What the others will do is anybody's guess. The only sure thing is that artists will go on making art and that some of that art will not always be recognized as "art"; some of it may even be called "politics."

NOTES

1. Darby Bannard, *Artforum* (Sept. 1970).
2. *The New Yorker* (Dec. 16, 1967).

The Art Workers' Coalition: Not a History*

On April 10, 1969, some 300 New York artists and observers thereof filled the amphitheatre of the School of Visual Arts for an "Open Public Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be the Program of The Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform, and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers' Coalition." The last time such a large and various group had got together for nonesthetic reasons concerned the Artists Tenants Association's threatened loft strike in 1961, which did not take place. The hearing was preceded by a list of thirteen demands to the Museum of Modern Art and demonstrations supporting them which emphasized

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The Guerrilla Art Action Group (l. to r.: Jean Toche, Jon Hendricks, Poppy Johnson, Silvianna). *A Call for the Immediate Resignation of All the Rockefellers from the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art*, lobby of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 18, 1969. (Photo: © 1978 Ka Kwong Hui)

artists' rights: legal, legislative and loosely political; they were the product of the newly named Art Workers' Coalition (temporarily and simultaneously the Artists' Coalition). The AWC was conceived on January 3, 1969, when the kinetic artist Takis (Vassilakis) made a symbolic attempt to remove a work of art, made by him but owned by the Museum of Modern Art, from the museum's "Machine" show, on the grounds that an artist had the right to control the exhibition and treatment of his work whether or not he had sold it. Not a revolutionary proposition, except in the art world.

Despite the specific subjects announced for the open hearing, taped and later published verbatim by the AWC, the real content of the night was the airing of general complaints about The System, epitomized by Richard Artschwager's use of his two minutes to set off firecrackers instead of talk. The picture of frustrated violence that emerged from this motley cross section of the art community (the speakers were 70 artists, architects, film-makers and critics, a number of them Black) surprised the establishment at which it was aimed. As well it might, since artworld complaints are made loudly, but in the relative privacy of studios and bars, rarely in public. Those who voiced them were immediately accused of opportunism by some of those who remained closet protestants. A number of speakers considered the Museum of Modern Art an unworthy object of artists' attention, but a grudging consensus agreed it was the best place to start if only because it is the seat (in all senses) of power; not enough people, time and energy were available then to tackle all the museums at once, and MOMA qualified by its

rank in the world, its Rockefeller-studded board of trustees with all the attendant political and economic sins attached to such a group, its propagation of the star system and consequent dependence on galleries and collectors, its maintenance of a safe, blue-chip collection, and particularly, its lack of contact with the art community and recent art, its disdain for the advice and desires of the artists who fill its void. The demands made in February 1969 were boiled down from thirteen to eleven in June, and revised slightly as the nine-plus below to apply to all museums in March 1970.

A. WITH REGARD TO ART MUSEUMS IN GENERAL THE ART WORKERS' COALITION MAKES THE FOLLOWING DEMANDS:

1. The Board of Trustees of all museums should be made up of one-third museum staff, one-third patrons and one-third artists, if it is to continue to act as the policy-making body of the museum. All means should be explored in the interest of a more open-minded and democratic museum. Artworks are a cultural heritage that belong to the people. No minority has the right to control them; therefore, a board of trustees chosen on a financial basis must be eliminated.
2. Admission to all museums should be free at all times and they should be open evenings to accommodate working people.
3. All museums should decentralize to the extent that their activities and services enter Black, Puerto Rican and all other communities. They should support events with which these communities can identify and that they control. They should convert existing structures all over the city into relatively cheap, flexible branch-museums or cultural centers that could not carry the stigma of catering only to the wealthier sections of society.
4. A section of all museums under the direction of Black and Puerto Rican artists should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of Black and Puerto Rican artists, particularly in those cities where these (or other) minorities are well represented.
5. Museums should encourage female artists to overcome centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in exhibitions and museum purchases and on selection committees.
6. At least one museum in each city should maintain an up-to-date registry of all artists in their area, that is available to the public.
7. Museum staffs should take positions publicly and use their political influence in matters concerning the welfare of artists, such as rent control for artists' housing, legislation for artists' rights and whatever else may apply specifically to artists in their area. In particular, museums, as central institutions, should be aroused by the crisis threatening man's survival and should make their own demands to the government that ecological problems be put on a par with war and space efforts.
8. Exhibition programs should give special attention to works by artists not represented by a commercial gallery. Museums should also sponsor the production and exhibition of such works outside their own premises.
9. Artists should retain a disposition over the destiny of their work, whether or not it is owned by them, to ensure that it cannot be altered, destroyed, or exhibited without their consent.

B. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS A MINIMUM INCOME IS GUARANTEED FOR ALL PEOPLE, THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF ARTISTS SHOULD BE IMPROVED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

1. Rental fees should be paid to artists or their heirs for all work exhibited where admissions are charged, whether or not the work is owned by the artist.
2. A percentage of the profit realized on the resale of an artist's work should revert to the artist or his heirs.
3. A trust fund should be set up from a tax levied on the sales of the work of dead artists. This fund would provide stipends, health insurance, help for artists' dependents and other social benefits.

The extent to which each "member" agrees with each "demand" fluctuates to the point where structural fluidity of the organization itself is unavoidable. The AWC has as many identities as it has participants at any one time (there are no members or officers and its main manner of fund raising is a "Frisco circle" at meetings; the number of participants varies as radically as does their radicality, according to the degree of excitement, rage, guilt, generated by any given issue). It has functioned best as an umbrella, as a conscience and complaint bureau incorporating, not without almost blowing inside out, groups and goals that are not only different, but often conflicting. Advocates of a tighter structure, of a real dues-paying union situation, have reason but not reality on their side. Nobody, inside or outside the Coalition, has illusions about its efficiency; the difference is that everyone outside thinks it could be done better another way and from the inside that looks impossible.

Don Judd, for instance, has been interested in a union setup since the Coalition began but was disgusted with the meetings he visited (and did not, incidentally, try to change or influence them by saying anything about his own ideas, which is too bad, because we could use his blunt, articulate intelligence). In a recent statement on art and politics¹ he wrote: "There should be an artists' organization. It's very odd to have a whole activity that can't help anyone in the same activity, that can't defend itself against carelessness and corruptions. The organization should have its own money; there could be a self-imposed tax by members on all sales, part from the artist's portion, part from the dealer's." (We've discussed this, but need, naturally, the support of a few more artists who have a portion at all, or who have a dealer.) Judd also says that "unlike the Art Workers an artists' organization should decide what it wants to do and go after it practically." Yet he agrees with our first demand and suggests we state that and talk to the museums. (We have, and still are.) Then he says that those museums "who refuse without reasons can be struck." (By whom? Judd and the rest of the art community's silent majority? If all those artists who want a union would get together and take over Section B of the Coalition's demands, they could comprise another special interest group under the "umbrella," or as a separate entity. But as long as the AWC's notorious sightseers, now perennial (Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and editor Philip Leider come immediately to mind), many of whom are respected members of the art community and good talkers and would be able to convince a lot of people—as long as they play intramural games in the bars, telling everyone how absurd or mismanaged the AWC is, instead of saying the same things in the public arena, they will be the bane and to some extent the downfall of the Coalition.)

If I sound wistful, or overoptimistic, it's because I can't help remembering the beginnings of the Coalition. At the first few open meetings there was a terrific atmosphere of esthetic and economic mistrust. Eventually basic dislike of organizations, innate snobbism about which artists should or could be associated with, the reluctance to waste time, and revulsion for yelling, rhetoric and opportunism (not unique to the AWC) broke down in favor of common excitement and, finally, even affectionate tolerance for some of the more therapeutically oriented participants. Nobody thought it was ideal; and nobody had ever seen New York artists come on any other way, either. Despite the heterogeneous composition, during the winter and spring of 1969 the AWC became a community of artists within the larger art community. The honeymoon period centered around plans for the open hearing and publication of its record and, later, around the "alternatives committee," whose search for alternative structures ran the gamut between a trade union complete with dental care, a massive takeover of the city's abandoned Hudson River piers for studio and exhibition space (that is now being done by the establishment itself), and an information center complete with Xerox machine, ending comfortably, if a little wearily, as a discussion group covering the highest tides of idealism and philosophical foam, with which New York art is very much at home. The weekly general meetings consisted of about 60 people, sometimes 100; the committees were much smaller. Both were characterized by reversals and arguments and endless bullshit (usually defined as somebody else talking), naïveté, commitment, and lack of knowledge about how to implement it, a high evangelical pitch reached in the bar after meetings, not to mention the endless phone calls that plague a small organization with no efficient communication channels, all backed up by an excited realization that MOMA was, for some inexplicable reason, afraid of us.

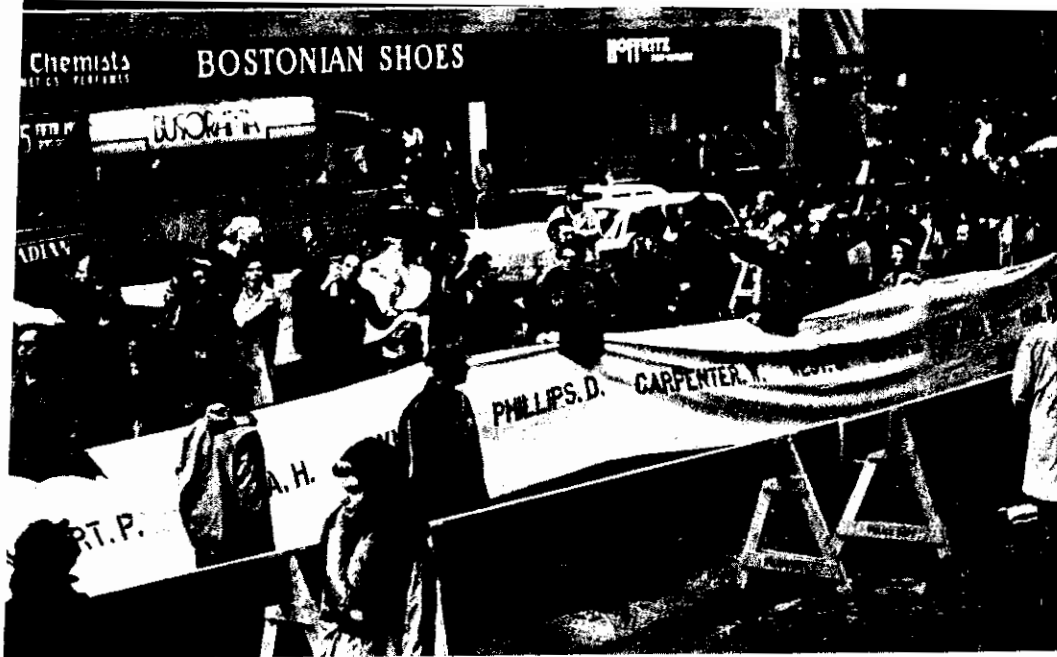
This period culminated in intramural quarrels surrounding the problem of what to do about what the AWC called MOMA's "blackmail" of first-generation New York School artists (which I consider one of our most important endeavors), and problems of structure, now that the Coalition was getting big with what sometimes seemed a false pregnancy. These most often concerned the point of whether or not the general meetings should have veto power over hardworking committees or special interest groups, including the usually controversial "action committee," where the militants and the Guerrilla Art Action Group were focused. I, for one, agreed wholeheartedly with Kestutis Zapkus' antiveto "Proposal" circulated in the summer of 1969, which stated, among other things: "There is no reason why the AWC should model itself on the procedures of conventional bureaucratic organizations. The development of special interests must not be dissipated by a less involved majority."

The most controversial aspect of the AWC among artists and establishment has been its so-called politicization of art, a term usually used to cover the Black and women's programs as well as demands that museums speak out against racism, war and repression. On May 4, 1969, Hilton Kramer of *The New York Times* left-handedly complimented us by saying that the open hearing proposed, "albeit incoherently. . . a way of thinking about the production and consumption of works of art that would radically modify, if not actually displace, currently established practices, with their heavy reliance on big money and false prestige." He had "the vivid impression of a moral issue which wiser and more experienced minds have long been content to leave totally unexamined." But as the AWC gath-

ered steam (or power), we became less attractive. His second article (January 18, 1970) ended with a plea to all those nice people "who believe in the very idea of art museums—in museums free of political pressures—to make our commitments known, to say loud and clear that we will not stand for the politicization of art that is now looming as a real possibility." We wrote a lengthy reply which was published with his third article on the subject (February 8, 1970). In it we said that if by the "politicization of art" he meant "political art," he should be made aware that the AWC has never offered any opinions on the content or form of art, which we consider the concern of individual artists alone; also, "Mr. Kramer ignores the fact that what radical critics are opposed to is the present conservative politicization of the museum. . . . If the men now controlling the Museum of Modern Art are not politically involved, who the hell is?"

The AWC did not begin as a political group, but its models were clearly the Black and student movements of the 1960s, and by the time of the open hearing it was obvious that nonart issues would assume, if not priority, a major rhetorical importance. Though the Black Panthers, the Chicago Seven and other radical causes have been supported; though we have protested by telegram and testimony ecological catastrophes, expressways, budget cutbacks to museums, etc., and once gave half the treasury (some \$500 from sales of the two documentary books we had published) to a Biafran woman who delivered a particularly stirring plea at a meeting, the AWC, like its predecessor and sometime colleague, the Artists and Writers Protest, has concentrated its political energies on peace, as did the May 1970 Art Strike. On the first Moratorium Day (October 15, 1969) the AWC managed to get the Modern, the Whitney and the Jewish museums and most of the galleries to close, and (with the crucial help of the participating artists) the Metropolitan to postpone the opening of its big American painting and sculpture show till a more auspicious date, though the museum itself stayed open and, with the Guggenheim, was picketed.

The bitterest quarrel the AWC has had with the Museum of Modern Art (aside from the "First Generation" controversy) was over joint sponsorship of the My-Lai massacre protest poster—a ghastly colored photograph of the event by a *Life* photographer captioned, "Q: AND BABIES? A: AND BABIES," which was vetoed by the president of the board of trustees after an initial, though unexpected, executive staff acceptance of the proposal. We picketed and protested in front of *Guernica*, published 50,000 posters on our own and distributed them, free, via an informal network of artists and movement people; it has turned up all over the world. Our release read, in part: "Practically, the outcome is as planned: an artist-sponsored poster protesting the My-Lai massacre will receive vast distribution. But the Museum's unprecedented decision to make known, as an institution, its commitment to humanity, has been denied it. Such lack of resolution casts doubts on the strength of the Museum's commitment to art itself, and can only be seen as bitter confirmation of this institution's decadence and/or impotence." Via this and other experiences we discovered that semiprivate institutions are unable to buck their trustees, particularly when the issue is one that presents the trustees with a direct conflict of interest. We also discovered that one thing museum administrators can't seem to realize is that most of the artworkers lead triple (for women, often quadruple) lives: making art, earning a living, political or social action, and maybe domestic work too. When the museum official gets fretful about our distrust of long dialogues and our general inefficiency (irresponsi-



Artists and Writers Protest/Art Workers' Coalition marches up Sixth Avenue to War Memorial with black body bags marked with body counts and about 1,500 yard-long banners bearing the names of American and Vietnamese war dead, May 1969. The crowds, even the policemen, were sad and solemn. Along the way, the body bags were strewn with flowers.

bility, he calls it), he forgets that he is being paid a salary for "caring for" work and issues that his opposite number on the picket line produces in return for no financial assurances whatsoever, and that the Coalition itself has to beg time from the "real" world to get anything done at all.

Certainly it is everybody's individual choice as to how he is going to handle his political burden (though anyone so sheltered as to believe he has no such burden is riding for a shock). The AWC will be powerful only in the art field, where artists have power, and it seems to me that if an artist is more involved in the Peace Movement than in artists' rights, he should be working directly for the movement. What anyone can do via the AWC for the Panthers or for peace or for welfare mothers or trees can be done a hundred times better within those organizations specializing in each of those fields. As an artist, however, he can exert an influence on those institutions which depend on him for their life, to make them speak up and influence others. The fact that these institutions are run by people running other areas of the larger world makes artists' actions as artists all the more important. What is sad is how few artists will even acknowledge their political burden, how many seem to feel that art, and thus their own art, is so harmless that it needs no conscience. At least I don't hear that doubtful statement "My art is my politics" quite so often since Art Strike and other recent developments. It's how you give and withhold your art that is political. Your art is only your politics if it is blatantly political art, and most of the people who say that are blatantly opposed to political art. The Coalition is neutral; it has always been a nonesthetic group involved in ethics rather than esthetics. For the most part, however, the artist's dilemma—Is this the kind of society I can make art in? What

use is art in this or any society? Should it have any use, even morally?—remains unsolved in or out of the AWC.

On October 20, 1969, Carl Andre read the AWC a devastating litany of its failures as a "preamble" to its second year of operations. Among his complaints were: "We have failed to convince Artworkers that it is futile to recapitulate in the art world the enormities and injustices of the American economic system. . . . We have failed to convince Artworkers that the profession of art is not a career but a constant witness to the value of all life. We have failed to convince Artworkers that the essence of art is inspiration and not petty ambition. We have failed to convince Artworkers that a myth of quality is no substitute for the fact of art. . . . THEREFORE WE OF THE ART WORKERS' COALITION DEMAND OF OURSELVES THAT: 1. ART, OUR WORK, BE WIDELY AND HONORABLY EMPLOYED. 2. ART, OUR WORK, BE JUSTLY COMPENSATED. 3. ART, OUR WORK, BE ALL THE BEST THAT WE CAN LIVE OR DO."

Rhetoric, perhaps; eloquence, certainly. But the central issue always seems to come down to dignity, dignity and tolerance—the central issues of any civil rights cause. Black or women artists are most disturbing to their colleagues and to the art world at large because their demands for dignity in their profession carry a large quotient of rage. It makes them harder to live with and their cooperation—with other interest groups—harder to retain. Artists are the Blacks of the white intelligentsia. A bright, angry Black woman artist may be the most explosive factor around. She has the Nothing to Lose that has traditionally made potent revolutionaries.

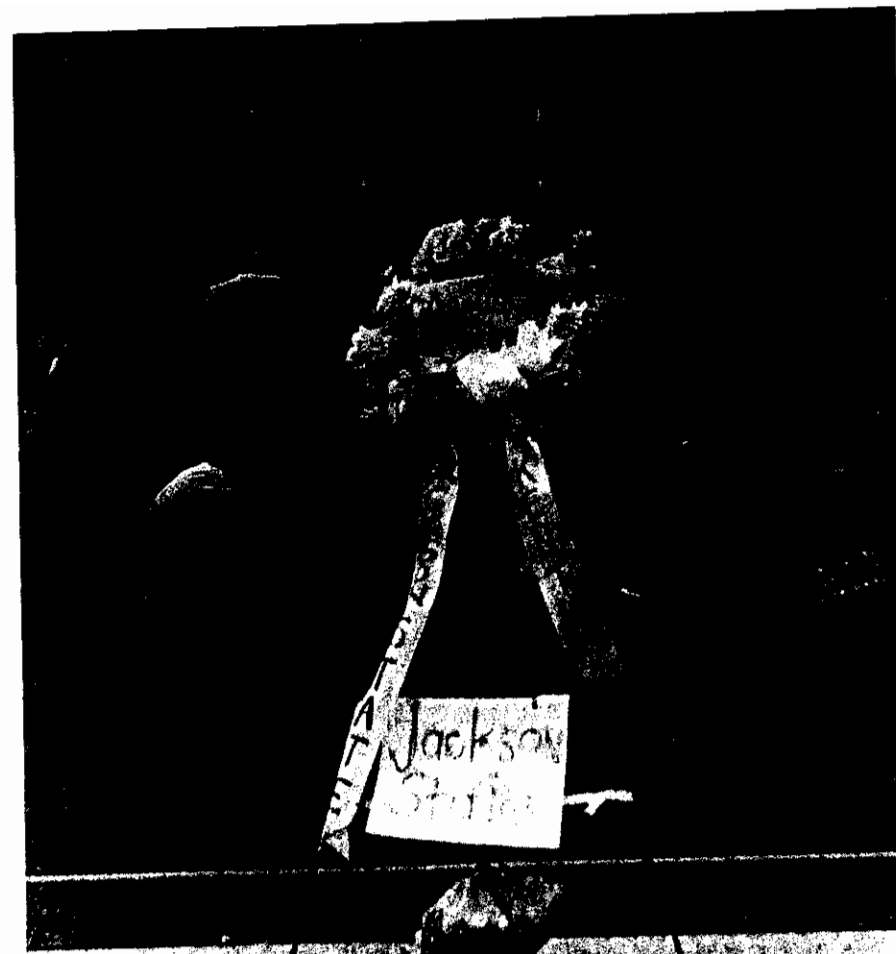
The ethical role of the Coalition infuriates people. It is frequently criticized for not representing enough of the art community to be listened to; we in turn frequently criticize the rest of the art community for not speaking up, with *or* against us. The Coalition is out there working and occasionally accomplishing something; where do those guys get off resting smugly in a nest egg of their *own* compromises and preferring to fight us rather than the common enemy? In June 1969, during an exchange with artists who had (we charged) been pressured to donate works to MOMA for a "historical" show that just incidentally had to come from the museum's collections, we wrote: "Our actions should not be mistaken for those of the community as a whole, but rather as a 'conscience' in regard to the existing system. We represent the present membership [of the AWC] and, by default, the passive element in the art community. Anyone who does not speak for himself will be spoken for by us until he does take a position on the various issues. . . . The AWC does not begrudge the success of the artists in this show, to whom we all owe a major esthetic debt, nor are we judging the esthetic content of the exhibition. We are all too aware of the conditions in which these artists have existed for years under the present system, and it is this system we would like to change. We have no intention of letting the 'watchdog' ghost of Ad Reinhardt lie. In the 1960s, large sections of the world's population have realized what Reinhardt realized in the art world long before, that sins of omission and commission, crimes of silence and rhetoric, are equally indefensible."

The crux of the matter is, of course, that no artist, in or out of the AWC, wants to be told anyone else is thinking for him. Nor does anyone like to be reminded that he is a pawn of the system. It comes harder to more successful artists than to those who are just beginning. The artist is a person who has chosen a life of "independence" from the conventional structures. He is by nature unequipped

for group thinking or action. He has also made certain sacrifices in order to have the advantages of "freedom." However, he prefers to bitch to (and about) his fellow artists about the gallery system, museums' ignorance of art and artists' lives, how critics "use" him and his art, rather than do anything about it. And this is, I suspect, because if he admitted to himself how far up against the wall he has been driven, life would be pretty unbearable. The illusion of freedom is of the utmost importance to a person for whom society does nothing else. Even if he is successful (and some of the esthetically and ethically unhappiest artists in the city, the ones that act like cornered rats when talking to members of the Coalition, are the most successful socially and financially), even then, if he measures his success against his compromises, he is asking for a downer. It's pleasanter not to be aware of the issues than to feel nothing can be done about them. Ad Reinhardt and Carl Andre, two artists who have had the courage to expose publicly the contradictions inherent in their own situation, have come in for far more mudslinging than their weaker colleagues who have accepted to wallow in suspect patronage, than the artist who is content to be waterboy to a critic or mascot to a collector. A list of questions circulated by an artworker and glued to doors throughout the city in June 1969 enraged almost everyone by demanding, "Does money manipulate art? Does money manipulate galleries? Do galleries manipulate artists? Do artists manipulate art? . . . Is art a career (career—'highway, a running from or to, carting, carrying')? Is a career carousing? Are galleries pimps for carousing artists cruising immortality?"

The real value of the AWC is its voice rather than its force, its whispers rather than its shouts. It exists both as a threat and as a "place" (in people's heads, and in real space as a clearinghouse for artists' complaints). Its own silent majority is larger than is generally realized. More important than any of our "concrete" achievements is the fact that whether or not we are popular for it, the Coalition has brought up issues that American artists (since the '30s) have failed to confront together, issues concerning the dignity and value of art and artist in a world that often thinks neither has either. If the American artist looks with increased awareness at his shows, sales, conferences, contracts as an autonomous and independent member, even mover, of his own system, the AWC has made sense. But if esthetic differences are a barrier even to a successful artist's understanding or working with equally successful colleagues, as artists for artists' rights, maybe there's no ballgame. Maybe artists will have the unique distinction of being the only professionals in the world who can't get together long enough to assure their colleagues of not suffering from their mistakes. Maybe sweetness, light, idealism and personal integrity, conventionally presumed to characterize art, have been bred out of it by this brutal age. Maybe the Coalition is about not thinking so, even if the odds look bad.

Tomorrow night (September 21) there is a meeting of the AWC, the Art Strike, Soho Artists Association and an artists' housing group, the first of a season, the first of the AWC's third season, the first season after 2,000 artists gathered to protest Cambodia and Kent State and Augusta and Jackson and formed the Art Strike, the first of a season that promises to be low on the kind of social (as in socializing) stimulation generated by moneyed institutions. A lot of people know that their time this year might be best spent in the studio and in the streets. You have to be pretty far above it all to stay aloof. At the same time, the majority of the art world is afraid to take its bullshit out of the bars and into the streets, afraid of losing the



"Art Strike Against Racism, War, Oppression," on the steps of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, May 1970. (Photo: Jan van Raay).

toehold it got last year on the next rung of the ladder, but at the same time afraid that the ladder will have been burned, toppled, or blown sky high just as it gets near the top (and there's no fury like that of a man who hates himself for compromising and is having the fruits of his ass-kissing taken from him too). Not a nice situation, but one that will, inside of the AWC or outside, have to be dealt with one way or another, now.

NOTE

1. *Artforum* (Sept. 1970).

Charitable Visits by the AWC to MOMA and Met*

The Art Workers' Coalition struck far out three times last week, between January 9 and 12. The issues underlying the three actions were (1) discrimination against women in the Whitney Annual; (2) the "discretionary admission charge" on previously free days at the Modern and the Metropolitan; and (3) indiscreet spending at the Met (which from the other side of its poor-mouth, cries for public funds to continue its name-dropping, park-grabbing Expansion Plan). Discretionary admission or "pay what you wish . . . but *pay*" is a museuphemism for compulsory contributions, from one cent up; the penny option is not made clear. At both museums the visitor is reminded by signs that Big Brother is watching and He prefers a donation in line with "normal" admission charges—over one dollar. How many people have the nerve to give a penny? The poorer you are, the less you're likely to cry poor. (I'm not talking now about student radicals or most products of the middle class, but the stone poor, the breakfastless kids.) The cathedral law-courtlike halls of culture are intimidating; the guards at the barriers are intimidating; in America, culture itself is intimidating, and music-hall turns and jewelry-store exhibition installations aren't changing that; they cost a lot too.

Monday, 2 P.M., at the Museum of Modern Art, two lines form halfway down the block for the Stein collections show, because Monday was until recently the "free day" inveigled out of MOMA by the AWC a year ago. We got Monday because attendance was lowest then. Now it averages 4,500, and the museum's wounds are not healed by the immediate admission hike to \$1.75 on other days. The AWC group moves past the ticket windows, where yellow slips register your "contribution" and remind you that it's tax-deductible; we refuse to pay at the guarded rope, blow whistles when we are stopped; a letter sent to director John Hightower is read to the crowd. It protests denial of free admission on the one day on which minority groups and students could possibly see the art at such prices and suggests that if the museum is so hard up, why doesn't it sell some of the blue-chips hidden in the vaults so people can see the art that *is* on the walls? A protester takes down the rope barrier and a lot of people in the line see their chance and bolt past the guards in the confusion, disappearing into the galleries. The rest of us stand our ground inside; the guards get rough and drag some of us out, saying we are under arrest (but the cops never show up). For the next half hour, chaos—as people in the lines try to figure it out. Sympathetic young people also refuse to pay ("You say pay what I wish, well, I don't wish to pay anything—is that OK?"). We scatter around the lobby to answer questions and persuade people to give only a penny if they must give at all (4,500 pennies instead of 4,500 dollars taken in that day would make our point nicely). The museum lawyer is

present, gritting his teeth. The ticket seller is so disgusted that at one point he throws handfuls of yellow slips up in the air and out of his booth. The event is taped and photographed throughout. MOMA Mondays, like Whitney Saturdays,¹ may become institutions in themselves. This week a similar action was performed again.

Tuesday, 8 P.M., the Metropolitan Museum, an Acquisitions (and deaccessioning) Committee meeting cum trustees, cocktails and dinner is taking place in (symbolically) the Louis XVI Wrightsman period rooms. Tuesday is the Met's one night open, but that doesn't stop director Tom Hoving from closing off most of the French section for the banquet. Food and drinks are served in and around the art. Pre-Hoving, the museum acquired work in more businesslike circumstances, but it can't hurt to have everybody well wined and dined before the curators make their rival presentations. By 8 P.M., odd figures appear in the medieval hall near the screened-off Wrightsman rooms, peer around, disappear, reappear with others—the AWC playing intrigue, casing the joint, whispering in corners, distracting guards, checking entrances . . . but it works.

Suddenly about fifteen people invade the dinner; flashbulbs flash, recorders hum, the first few are greeted with polite resignation ("Oh my, is this the Art Workers' Coalition?"), but as the numbers increase, there is obvious unease, and then guilt? outrage? distaste for such bad taste? (The museum's secretary later tells us this is not "playing the game," that we should have told them ahead of time . . .) Guards appear and grab at cameras, push and shove us out; whistles shrill; comments are shouted about the taste and eating habits of the Acquisitions Committee in a people's museum; one invader liberates cockroaches from a box onto the dinner table ("to keep Harlem on your minds"); a rough guard is kicked back; film is confiscated, but our professional photographer saves hers, first by telling a rampaging guard, "Don't touch me, I'm pregnant," then by stuffing the goods into her underpants and marching out. Another member evades guards and leaflets the lobby, where a startled public has been herded to the tune of a noisy museumwide alarm; all outside doors are locked, frustrating those who think it's a fire. (I wonder if anybody got into the galleries free during the commotion.) One AWC member is choked and stood upon by guards, the invaders are locked into a security room and visited there by the secretary and another *petit fonctionnaire*. We are told, irrelevantly, that the dinner did not come out of public funds, but "out of the Acquisition Committee's own pockets" (so what; why wasn't that money used for something more useful than feeding the starving trustees? And this goes on every two months); that they ate only chicken "at twenty-nine cents a pound" (but someone noticed they were drinking red wine; how unchic, or what was the second course?). The question about cocktails was never answered. On top of which the museum allowed as how it was "disappointed" in the Coalition and Art Strike, which was supposed to be cooptable at any time with tea and talk. We replied that this was the Action Committee, not the tea and cookies committee, and that it had become all too clear that what we had gotten out of a year of talk was an admission charge to a previously free museum; we wanted, and got, exposure of the Met's disregard for the public and for the real value of money! If the dinner cost \$1,000, that meant 100,000 people could have seen the art free at a discretionary penny each. Finally, it became obvious that the museum wasn't pressing charges. The AWC got up and

*Reprinted by permission from *The Element* (Jan. 1971). The third part of this essay on a charitable visit to the Whitney by the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee has already been published in *From the Center*.

walked out. We were not stopped. The following day the man who had been choked wrote Hoving charging brutality; his house keys had been taken in the process and were never returned.²

Art isn't entertainment. It should be free to anyone who is or might be interested.

NOTES

1. The Whitney Annual was picketed every Saturday that year by protesting women.
2. For the further adventures of Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks, or the Guerrilla Art Action Group, see their book *GAAG* (Printed Matter, New York, 1978), in particular the accounts of the notorious "flag case" and the Judson Three.