

Ah, The Sophisticated Open-Mindedness of Modern Art

by Theodore Dalrymple

I took part recently in the annual festival in Hay-on-Wye. You could tell there were large numbers of radical young thinkers present by the prevalence of rings in their noses. I was put up in a very nice early Nineteenth Century house with a magnificent garden. The art in the house, which I imagine was rented mainly to visiting intellectuals, was interesting. Prominent as I entered by bedroom was a work by Gilbert and George, the self-publicists, also known by some as artists, who have made a name from adolescent transgression. This great work consisted of the following words in red and black on a white ground:

Gilbert and George say -:

BAN RELIGION

On the wall opposite was a pencil original of a strip cartoon by a British artist. It had five drawings, the first of them a close up of part of a man's face, with the following words pasted on: Fuck... fuck... fucker...

Then came a picture without words of a dog sniffing at the bottom of a door from the outside. There followed a drawing of an ugly man loading the double barrel of a shotgun, saying 'Fuckin' dead fucker.' The fourth picture was a close-up of the same man's face, with little rectangular-lensed spectacle. He was saying 'Cunt fuckin' dead cunt.'

The final drawing is of the man's face contorted with hate, shouting 'Shu your fuckin' row fuckin' dog else dead fuckin' cunt dog too!' In the bathroom was a stained-glass representation of a woman masturbating herself. In the sitting

room was a reproduction of a modern artist's work whose works sells for millions and even tens of millions. On a white ground were the following words:

ANDIF YOU

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The reason this kind of art will continue is the reason why Macbeth continued his career of murder. If the art were to cease, the critics, collectors and curators would stand revealed as fools or worse; the vulgarity would no longer be seen as a sign of sophisticated open-mindedness but as the adolescent desire that it is to shock adults. Worse still, prices would fall, and who wants to lose millions? The last time I spoke at the Hay Festival, I shared a platform with the art critic of one of our broadsheets. He said that London was now at the 'cutting edge' of world art activity. I said that all that activity was not worth one small picture by Memling.

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