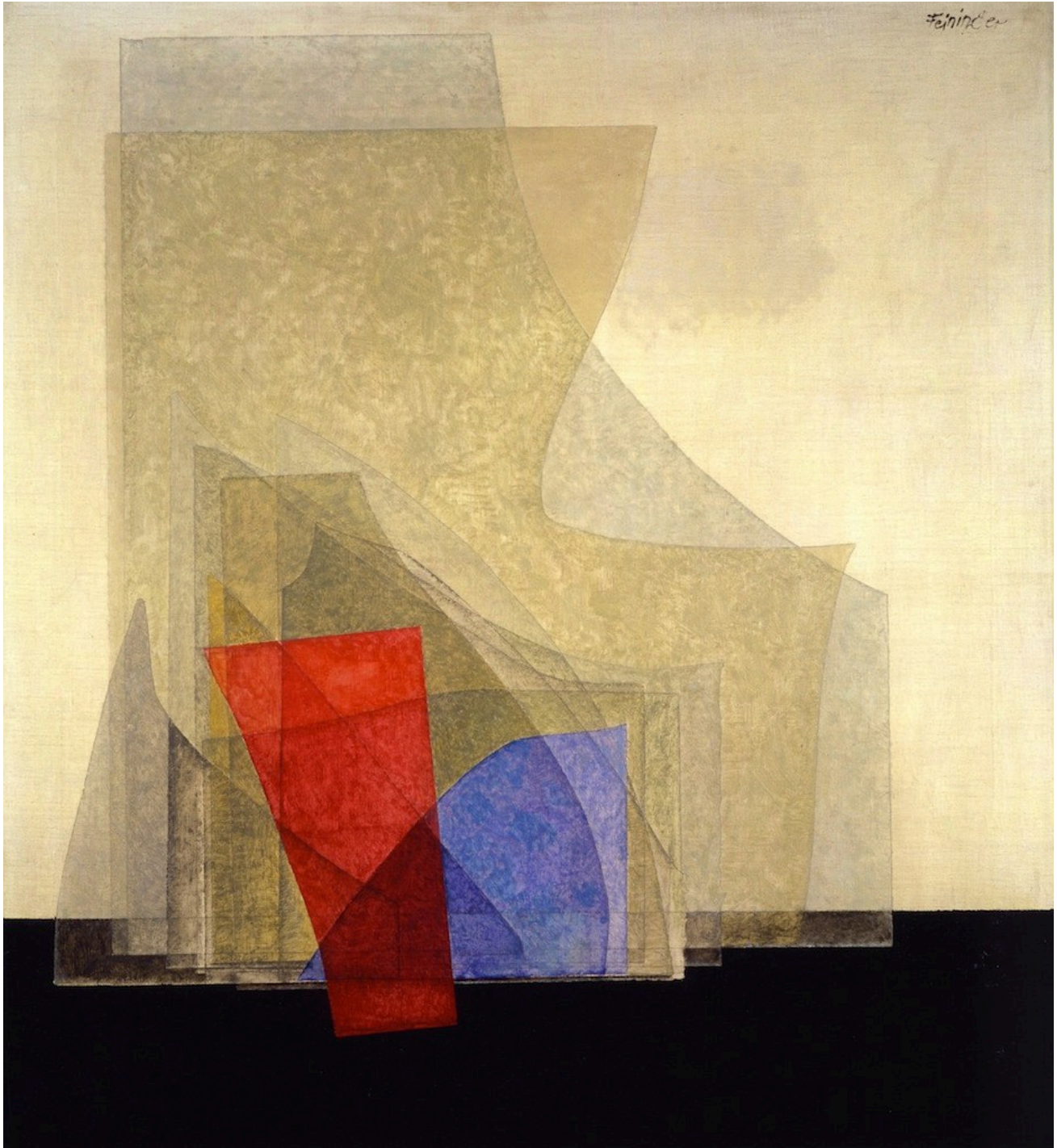


When the Crystal Cracks

by [John Henry](#) (March 2023)



Glasscherbenbild (Broken Glass), Lyonel Feininger, 1927

For those who first pondered the future and were able to find a trade or profession to learn and follow, the question was:

will what I gain in my schooling, and can I depend on my training to support me for the rest of my life? Would it be worth the effort if the payoff was just for a shorter time?

I am not sure that 'guidance counselors' in high school are properly advising their client students. It is very difficult to guess the future and match skills and interests. And the current political and social dysfunction is clouding thinking on all sides.

Look at current economic/political/medical events. The government wants to forgive student debt. There appears to be a scalping of the student borrower by the finance companies and there is a rationale being pitched to charge the most successful graduates with the borrowing costs at a higher rate than those who did not select the highest paying fields and have difficulty making their payments as contractually obligated.

Adding to the problem have been two years of Covid and essentially free money, which coats the mind and reflexes with apathy yielding a relaxing of motivation to succeed.

Businesses of all kinds allowed their workers to take their laptops home for more than two years now, and while the idea may have been to preserve the health of the worker, the results have been mixed while large companies are now insisting that staff return full time or for at least a few days a week. There has been wholesale resistance and refusal to return.

To make things worse, we have had inflationary pressure which has reduced the earning and savings power of workers in nearly all industries. All these factors combined result in a growing reticence in the minds of particularly younger workers. The final blow recently has been a nearly industry wide layoff program especially in the tech field, but includes financial giants and prominent Dow companies.

These series of events tend to create great anxiety among all working citizens. Those laptop toting Gen Zers with smug looks as they have been luxuriating in coffee shops for the last 4-5 years are now fretting about their futures.

The Crystal Generation (oh, even a microaggression is cause for mental anguish) is questioning not only their education but the golden future and relaxed lifestyle they anticipated and have taken for granted. More insidiously perhaps, they must be questioning the validity of the 'system' in which they were groomed and on which they developed their world view. If more and more layoffs are in store and the economy does not strengthen, we may have a problem.

The passive and inclusive mindset may rebel against the 'machine' and result in even more "quiet quitting." This is not going to do much good as employers would rather see their employees actively engage their tasks and create value on which they can bank profits.

The reality is that employers have pushed their workers at home to take on tasks and execute on schedules unrelentlessly. A general exhaustion and reflexive resistance to pressure and deadlines is permeating the work force. There are several fields, especially in nursing and the medical profession in general, where a lack of adequate staffing means fewer people doing more and more work resulting in burnout and refusal to produce. Associated tech businesses and many other bread and butter firms also cannot find adequate help or qualified staff. The hustle culture is glazing over and dropping out.

This has led to the Great Resignation. "Last year, 47.8 million workers quit their jobs, an average of nearly 4 million each month, meaning 2021 holds the highest average on record, topping the 2019 average of 3.5 million. The year with the lowest monthly average is 2009, which saw around 1.75 million workers quit each month—less than half the 2021 average." —SHRM, Society for Human Resource Management.

It is now being termed 'The Big Quit.' According to Visier, "The Big Quit is in full effect with 95% of employees considering leaving their organizations." Allow a little speculation on what may ensue ...

Add to this scenario artificial intelligence (AI), and things become dicey. Kai Fu Lee, a futurist based in China, predicts that AI, robots, and other machines will displace 40% of the world's workers as soon as 2035. ChatGPT, the newest AI algorithm capable of writing essays, legal briefs, and computer code will challenge professions and business workers for their positions. Arthur Herman, Hudson Institute senior fellow, believes AI will displace millions of white-collar workers: "If you're an accountant, if you're a financial planner, you might want to look to your laurels because there may be a program coming, an AI-generated program that's going to be able to do jobs just like yours."

With higher learning professors leaning so far to the left, the indoctrination blaming western ideology and capitalist ethics for everything from racial injustice to climate warming in the Gen Z graduates may result in a rejection of the current system in favor of something else. The possibility of widespread protest by the young working generation and an adoption of a hybrid social/capitalist system as in communist China is not a farfetched prediction.

But in China as well, a multimillion-numbered and university-educated graduating class are not able to find decent jobs and affordable housing. They have witnessed their parents sacrifice greatly to improve the family's future but now are jaded with lack of available positions that match their skill sets and will not endure a scenario similar to their parents.

In the United States, the pension system—a staple of the 'American Dream' —has evaporated and young graduates entering the workplace have been spoiled thinking that they have great flexibility in where and how they perform their tasks but are

actually in constant fear of losing their jobs. Added pressures to perform at home or remotely for 10 and 12 hours per day are killing their aspirations, spirits, and exhausting them to the point of wanting to change jobs and quit.

Another portion cannot retain full time jobs and have to find one or more part time positions or prostitute their skills online in venues such as Fiverr, working for huge discounts. Meanwhile, the illegal immigrant community secures the remaining base physical labor jobs in agriculture, construction and the hospitality industry.

We may be on the verge of a great 'slacker' population that will demand government handouts and a type of workplace that weaves personal fulfillment with low pressure job tasks—a system that cannot be sustained.

The other problem is funding social security for the burgeoning baby boomers. If AI and robotics replace blue-collar and white-collar work, where will the checks come from when GenZ starts to reject the entire system?

The crystal is cracking.

[Table of Contents](#)

John Henry is based in Orlando, Florida. He holds a Bachelor of Environmental Design and Master of Architecture from Texas A&M University. He spent his early childhood through high school in Greece and Turkey, traveling in Europe—impressed by the ruins of Greek and Roman cities and temples, old irregular Medieval streets, and classical urban palaces and country villas. His Modernist formal education was a basis for functional, technically proficient, yet beautiful buildings. His website is [Commercial Web](#) [Residential Web](#).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)