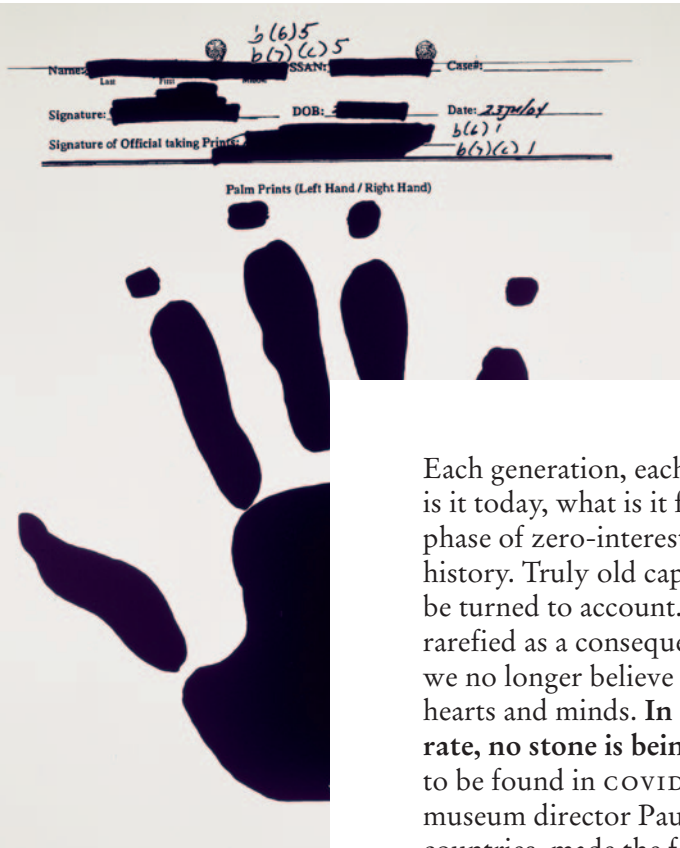


The Battle for Good Artists *Part 2*



Jenny Holzer:
DODDOACID 008769
BLUE WHITE, 2008
Oil on linen, 58 × 44 inches
147.3 × 111.8 centimeters

Each generation, each epoch chooses its own art. But what is tradition? What is it today, what is it for us? We can note, first of all, that in this prolonged phase of zero-interest rate policy we are beginning to take leave of linear art history. Truly old capital, in art as in other domains, can evidently no longer be turned to account. It is to be hoped that the air will become purer, more rarefied as a consequence. Perhaps we are no longer going to church, perhaps we no longer believe in marriage, or are already contemplating divorce in our hearts and minds. **In the museums and in some of the great galleries, at any rate, no stone is being left unturned.** The cause for this development is not to be found in COVID 19 and strong revenue shortfalls. In the early 1960s the museum director Paul Wember, a legendary figure in the German-speaking countries, made the fascinating and not at all facetious proposition that the art of painting had been purely and simply a movement from Giotto to Yves Klein. Forwards and always straight ahead. His Swiss colleague Franz Meyer had developed the habit, not unrelated to Wember's view, of only acquiring works of the currently "best" artist, and never of the second-best. Everything seemed to be clear. Frank Stella was in this sense great, while Ellsworth Kelly was expressly left out in the cold. Donald Judd, who began as an art critic and became a truly great artist himself, regarded his own "Specific Objects" (1964) as the finale of the history of art, a logical as well as artistic end point which, he granted, had been attained by Yves Klein and Andy Warhol as well. **More than fifty years have passed since the heyday of this dogmatically teleological conception of art history, a view that is now being disavowed, especially on account of its "white" and "male" provenance. But do we understand the change? Is it only a matter of a sense of justice and new generations?** The global economy and global politics have been undergoing a revolution. Art and taste cultures almost always reflect such changes, slowly at first and then inescapably. As recently as the 1970s, Andy Warhol's Mao portraits were all the Western world got to see of contemporary China. These paintings, which are still regarded as being among the "best" of Warhol's works, were at first taken to be expressions of irony. Asia came into play more strongly when the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam and recognized Mao Tse-Tung as the intransigent ruler he had been for decades. **Today Asia appears to be economically and culturally on par with the United States, and has an unmistakable voice of its own.** Since the last Iraq war, the United States has given increased attention to the Arab world. New cultures and different political interests are making their claims and can no longer be overlooked.

The economically and morally hegemonic USA is now passé. The resultant changes in the art world are having a powerfully animating effect on the competitive search for new artists. The world, it seems, is being redistributed. Robert Longo's great Cassandra voice criticized his country decades ago for offering little to the world's culture besides "missiles and maple syrup." Museum policy is now responding to these emergent changes. The *Baltimore Museum of Art*, for instance, is envisioning "the rigorous reimagining of art-historical and institutional ethos." Recently the Museum considered an auction at *Sotheby's* of works by Andy Warhol, Clyfford Still, and Brice Marden in order to facilitate acquisitions of new works, especially by women and people of color. **The idea of "worldmaking" holds strong appeal for many people. Some museums are now ashamed of their old culture.** After Gary Garrels, SF *Moma's* top curator, resigned, Nancy Spector, for more than thirty years chief curator of New York's *Solomon R. Guggenheim*, recently stepped down from her position in the wake of accusations of "institutional racism." In the year 2020, the quest for justice on the part of new voices is showing clear signs of vengefulness. How did Friedrich Nietzsche put it? "For man to be redeemed from revenge, that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms." **Struggle and inequality will hardly be reduced in the world or in the arts in the future.** The cultural shift in perspective can easily obscure the fact that it is getting more and more difficult to find the truly "good" names. Is it the highly gifted black artist Theaster Gates? Among female artists, can we see Jenny Holzer's works as icons of the early 21st Century? Lately, Holzer has thematized cruel misconduct of the American military and the American police. Again and again, she has focused on appalling double standards in her country, as well as on the negative consequences of secrecy surrounding political decisions. Both names are and are becoming especially important, but there are others.



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