

Meliksetian MB Briggs

ARTNEWS

Vol. 115, No. 4

HOW TO FIX THE ART WORLD | WINTER 2017

*Low or free tuition
would immediately
help democratize
art production and
help foster a climate
of critical artistic
autonomy*

- John Miller

John Miller *Artist*

The biggest problem, in my opinion, is the tendency toward monopolization. In the last several years just three or four big galleries have come to dominate the art market, squeezing out the small and mid-level galleries. This is fundamentally undemocratic, and it reflects the larger, global question of increasing income inequality.

Meliksetian MB Briggs

The economic reasons for this are complex, but one exacerbating factor is internet technology. Starting with Roman roads, all networks have served to consolidate power, i.e., to create hegemonies, but they do not do this unilaterally. Income inequality is also reproduced in our educational system in the form of high tuition costs. Internationally, the United States is the worst offender on this score. Vis-à-vis art schools, students increasingly tend to consider their practice in market terms, if only to pay off their student loans. The real estate bubble is yet another manifestation of this: What are the spaces for art? How can it be presented to a “public” and under what conditions?

In framing prospects for a solution, I’d reference two texts: First, Adrian Piper’s essay “Cheap Art Utopia” as a heuristic principle. Second, Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the 21st Century* as a pragmatic critique and an outline for change. I don’t think any ironclad solutions are possible, but changes in public policy would be a good way to start. One of these possibilities would be to rethink the role of the National Endowment for the Arts. After the Culture Wars of the 1980s, conservatives effectively gutted sponsorship for individual artists and in that regard NEA policy has changed very little since. Ironically, many of the sexual issues that conservatives once considered so unacceptable and so transgressive have become more or less mainstream, but NEA policies remain bound to what has become an archaic battle. Most important, though, a renewal of NEA funding for individual artists would also help recast art making as a matter of public discourse, rather than one of personal accumulation of aesthetic goods. A second solution would be tuition reform. Low or free tuition would immediately help democratize art production and help foster a climate of critical artistic autonomy.