

[return to updates](#)

A Review of the 2011 THREADNEEDLE PRIZE Competition



by Miles Mathis

[All images in this paper but one are taken from the Threadneedle finalists 2011, and are reprinted here under the fair use doctrine of the USA].

The Threadneedle Prize has been around since 2008, selling itself as the “representative” alternative to [the Turner Prize](#). It is also called a figurative prize, to distinguish itself from the conceptual nature of the Turner Prize. Held yearly in the Mall Galleries, London, this prize includes a £25,000 [\$38,000 or €28,500] first prize and a £10,000 visitors' choice prize. It is the top prize in the UK for figurative work and is considered prestigious.

But the Threadneedle isn't really an alternative to the Turner. It is only a variation of it. The Threadneedle is not interested in contesting any of the values or definitions of the Turner, it is only interested in extending these values and definitions to representative art. We see perfect proof of this when we look at the jurors. This year's jury includes Godfrey Worsdale, Director of BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Worsdale is also a juror for the 2011 Turner Prize, and the Turner is being held this time at the BALTIC. If that isn't chummy, I don't know what would be.

Before we go on, remind yourself that contemporary art is supposed to be “pluralistic”. Like all words used by modern people, that word is pretty much meaningless, but it is supposed to mean that art is varied. Back when all things were less controlled and art really was more varied (the 1800's, for

example), you had people disagreeing with one another. That is what real variation will do—it will create disagreement. But here we see two “variations” of art selling the same ideas. There is no disagreement. The same juror can sit on both juries. So we see that the Threadneedle isn't really even a variation of the Turner, it is only the same idea in different garb. Not a variation but a subsidiary.

Or maybe an ugly stepsister. The Turner Prize is worth £40,000, 60% higher than the Threadneedle Prize. This is curious in itself, and is a tall sign announcing what is really going on here. Representation is being let back in the game, but only as a minor partner. As we have seen with Godfrey Worsdale, the Turner people are in control of the Threadneedle as well, and they are dictating the terms. Ask yourself this: why can't they just admit that art is one category, as they so often tell us themselves? Why divide it into representation and conception, which are manufactured and false categories anyway? Why not have one show and let the artists compete directly against one another, pooling the prize money? I will tell you why. Because the Turner people want to keep realism down, even while pretending to include it. They want you to be able to look at it, because that is only fair; but they won't include it as an equal, and won't show you the best of it. If they included the best realism in the world, and set it side by side with their Turner lots, the Turner lots would immediately crumble in the eyes of everyone. The scam would be over.

If you set up [my Triptych](#) at the Tate Modern, as just one example, it would create a sensation far beyond any elephant dung or shark in a tank or other manufactured and promoted shock by Saatchi and Serota and their coven of fraudsters. The next year the public would demand to see more real works of art, and no more of this modern garbage cluttering the museums. That is the real reason we have to be kept out. That is the real reason we have to be slandered decade after decade. And that is the real reason that the Threadneedle looks so pathetic. It is being squashed on purpose. These little paintings were chosen expressly to make the Turner tinkertoys look interesting.

The US equivalent of the Threadneedle is the Outwin Boochever Portrait Prize, which I have [commented on extensively](#). Although the Outwin Boochever has always received many quality entries—entries next to which the Threadneedle finalists pale in comparison—the OB has in the past been controlled in the same way the Threadneedle is. The judges and administrators use modern inverted criteria to hijack the show, jettisoning the best entries and feting the worst. This is done on purpose, and it is done to force realism to conform to the values of the avant garde, making both sides of the false dialectic fundamentally equivalent. Again, not a variation but a subsidiary. Not pluralism but monism. The same idea in different make-up.

We are told that the Threadneedle Prize was created in order to act as a “showcase for paintings and sculptures that promote the practice of representational art, but challenge its language and assumptions.” Some have thought the Prize was a reaction to the complaints of the Stuckists—self-styled contemporary realists in the UK [who have cried foul in recent years](#) at the avant garde's total co-option of the market. Although the timeline would support this reading, as we will see the Threadneedle was created more as a further form of control rather than of inclusion.



As we proceed, remind yourself of the “infiltrate and diffuse” methods used by the various State and corporate institutions over the past century, in both the US and UK. These methods are now a commonplace, and most people know not only of the many programs of the FBI and CIA and MI5 to diffuse opposition, they know of the record industry's program to tame and incorporate rock&roll, punk, rap, and so on. They know of the movie industry's program to tame and incorporate all forms of discontent and rebellion. And they know of the mainstream media's program of taming and incorporating any outbreak of social unease, first by including it in the roster, then by redirecting it into harmless and ineffectual channels.

By framing this paper in this way, some will think I am out of my mind. Am I claiming that realism is now a form of rebellion, one that needs to be tamed like rap or punk? I am indeed. I will admit that the current forms of realism aren't seen that way. Beyond that, I will admit that most realism isn't rebellious or progressive in any way. However, I will argue here that realism is potentially a very disruptive force against the *status quo*, and that the *status quo* knows that. This is because the *status quo* isn't what we have been told it is. The Stuckists, like their arch-enemies the avant garde, appear to think that the *status quo* is still the old aristocracy. They think that those making the rules are wealthy bluebloods, sipping port and listening to Vivaldi. But anyone who pays attention knows that isn't the case. That *status quo* was killed more than a century ago. As we can see from both the Threadneedle Prize and the Turner Prize, the *status quo* is now composed of the talentless children of corrupt old families who don't know art or music or poetry from a hole in the ground. They still control all levels of the arts and other media, but there is nothing remotely aristocratic about them. *Aristos* means best, and these corrupt people have no interest in best. Their only interest is that they and their families and friends continue to get the prizes and jobs in the cushy fields like art, and that their investments in art remain viable.



This is how to explain the shortlists (finalists) for these prizes. Any sensible person looking at these lists must see the purposeful lack of all quality in every submission. Any sensible person must see that the jury is choosing the worst work they can find, on purpose. Why would they do this? Two reasons: 1) to ensure that the bar is set so low that their friends and family can make it over, 2) to ensure that real artists either don't submit or don't meet the low qualifications.

Yes, this is the “idea” that both the Turner and Threadneedle competitions share: not revolutionary or even progressive politics, not exciting new theories, not relevant social commentary, but simply the inversion of previous standards. If the past was about beauty, about meaning, about skill, about talent, about passion, all those must be excised from art. Where art of the past was purposefully full, art now must be purposefully empty. Where the art of the past was large and ambitious, the art now must be small and pinched. All conventions must be minimized or destroyed, not for the sake of any storable regimen or end, but simply because they are conventions. The body of art must continue to be bludgeoned, not because it has committed any real crime but only because the spectacle of bludgeoning is more thrilling to the modern mind than any other possible spectacle. Better a pointless killing than no killing at all.



To see this more clearly, let us study the quote above, the one about “promoting the practice of representational art, but challenging its language and assumptions.” If you look closely at the works in the exhibits, you see that this sentence doesn't apply, or only applies in a negative sense. These works don't challenge any assumption, except maybe the assumption that art should be good. Gauguin challenged assumptions; Van Gogh challenged assumptions. These contemporary artists don't challenge assumptions about art, they are artistically challenged. Gauguin, looking at these shortlists, wouldn't applaud the bravery of these artists, he would look for a deeper hole to hide in. He would move from the Marquesas to a cave in the Antarctic. Van Gogh, looking at these shortlists, would cut off his other ear and gouge out both his eyes.



Let's be honest: the Threadneedle paintings and sculptures don't even reach the level of amateur art. I have judged highschool competitions where the entries were both more skilled and more interesting. Sixteen year olds have a better sense of art, even a better sense of politics, than these sad people at the Threadneedle. I have seen exhibits at jails and asylums that were much more interesting. We have all seen paintings by chimps and elephants that showed a keener sense of aesthetics, and I don't mean that as a joke. I am deadly serious. This so-called art in contemporary exhibitions has been purposely zeroed out, so that it looks bad next to *anything*. It is *supposed* to look bad, and it achieves that in spades. This awful realism is perhaps the only thing in the world that could make the lots at the Turner look good, and that is precisely why it is in the exhibition.

Yes, these works aren't just accidentally awful. These works, like the ones in the Turner Prize exhibits, are awful on purpose. Most people who read about these exhibits in the papers think that this is simply what art has become. It just happened. Well, like everything else, it *didn't* just happen. It wasn't an accident. Nor is it a case of “We just can't do any better.” The death of art was a program, premeditated and pushed over decades, for the express purpose of dislodging the top tier and replacing it with the middle tier. The middle tier was then dislodged and replaced by the lowest tier. Why? Because at some point, the wealthy dabblers in art got tired of seeing real artists get all the glory. Why, they thought, should someone like Rodin get to be rich and famous just because someone called him an artist? Why shouldn't the critics call each other artists instead? In that case, they could dispense with the Rodins altogether. The pen is not only mightier than the sword, it is apparently mightier than the eye or the soul. The people reading the papers will take whatever you give them as art, so you can call whatever you want to art.

That trick worked amazingly well, but through it the critics doomed themselves. They were doomed as soon as the even richer folks who owned the papers saw that they could get rid of the critics, too. The wealthy families just installed their own children as both the artists and the critics, and the circle was closed. Both the Rodins and the Zolas were no longer needed. The market didn't require people who could paint or sculpt or write. It could exist just as well with people who couldn't do anything.

This is what we see at both the Threadneedle and the Turner, and in all the galleries and museums. It is what we see in all the papers and magazines. You know these artists and writers and jurors aren't getting into the game on merit, since no merit is present. So you can assume they come from wealthy families or the hangers-on to these families.



This situation is much much worse than the old aristocracy, since the old aristocracy never managed to be regressive to this extent. I am not apologizing for the aristocracy and have no wish to return to it, but any sensible and honest person can see that the contemporary plutocracy is much worse for art than any aristocracy ever was. Louis XIV may have been a pig in most ways, but at least he didn't set himself up as his own court painter and court architect. He didn't hire his talentless friends to build and decorate Versailles. Pope Julius didn't hire his semi-retarded grandchildren to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Charles didn't hire some stage actress or one of his sluts to paint his portraits, he hired Vandyck. Those in the current system, while mouthing empty phrases about being progressive, exhibit an artistic corruption far beyond anything the Kings or Popes ever imagined, since they have been willing to destroy all the arts simply to promote themselves.

But how is realism a threat to any of this? you may ask. Well, it is not realism *per se* that is the threat, it is simply the idea of quality that is the threat. Anything, done well, is a threat to the current *status quo*, since it would take the control out of the hands of the wealthy dilettantes who currently wield it. That is why we hear a constant line of propaganda against talent, against skill, against beauty, and against hierarchies. We have seen decades of hardsell for the idea that these things are regressive, but are they? No. Fake hierarchies, like the one based on wealth, are regressive. Real hierarchies are

progressive, since progress depends on things being done well, in all fields. But the wealthy dilettantes want to keep the fake hierarchy, which protects their wealth, and to destroy the real hierarchies, which threaten it. If real artists are let back into art, then the sons and daughters of the wealthy will no longer get their names in the papers for that reason.

The pat answer to my counter-critiques is to claim that I am just rationalizing my own lack of success in the market. I am told that my problem is not any conspiracy against quality, it is simply my big mouth. No one wants to work with someone who is so opinionated and outspoken. But several facts fail to support that easy answer. The first fact is the timeline: my troubles in the market came first, then my papers. I saw how things were set up, *then* I responded to them. Not the reverse. If B comes after A, B cannot cause A. If that is too logical for you, let us take someone else as the example, not me. Let us take, say, Jeremy Lipking, who is less outspoken and has more market success. Or Graydon Parrish or Jacob Collins or Ronald Sherr. Do you imagine these artists don't feel what I feel? Do you imagine they disagree with this paper? Do you imagine that you will ever see a Lipking or Collins or Sherr or Parrish in a show like the Threadneedle? Do you imagine that you will ever see a positive account of them in the major media? Most importantly, do you imagine that there is *not* a low ceiling over their heads, as over mine? They may be allowed a fair living by driving around the propaganda of the mainstream, but they will never become a part of "art history", as it is now sold and controlled. They may gain the respect of a few artists and clients, but they will never break into the major contemporary institutions. It is these institutions that determine the manufactured top tier of art.



You may say, "That isn't fair, but it isn't really important, either. Art is about art, not money or fame, as you so often say yourself. So why continue to whine?" Yes, for the individual artist, money and fame aren't so important, and probably just get in the way. I am not dissatisfied with my daily life: I love the freedom and don't really need the money or the fame. The loss is not to me, it is to culture and history. When hierarchies are turned upside down, it *is* important. When real hierarchies are reversed, culture becomes regressive, by definition. Society becomes corrupt. Nor is it a sign of maturity or depth or "realism" to shrug at this corruption. If we love the progressiveness of Gauguin or Van Gogh—to return to earlier examples—it is because they were *not* able to shrug at corruption. Van Gogh said,

“Snobs, nobodies, come in the place of workers, thinkers, artists, and it isn't even noticed.” Meaning, here, that he loved art and could not have shrugged at its death or destruction. He would not look impassively at the Threadneedle shortlist, and neither can I. It makes me angry, because this is what we have let art become, through our silence and our disinterestedness. The thing I love is not just my own art, but much of the art of history, the Titians and Vandycks and Sargents and Gauguins. And this is what that history has come to now: the daubings of an inbred clique of promoted fakes.

You will say, “That's all as maybe, but I still don't see how the Threadneedle Prize can be compared to the FBI infiltrating a revolutionary group. If these talentless people are already from established families, as you say, why would they need to be infiltrated? Nothing is going here, least of all revolution or subversion, so why would it need to be controlled?” Well, I was not claiming that MI5 had a hand in this exhibition, although the British government may have an interest in suppressing quality (see below). These exhibitions are more an example of *corporate* control of media than of government control. It is the established galleries that have an interest in keeping art as it is, since it has never been so easy to manipulate. If you brought real artists back into art, the galleries would immediately lose a large part of their power. And, as I showed above, the current exhibitions and prizes don't need to be infiltrated, because art had already been infiltrated decades ago. All that work has already been done. These new exhibitions and catalogs only need to continue the disinformation campaign which was perfected some time between the world wars. As you can see, they do that very well.



I was not claiming that something revolutionary was going on at the Threadneedle. I am claiming that something revolutionary *would* be going on if art like mine were shown instead of the art you see. Not because my art has revolutionary subject matter or style, but because *any* art of quality, shown in highly publicized venues, would immediately change the course of art history, and would thereby be revolutionary. If the public remembers that real art exists, it won't put up with this fake art anymore. It currently puts up with the Turner and Threadneedle exhibits only because it thinks this is the only thing available. The public has proven itself almost infinitely sympathetic and malleable, and will support art even at its worst. But only if it is fooled into thinking the artists are doing the best they can. When the public comes to understand it is all a scam, it won't support it. This is why the public is fed a

constant stream of political correctness in support of contemporary art. The public thinks, “Yes, this art is crap, but it is in support of things I believe in like equal rights and so on, so I best put a good face on it.” When the public comes to see that the equality patten is just a façade, and that the art is actually a continuation and extension of the old privileges of the plutocracy, it won't support it any longer.

As a specific example with the Threadneedle, I point out that all three winners of the prize have so far been women (2008-2010), and that 6 of 7 finalists this year are women. The public is told this is an example of equal rights, when it is clearly an example of yet another and tighter clique. It is not just a clique of talentless privileged people, it is a clique of talentless privileged women. That is not equal rights, it is control. Control of a event is once more being sold as an extension of freedom. Because those controlling the event are women, we are supposed to look the other way. Women are never fascists, right? Women are never egotists, continuing to sell out art history for a few moments of recognition, right?

Beyond that, it is worth mentioning that the Turner Prize has been criticized for being male-dominated. With the Threadneedle as an ugly stepsister, the Turner can externalize that problem. They can point to the Threadneedle, which is female-dominated. Parity, right? Not really. The women are still given the lesser booby prize, and they are made to look bad by choosing the worst entries. Any woman who points to the Threadneedle as a source of gender pride is a very confused person.



So far we have followed the rabbit hole down to a certain depth, but there is more. We gets hints of the truly awful if we consider the sponsor of this prize: “Threadneedle is a leading international investment manager with a strong track record of outperformance across asset classes.” Wow. What does that have to do with art? Why is an investment firm sponsoring a show like this? Most will assume it is just advertising: Threadneedle is getting its name out there with wealthy people, like Cadillac advertising at the Masters golf tournament. Those who accept my thesis here may take the next step: Threadneedle, as an institution of the wealthy, is supporting its own. These are its own wives and daughters it is underwriting. Both answers are part of the truth, but they aren't the whole truth. Threadneedle is owned by Ameriprise, a company with assets of 131 *billion* dollars, involved in private “asset accumulation” of all kinds. In today's world, this means they are masters of market

manipulation, and Ameriprise and its subsidiaries have been investigated and fined many times in the past decade [for exactly that](#). If we know they exist via manipulation, we must consider the possibility they are manipulating the market even as they sponsor an art exhibition. How could they be doing that? Simple: they and their clients are invested in the galleries that sell this sort of art, in the art itself, and in the auction houses, so they must support it directly and preferably indirectly. If they can support (manipulate) the market while appearing to be philanthropists, so much the better.

But manipulation means more than supporting your investments. It means destroying your competition. What is the competition for this sort of art? My sort of art. Just look at the 20th century. The entire century, and especially the first half of it, was a long war of “new art” against “old art.” New art is what they still sell, a stripped down “egalitarian” art of nullities and fakeries. Old art is any art that attempts to go beyond this. My art is in this category. My art and the art of Lipking, Collins, Sherr, Wang, Parrish, and so on, is not “old” in the sense that it is aristocratic. We aren't painting gods or kings or Popes. We aren't painting anti-union paintings or racist paintings or paintings that glorify the military and the bankers. So why are our paintings dismissed as old-style? It is a technical matter and nothing more: we are trying to paint well. We are concerned with quality. We aren't satisfied with cranking out a few color blobs and trying to sell them as fascinating. We are actually trying to apply a craft to a subject. You wouldn't think this would be either revolutionary or forbidden, but it turns out it is both. Why? *Because it threatens the investments at places like Ameriprise.* This may sound like an outlandish proposal, but it is supported by [my counter-critiques of the Wall Street Journal](#) and [Forbes](#). Despite the conservative nature of these business journals, we have seen that they have a strange interest in promoting the avant garde. This goes against what we have been taught in our history classes, since in previous centuries the conservatives were always the great enemies of the avant garde. What changed? The investments changed. The wealthy are now invested in the continuation of *art moderne*. Just as JPMorgan cannot tolerate a rise in silver prices past a certain point, since they have bet heavily against it, investors cannot tolerate the fall of modern art. It must be propped up at whatever cost. Any threat to it must be fought off, by hook or crook. I and all those like me are a threat to it.

And now maybe you begin to understand the full extent of the problem. Maybe now you begin to understand the reach of the corporations. The journals and the universities are not accidentally arrayed against any renaissance in the visual arts. The articles you read and the exhibitions you see are not accidentally or one might say, *naturally* biased against “old” art. They aren't biased, they are manipulated. They are controlled. That is different than bias, and far beyond it. The articles aren't written by true believers, biased by strong emotion; they are written by stooges of the galleries and corporations, just as the articles in the medical journals are written by paid stooges of the pharmaceutical companies and the articles in the science journals are written by paid stooges of the military and biotech companies and the articles in the literary journals are written by paid stooges of the publishing houses and articles in the farming journals are written by paid stooges of Monsanto. In short, everything you now read in major journals is paid propaganda, shoveled into your head to confuse you, pervert you, and sell you on an expensive future you don't want and don't need.

This is why everything has been turned on its head, why you have to be told black is white and good is bad and regressive is progressive. It is via this topsy-turvy education that you have been taught that people like me are regressive. Anyone “in the arts” knows that realists like me are throwbacks, without even having to talk to us. We are the worst sort of reactionaries, conservatives, or ideologues. This rhetoric, at its worst, would have you believe that “old-fashioned” artists are little Hitlers in waiting, failed painters waiting to snap and initiate another Holocaust. I have actually seen this said in the “progressive” journals. [John Carey has said it](#) in those words in the *Sunday Times*. I don't accept their

new world of crap art, therefore I am the moral equivalent of Hitler. But if you accept this line, you need to reread the paper above, and all my papers. You need to ask yourself one question: “who is really fighting the *status quo*, the so-called avant garde or Miles?” Who is attacking the wealthy above, me or the avant garde? What are the artists at the Turner and Threadneedle doing or saying that is the least bit progressive? [Turning lights on and off?](#) [Kissing Madonna and Dennis Hopper](#) and Cher? Posing in a bear costume? Sculpting a twig? [Floating a basketball in an aquarium?](#)

True, my paintings, unlike my writings, are not overtly political. But the least of my paintings is more progressive than anything you see in modern exhibits, simply because it dares to *try* to be good. I am interested in quality and say so, which puts me at odds with the entire modern program. It is not these people at Turner or Threadneedle that are daring. They are doing the same thing everyone else around them is doing, which is conformism pure and simple. Who would be the odd man out in a contemporary exhibition? Me or them? Which work would stand out in a modern exhibition, this one or this one?



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If you want to talk to me about guts, tell me which work requires more guts to create in this day and age, or any day and age?

Beyond that, for anyone really interested in feminism my Triptych must do more for the cause than any number of pathetic paintings of yellow dogs or striped eyeglasses by women. Of course, to discover this, these people would have to remove their heads from their sharktanks long enough to read the Triptych poem, and I haven't met many who had the gumption to do that. They prefer a painting that can be digested like a soundbite, with no use of energy, preferably with an audiotape or their own BBC monkey to tell them what it means. It is easiest to rely on their private Teleprompter, which has been running a continuous loop since about 1910, instructing them not to even consider looking at such a work of art: if they do their club cards might be revoked, the patches ripped from their jeans, their cigarette ration cut, the peroxide tap closed, and their names taken off the New York or London Social Diary.

No, the entire Modern program is based on lies: lies about guts, lies about politics, lies about investments, lies about depth. Open your eyes for a moment and you see that nothing that you are told is there is really there. The paintings and sculptures are unskilled representations of nothing, propped up with unskilled and nonsensical blather. Even the promotion is embarrassing, since it is created by the same sort of people who know nothing about nothing, who can't even write good advertising copy. Behind this façade of incompetence, the real meat of the market is hidden from you: the manipulation, the investments, the dirty deals, the crushing indifference to art, the shallow careerism, the willingness to pimp and prostitute anything and everything.

You will say, "Well, that is a pretty bleak picture you have painted, Dear Miles, and we actually prefer your naked ladies lying on rumpled beds. At least they don't make us want to stick our heads in our ovens. If you are right and the market is a closed circle, what can we do?" The art market is a closed circle, in the sense that it is currently closed to quality and in the sense that it has successfully controlled the buyer, seller, and critic for decades. But it is not impervious to outside influence.

Nothing created by man has managed that feat. The buyer is the weak link here, since he has to be continually hoodwinked. The buyer cannot be created by fiat, with a wave of the hand, as the fake critic and fake artist can be. Some pre-existing chump has to be convinced to give up a large sum, based on an empty promise. And since old buyers eventually die off, new buyers have to be hoodwinked. But with a saturated media and the internet, it is more difficult to keep the truth under wraps. The media is a two-edged sword, since it can be used both for propaganda and to diffuse propaganda. Up to now, the wealthy have been amazingly successful at keeping both public opinion and “intellectual” opinion away from the action. Both the buyers and the academics (who are used to prime the buyers) have been diverted with word games and political games from the recognition that art has been completely eviscerated. As in other fields, the original academics and intellectuals have finally got wind of the scam, smelling the stink (see Robert Hughes as just one example). They packed up and left and a new crop of fake academics, grown for the purpose, have been trucked in to take their place. But the new crop has not proven to be as convincing as the old crop, and the readers and buyers are also smelling a rat. More and more is spent on promotion, to keep the stink down, but doubt is like a vapor and it is hard to contain. Buyers don't like to look foolish, and one prominent buyer bolting can start a stampede. If David Geffen read my papers and somehow got a clue, the market might collapse overnight.

We are already near a tipping point. We have been near a tipping point for decades, and only the wish to avoid a market collapse on both sides, seller and buyer, has prevented Armageddon. The market will soon correct itself in spectacular fashion, and you can help it do so all the sooner by speaking out. Argument still works and the truth is still a powerful thing. It spreads itself, freely and without cost, with only the movement of your jaws or fingers. If someone tells you something that is clearly false, say so. Don't let a lie pass. That is all it takes.

The market for art has long been like all the other markets we have been reading about recently. The housing market, the banking market, the market for cars, the derivatives market: all have been propped up, not allowed to fail. Too big to fail. But you cannot stop a market correction, you can only postpone it. And like a toothache or a tumor, postponing only makes the problem worse. Every market based on a lie will fail, and it will fall back to the level of the lie. The market for cars cannot fall to zero, since people need cars. The market for land cannot fall to zero for the same reason. But contemporary art, being an absolute nullity, *will* fall to absolute zero. At that point real art will take its place, since people need art. If they didn't have a powerful thirst for art, they wouldn't have been trying to slake that thirst at an empty lake for so long, wouldn't have spent so much energy trying to convince one another that their lips were wet.