

PULCHRISM

CHAMPIONING BEAUTY AS THE PURPOSE OF ART

JESSE WAUGH

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Cover Image: *Beauty Sublime Still*



Championing Beauty as The Purpose of Art

Up until the early 20th century, beauty was assumed by most people to be the purpose of art. It was a given. Following is a quote from Arthur Danto's *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*:

“A century ago, beauty was almost unanimously considered the supreme purpose of art and even synonymous with artistic excellence. Yet today beauty has come to be viewed as an aesthetic crime. Artists are now chastised by critics if their works seem to aim at beauty.

In the past few years, however, some artists, critics, and curators have begun to give beauty another look. The resulting discussion is often confused, with arts pundits sometimes seeing beauty as a betrayal of the artist's authentic role, other times working hard to find beauty in the apparently grotesque or disgusting.” [1]

When beauty is brought up as a subject in the context of higher education, it is striking just how far those supposedly benefitting from higher education will go to excommunicate beauty from its natural place in art. They deny with zealous piety the importance of beauty, and almost invariably seek to crucify any unfortunate soul who dares to espouse it as a purpose for art.

Adolf Loos famously declared “Ornament is crime” [2], Walter Serner “Art is dead” [3], Paul Delaroche “Painting is dead” [4], Nietzsche “God is dead” [5], Fukuyama “History has ended” [6]. Nihilism spread across the spectrum of art, science, culture and politics throughout the 20th century - but to what end?

The worst nihilistic proscription comes from Georges Bataille: “Beauty is desired in order that it may be befouled; not for its own sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of profaning it.” [7] What was the purpose of removing Beauty from its natural place as the purpose of art?

If I were to put forth the argument that this obliteration of beauty, art, purpose — *and life itself* — was indeed deliberate and even orchestrated, I would be severely derided by those who fail to question paradigms because they cannot see the forest for the trees. So instead I will cite various examples of artists, scientists, critics and commentators, who wrote or lectured during the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, and who acknowledged in some way that the annihilation of beauty was a principle theme of Modernism.

This thesis will be concerned primarily with the Modernist murder of beauty which occurred after World War One — as during the *long nineteenth century* movements such as Impressionism, Aestheticism and Art Nouveau were most definitely pro-beauty to one degree or another [8][9], though they can be seen as proto-modernist.

The Harvard educated head of History of Art at the University of York - Elizabeth Prettejohn - has written extensively on 19th century artists including John Singer Sargent and Frederic, Lord Leighton, as well as on 19th century art movements such as Aestheticism and the Pre-Raphaelites. She has also written a book dedicated to the history and theory of beauty in art entitled *Beauty and Art 1750-2000*. In it, she states “a number of artists, critics, and curators have begun to call for a new attention to beauty as a significant issue in both contemporary life and contemporary art”. [10]



Jesse Waugh
Beauty is Truth
2015
Oil on canvas

Elizabeth Prettejohn is also involved in the *Defining Beauty* exhibition on show at the British Museum at the time of this writing. I attended a symposium hosted by the British Museum in May of this year - 2015 - at which Prettejohn and others panelled a discussion on the topic of *what defines beauty*, which was entitled *On Beauty*. [11]

In certain art circles, beauty is rigidly relegated to the realm of purest subjectivity. [12] No possibility of any objective qualities is afforded it. But this is a recent phenomenon, as is demonstrated by the many opposing viewpoints expressed by historical figures who were not afraid to speak their minds on the matter of beauty's purpose - or supposed lack of purpose - in art.

Take, for example, the following quote by Prussia's Kaiser Wilhelm II from 1901:

"Art that disregards the laws and limits... is no longer art: it is factory work, trade... Whoever... departs from the laws of beauty, and from the feeling for aesthetic harmony that each man senses within his breast... is sinning against the original wellsprings of art." [13]

Contrast this with what abstract expressionist artist Barnett Newman stated in 1948:

"The invention of beauty by the Greeks, ...their postulate of beauty as an ideal, has been the bugbear of European art and European aesthetic philosophies". [14]

In other words, according to Newman, beauty as an invention can be dismissed as an abstract artifice. Newman and his ilk were reacting to what they perceived to be pious veneration of artificial constructs of beauty by artists and philosophers in centuries preceding theirs. But they were also being funded by what could be perceived as nefarious agenda-laden forces who had designs on beauty and were also working against figurativeness in art.

From *The Independent*, in an article entitled *Modern Art Was a CIA 'Weapon'*, dated Sunday 22 October 1995, written by Frances Stonor Saunders, we read:

"For decades in art circles it was either a rumour or a joke, but now it is confirmed as a fact. The Central Intelligence Agency used American modern art - including the works of such artists as Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko - as a weapon in the Cold War. In the manner of a Renaissance prince - except that it acted secretly - the CIA fostered and promoted American Abstract Expressionist painting around the world for more than 20 years." [15]

Why would the government encourage and even orchestrate the production of modern art? The *Independent* article goes on to state that "this new artistic movement could be held up as proof of the creativity, the intellectual freedom, and the cultural power of the US. Russian art, strapped into the communist ideological straitjacket, could not compete."



Jesse Waugh
Galatea
2013
Oil on canvas

But I think it went much deeper than this — and frankly, American Abstract Expressionist art was not really much better than the art coming out of Soviet Russia. In the early part of the 20th century, there was a concerted effort by a nefarious cabal, which included Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, and which operated under the guise of the *Institute for Social Research* - otherwise known as the ‘Frankfurt School’ - to destabilize the very foundations of art, and what could accomplish this more thoroughly than the deposing of Beauty as the highest aim of art? [16]

If the above-cited “conspiracy theory” pertaining to the *Institute for Social Research* is nothing more than naïve conjecture, then so are the assertions that *beauty has no purpose* and that *ugliness is beauty* — which destructive false hypotheses are founded on, and reinforced by, pseudo-academic mumbo-jumbo or hearsay inherited through murky channels from mock-counter-culturalist, agent provocateurs, bankrolled [17] revolutionaries and art-murdering critics such as Adorno, Benjamin, and Bataille.

Aestheticism

Fortunately, we have solid historical records of the mid-19th century art movement which overtly championed the creation of beauty as the noblest human endeavour, and as the highest human ideal: the Aesthetic Movement.

In his Phaidon-published book *Art Nouveau*, scholar Stephen Escritt writes:

“The Aesthetic Movement, which reacted both against industrialisation’s ugliness and Arts and Crafts’ social moralizing, made an equally important English contribution to Art Nouveau. Attracting support among a fashionable stream of English upper and middle-class society between the 1870s and 1890s, it promoted the supremacy of beauty and the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, a philosophy that often spilled over into the kind of hedonism characterized in the lives of the playwright Oscar Wilde and the artist Aubrey Beardsley. It was in fact a Frenchman, the poet Theophile Gautier, who coined the phrase ‘l’art pour l’art’ when discussing Symbolist poetry, but it was in England that this religion of beauty was most widely applied to the visual arts.”

He goes on further:

“In 1873 Walter Pater, an Oxford don and mentor of Aesthetes such as Oscar Wilde, famously invoked the aesthetic spirit in his *Studies of the History of the Renaissance*. Pater wrote of ‘the desire for beauty, the love of art for art’s sake’.” [18]

So what happened to English, American, and European art between 1873 and 2015? Beauty was murdered. *Striving for beauty in art* was replaced by *striving to excise beauty from art*. Most artists and critics still refuse to see what is staring at them in the face: that they have been hoodwinked. When beauty was removed from its place as the primary purpose of art, art lost its purpose. Pure concept was foisted upon art as an impossible substitute, which was bound to spiral down into the chaos and nothingness we have as “art” today.



Jesse Waugh
Monarch Danaus plexippus
2014
Oil on canvas

Art became nothing. The conceptual low-point or high-point - depending upon how you look at it - the bottoming out of conceptualism - was perhaps best represented by Simon Pope's 2006 *Gallery Space Recall* - which consisted of *nothing*. The gallery was left completely empty. While this may seem clever and amusing, it was the natural end to the endlessly ironic conceptual extrapolation toward which entire generations of "artists" strove. It was also an unoriginal, uninspired and obvious idea, which must have been done many times before. "There was nothing to see, but seeing nothing made you a philistine," wrote critic David Llewellyn about *Gallery Space Recall*. [19] *Gallery Space Recall* serves as an example to illustrate that while Modern Art may not be *dead* per se, the Modern era with its conceptualist aftermath is most certainly over. I personally entertain hopes that a New Beauty Era is emerging.

This is not to say that abstraction - as was witnessed in the empty gallery space at Pope's "exhibition" - in itself cannot be beautiful — as much Japanese Zen art and design would prove otherwise — and I have stated this outright in my

Pulchrit Manifesto (see the addendum or jessewaugh.com/manifesto). But there is a major difference between the motivation behind Japanese Zen art and the nihilistic art produced predominantly in Western countries in the 20th and 21st centuries: The difference is that Japanese abstraction has traditionally aimed at balance and creation, while modern Western art - at least that chosen for exhibition at major museums and galleries - has had existentialist annihilation (of matter, of substance) as its primary objective.

Moreover, Zen art from both Japan and China is concerned principally with the *sublime transcendent* — this it admittedly has in common with certain works of *contemporary art* — but Zen art is rarely deliberately demonstrative of the ugly, decayed or destroyed. [20] The very core function of Shintoism, as well as that of its spiritual antecedent Taoism, is worship of the awe-inspiring *Kami* spirit force of nature which is in varying manifestations terrifying and overwhelming - much like the Kantian notion the sublime. But this veneration of the awesome does not usually focus on the worship of trash, as does its superficially resemblant Western cousin - contemporary, conceptual art. There is respect for beauty inherent in the *Kami* and *Chi* (life-force) worship normal to Oriental religions. Without respect for beautiful order, there can be no sublimity and no transcendence.

Tantrism, as opposed to Zen, does indeed, in certain instances, put forth death, decay, destruction, and degradation as objects of worship. The “nothing exists that is not divine” (*nasivam vidyate kvacit*) mantra at the core of tantrism abolishes the division between the sacred and profane. [21] This opens up possibilities for good and evil, but fully allows for attempting transcendence through depravity. Many Hindus would argue that Kali or Durga worship brings them closer to *god*. Let’s accept this for the sake of argument and ponder what the varying forms of Hindu immolation — which tend to result from the veneration of death and destruction embodied in deities such as Durga — might achieve: Do they achieve sublimation? Is total destruction sublime? By definition it cannot be, as it actually destroys its participant. The sublime can be terrifying, but once it crosses the line into actual destruction it kills its audience.

This is the awful (though not awesome) conundrum we find ourselves in at the end of the Modern era: we find ourselves worshiping death, rather than the dynamo constructed by the thrilling natural opposition of beautiful life contrasted with terrifying death - *chiaroscuro* only exists where there is also light present. If we revere the corpses and faecal matter given sacred space in our museums and galleries, we ignore the existence of half the universe. A cursory comparison of the art of Alexander McQueen with the ironic mock-art of Damien Hirst illustrates this dichotomy clearly: where McQueen succeeded at creating a balanced, amazing *Savage Beauty* which included *both* life and death in its colourful and rich motifs, Hirst has failed because his oeuvre consists almost solely of one giant memento mori. In other words, like a Puritan who has tried his hardest to rid the world of evil, Hirst has focused on trying to rid the world of *life*, although his use of butterflies might be considered a sort of penance to make up for all his sad morbidity, if there is indeed any sincerity in any of his art. Beauty and ugliness must be maintained as separate phenomena, and cannot be transposed by art relativists and subjectivists, if dynamism — not one-sided puritanism — is to prevail and make art beautiful.

Here is the crux of the problem of relativism: If everything is art, then nothing is art. If nothing is art, then everything is art. If everything is beautiful, then nothing is beautiful. If nothing is beautiful, then everything is beautiful.

We are handicapped in an age of political-correctness which has brainwashed us into accepting that discrimination has no merit. But it has to have merit if life is to have value. Otherwise we live in pure relativity, with no meaning.

Furthermore: If everything is relative, then nothing is relative. If everything is subjective, then nothing is subjective. For subjectivity to exist, there must be objectivity. And straight to the point: If relativity is to exist, then there must be an absolute. Any other line of thinking is logical fallacy.

Therefore it stands to reason that a given individual can rationally assign an absolute position to Beauty as the purpose of art. Just as he can rationally assign relativity to beauty if he so chooses. Both are logical stances which may superficially resemble opinions, but in fact can be entirely rational deductions. It is therefore within reason for me to assert the absolute position of Beauty as the purpose of art. Any argument against such a stance would be irrational.

Humanity has had centuries to come to a holistic understanding of the dynamics involved in the interplay between light and dark - they do not exist without each other, and if they can exist independently - to what avail? Nihilists worship *nothingness* in the same way that idolaters worship *somethingness* - both are only half of the whole. It is in the interplay between opposites that we find the truth — and the truth, as put forth by John Keats in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” [22]



Jesse Waugh
Center (Bonsai)
2014
Oil on canvas

Pulchrism in Practice

I have endeavoured to fully adopt Beauty as the purpose of my art. Although I have been highly experimental, I have attempted more often than not to create art which had Beauty as its core motivation.

From my own etymological study *Pulchrism: Discovery of a Lost Romantic Word* [23] comes the following information:

“During the filming of my first film *El Angel*, which was shot in and around the L.A. River in 1994-5, I had a spiritual crisis of deep existentialist doubt. While lying in bed one morning, in my apartment in Los Feliz, Hollywood, I began to *die* of some sort of despair. I began to let go of life. Ethereal clouds — at once colourless and opalescent — appeared through a parting reality. My soul questioned the purpose of life, doubting its validity. I ascended and descended simultaneously into an extracted space which was Beautiful. At that point some sort of Divine command issued forth at me - and I remember deciding to myself, in the deepest core of my being, that I would LIVE FOR BEAUTY. I decided that moment to dedicate my life to attempting to communicate Beauty. It has become the purpose of my life.”

I shall here interject some personal notes from my journals in order to illustrate my experience in attempting to freely adhere to the tenets of Pulchrism and practice my art accordingly:

Far from being rigid or dogmatic, I have methodically placed Beauty at the forefront of my industry. From 1995, up until I attended the Masters of Fine Art programme at the University of Brighton, in Southeast England, in 2014-15, I had never actually encountered individuals in person who were drastically opposed to the notion that Beauty should be the purpose of art. It came as quite a shock to me that such a maxim should be perceived as dreadfully controversial as it was amongst certain students on the course. At first I thought they were joking - for certainly they had grown past the outdated brainwashing memes fostered in the 19th and 20th centuries that Beauty had no meaning or purpose in relation to art. Had those students been living in a bomb shelter for the past sixty years?

But no, what I encountered shocked me to my core: certain artists' expired, morbidly outmoded — and I would say criminally ignorant — aesthetic suppositions - undoubtedly the products of mind control indoctrinated into them by mass, pop-cultural, trauma-induced, Brave New World-style mental conditioning - were still solidly rooted in the pseudo-foundation of disingenuous 20th century aesthetic relativism.

Had I fallen through the rabbit hole? Unfortunately yes, for I was subsequently barraged with rabid impositions of subjectivity at every turn. I was attacked by demonic presences disguised as art students, whose true countenance surfaced only during the most extreme spewings forth of vitriol aimed at discrediting my stance on the importance of Beauty to art. Such rampant, disheartening hatred affected my sense of self-worth and outlook on the art I had been producing. In other words: they made me doubt myself and my practice.

In practice, I have made it my objective to create beautiful art. Any results are beside the point, for it is the motive that matters most. I have found that the medium employed is only one variable, and that any resulting beauty can arise more or less independently of whatever given media might have been used. Film does seem to give me an edge in

achieving some sort of beauty which can be commonly recognized as beautiful, and I think it is because of the immediacy of film — you get instant results — and also perhaps because I have been practicing with that particular medium for more than twenty years.



Jesse Waugh
Starry Night Cracker - Hamadryas laodamia
2014
Oil on canvas

Case Study of Another Artist in Practice

For the past ten months, I have been sitting for a well-known portrait artist - Allan Ramsay - as he paints my portrait. [24][25] I have been very impressed with his ability to recreate what he sees — whilst adding gracious proportion and colour to his completed works. He exhibits a strong and capable aesthetic. We have discussed the topic of aesthetics and beauty, particularly in their relation to ‘contemporary’ conceptual art. He believes that before we are able to intellectually rationalize our perception of art, we have already assessed it based on intuition or feeling, and that this is an inex-

tricable process. This can justify my stance on the importance of beauty to art, as it places the emphasis on the bridge between the rational and irrational, and gives Beauty a place to breathe, where it is not stifled by insistence on explicability.

Allan said he was influenced in this regard by French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who was concerned with the constitution of meaning in human experience. [26] Allan told me that Merleau-Ponty gave visceral experience the priority in human aesthetic experience of art. So basically, Merleau-Ponty stated that all of the rationalization and interpretation of (Modern) conceptual art naturally comes after the initial instinctive reaction to it. This native reaction is where the true value of art lies, and not in all of the concocted pseudo-intellectual justification which has become so prevalent among conceptual art circles of critique.



Jesse Waugh
Pseudonarcissus
2014
Oil on canvas

Allan has gone so far as to say that he believes most conceptual, contemporary art requires onlookers to “check their eyeballs in at the door”, and has even come up with a conceptual piece himself as a logical continuation of the concept: a jar of eyeballs placed at a hypothetical gallery entrance, with a sign dictating that visitors must deposit their eyes in the jar at the door in order to prevent them from being able to engage in any truly rational critical thinking which would almost invariably lead them to conclude that what they are viewing is nonsensical rubbish — that the emperor has no clothes. His point is that true critical thinking is not actually allowed in conceptual art venues, because if it were, virtually none of the “art” on display could possibly be seen to have any real merit.

My favourite quote from Allan Ramsay is: “People don’t plant ugly flowers.” He makes a good point when he asks “Why do people come to Brighton Beach?” He states that people come down from London to Brighton to see the beautiful sea, sky and sand [stones rather]. And this is an excellent point which has also been stated by my academic mentor Helen Kennedy: their simply must be some agreement amongst people in general that the sun setting over the sea is beautiful. Does this not suggest some sort of objectivity to beauty? If so, then how can beauty be entirely subjective, as is enforced as a concept by so many practitioners of art in our current era? Are those *subjectivists* — as I like to label them — possibly mistaken in their fascist, anti-beauty dogma? Or is beauty purely relative as they so forcefully emphasize?



Jesse Waugh
Brighton Butterfly: Red Admiral
2014
Oil on canvas

The Question of Beauty in Current Discussions

There have been two very recent examples of the question of the importance of beauty being brought into the public sphere in the United Kingdom. The first is the current exhibition taking place, mentioned previously, at the British Museum entitled *Defining beauty: the body in ancient Greek art*. The description for a related event which I attended at the British Museum in May 2015, which was named *On beauty*, reads as follows:

“Greek ideas of beauty have profoundly influenced Western art and how we think about ourselves today. This panel discussion will consider Greek perceptions of beauty, and how ideas have changed, from Greek sculpture's impact on art in the 19th century to recent neurological insights into how the brain generates experiences of beauty.” [27]

During the symposium *On beauty*, neurobiologist Semir Zeki demonstrated that the human brain's response to beauty is indeed contrastable with its response to ugliness, and that studies on the human brain prove that the *medio orbito-frontal cortex* of people of all types (race, gender, age, etc.) universally recognizes beauty in specific facial proportions and also gains pleasure from viewing art works which are commonly considered beautiful; whereas a different, and more basal, protection-oriented part of the brain - the amygdala - is stimulated by images commonly considered ugly.

To quote Semir Zeki: “The Neurobiology of Beauty: What is beauty? And is there a single characteristic or a single set of characteristics that defines it? The answer is ‘yes’. The question has been pondered and debated for centuries without adequate resolution. Art and beauty were brutally separated by Marcel Duchamp when he sent a urinal which he called euphemistically *The Fountain* to an art exhibit.” [28]

Also taking place this summer of 2015 is a colloquium at the University of Oxford, Mansfield College, called *Making Sense of Beauty: The Beauty Project*. It is entertaining reading the description of this conference, as it seems to go out of its way to include ugliness and death as being part of beauty, but these glaring attempts at asserting relativist subjectivity only succeed at emphasizing the awkwardness of shoving the polar opposites of beauty and ugliness together into an uncomfortable, repulsive, falsely-fused dichotomy, which causes cognitive dissonance in any healthy mind. Witness the following:

We see beauty; we experience beauty; we think beautiful words, beautiful thoughts. It raises us up, comforts, inspires, thrills, takes us out of ourselves to the sublime and the sacred; it also challenges, disturbs, discomforts and brings us to the most unlikely and unexpected places of death and destruction. Some find no beauty in life, or claim they are unable to see the beautiful any more. It is many things to many people. But it is never neutral or detached and you cannot ‘take it or leave it’; without fail, it elicits a response.

What is beauty? The flickering shafts of light playing through the leaves of a tree, the nuanced strokes of an artist's painting, nature's rich abundance of animals, the interplay of light and shadow on a human face, the angles and curves of a building, the structure of a snow flake or (diseased) molecular cell, the simplicity of a mathematical formula, the manner of a death: all have been labelled beautiful. What is it – if anything – they share in common that allows us to call them beautiful?



Jesse Waugh
Rain at the Arno
2014
Oil on canvas

Is the word itself a problem? Are ‘beauty’ and ‘the beautiful’ the same thing? Or are we dealing with something which is literally in the eyes of a billion beholders, eliciting a billion reactions and consequently a billion unique definitions?

Does it matter? Is preoccupation with beauty a distraction from other considerations, such as functionality, utility or practicality? Is beauty merely one of life’s luxuries, or is it directly related – in both positive and negative ways – to health, happiness, well-being, sense of self and other essentials for survival? How does beauty inform the way we cultivate personal relationships and experience love and romance? How does it shape our values and our perceptions of the broad spectrum of human creativity? What is at stake when we talk about art, literature, film or music in terms of beauty? [29]

The writers of this pitch dance around their own relativity dogma like butterflies on fire. And then they go on to state “The *Making Sense of Beauty* conference seeks to explore these questions in an inclusive environment that welcomes participants from all disciplines, professions and vocations. As we come together to engage in a rich interdisciplinary conversation we will wrestle with issues that cross the boundaries of the intellectual, the emotional and the personal.” But something tells me that if I go to that conference and state my sincere belief that Beauty is objective and absolute, I will be crucified by relativists who only give the slightest lip-service to the possibility that the 20th century excommunication of Beauty might have been a giant, colossal mistake, and I will also be ostracized for behaving in any sort of an assertive, masculine manner, which behaviour will be seen as suspect and potentially dangerous.

No, I don’t think my assertions would be welcome at all, as they would only serve to threaten the entrenched and now fossilized counter-intuitive subjectivist dogma that Beauty is *always* in the eye of the beholder, and that there can *never* be *any* valid consensus which would prove otherwise - i.e., that there may be even the slightest something objective about Beauty. According to the new status quo, ugliness is only a relative form of Beauty; and destruction, deconstruction, decomposition, demolition, decadence, debauchery, decay, death, disease and excrement are only negative manifestations of Beauty masquerading in ugly guises which are only seen as ugly or negative — or *not beautiful* — by uninitiated, naïve, provincial, idiotic philistines.

This relativist ideology that they are advocating is one of irony because it transposes beauty and ugliness. And irony — which became the de facto religion of the 20th century art world and its adherent nihilist pseudo-intelligentsia — is so dated. That irony so widely celebrated in the Anglosphere as being the antidote to Old World hyper-ornamentation with its hokey and sentimental decorative excess, has itself become backwards, retrograde, passé, hokey, suburban, common, provincial, philistine - it’s even become a nostalgic, sentimental reaction to the uncertainty of the New Age which is dawning and threatens to sweep away many 20th century fixtures such as Modernism, Conceptualism, etc. The irony game is over but its dogmatists are clinging onto it for dear life.

Beauty is not ugly.

Pulchrism

Pulchrism is a New Beauty which offers a simple, intuitive solution to the now very dated question of the definition of what is beautiful: Beauty is objective. Beauty can be decided upon by individuals and by consensus. Beauty can be seen by masses of people who instinctively agree upon it. Beauty is only *relative* to sick, dishonest or gullible minds. Not everyone will agree on everything, but most will agree that certain things are beautiful: flowers, sunsets, stars, waterfalls, butterflies, the healthy human body, etc. Frankly anyone who cannot see beauty in these things is mistaken or incapacitated in one way or another.

Pulchrism's detractors have created a situation in which those who advocate the objectivity of Beauty are immediately sent to a psychological concentration camp for the politically *incorrect*. Thankfully, this ludicrous and highly illogical, not to mention disturbingly unintelligent, anti-beauty mass hysteria is coming to an end because the tide is turning.

Pulchrism is a juggernaut which cannot be stopped. Regardless of whatever hate any self-appointed, pseudo-avant-garde, mock-intelligentsia might hurl at Beauty in its place as the Purpose of Art, they are destined to fail. Humanity has finally divested itself of the hoodwink under which it suffered ugly, foul, negative, nightmarishly *wrong*, degenerate art in the 20th century.

The marketed controversy as to the purportedly precarious nature and validity of beauty in art, versus ugly degeneration in art, has been nothing more than an artificial dialectic foisted on the gullible masses by social engineers who seek to propagandize people into believing that beauty and ugliness are indiscernible from one another.

The truth is that human beings have a natural ability to recognize beauty and contrast it with ugliness — in exactly the same way that they can differentiate between light and dark. Beauty is not relative, but identifiable, and to be celebrated. All that has happened during the past century or so is that ugliness has been hoisted up onto the pedestal formerly occupied by Beauty. There is nothing at all more to this parlour trick. And the only variable left is people's adherence to faulty dogmas of ugliness' preeminence. It's time to swallow our pride and admit that we have been fooled.

The jig is up. The shark in formaldehyde [30] has become nothing more than a joke. Paul McCarthy's *Tree* (butt-plug) was slashed by Parisians who saw right through its veil of lazy, cheap, ugly irony. [31] Apparently ugliness and irony have depreciated in value.

It must be conceded that the cellularization (see my short film *Tracing Cellular Reduction* [32]), deconstruction, and obliteration of art that happened and was designed to occur during the 19th and 20th centuries, may have served a great purpose after all: to spark cognitive dissonance in our minds and provoke us to critically question art world 'authorities' which present ugliness as beauty.

I believe that Pulchrism realizes the highest, ultimate, and most absolute Truth — that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” [33]



Jesse Waugh
Cascading Orchids
2013
Oil on canvas



Jesse Waugh
Sleeping Cupid
2015
Oil on canvas



Jesse Waugh
Wall Lettuce in the Rain
2014
Oil on canvas

THE PULCHRIST MANIFESTO

- 1. The term pulchrism was coined by Jesse Waugh from a combination of Latin pulchri- (beauty) + ism.**
- 2. In pulchrism, Beauty is given precedence over style and format.**
- 3. Pulchrism is not dependent on either figurativeness or abstraction in art. It allows for abstraction if for the conduction of Beauty - this principle it shares with Zen.**
- 4. A fundamental precept of pulchrism is that Beauty transcends both relativity and absolutism.**
- 5. Pulchrism encompasses The Cult of Beauty, while adhering to its stipulations.**
- 6. One of pulchrism's foremost tenets is that ugliness must be categorized as separate from Beauty. Ugliness called Beauty is anathema to pulchrism. According to the pulchrist doctrine, relativist confounding of Beauty with ugliness destroys Beauty. Art elitists argue that only philistines cannot see Beauty in ugliness. This stance is generally borne of or inspired by ferment in individual souls or in the cultural zeitgeist; or it is deliberately employed by provocateurs seeking the demise of society. While excess may bring one to moments of lucidity, it also distorts perception. Distortion is ugly.**
- 7. Pulchrism is not traditional or modern. It is timeless. Pulchrism advocates that Beauty is not relative, but recognizable.**
- 8. Pulchrism is absolutist in that it holds that Beauty is not solely in the eye of the beholder, but usually contains fundamental traits such as satisfying proportion, exalted color, dynamic chiaroscuro, or preternatural inspiration. Pulchrism can include the precepts of computational aesthetics wherever required.**
- 9. Pulchrism takes the stance that Beauty can be identified, recognized, and agreed upon.**
- 10. Pulchrism places precedence on Beauty above all other qualities in art.**

Pulchrism, n. [puhl-kriz(ə)m]

Pulchrism is an art movement which champions Beauty as the purpose of art.

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