

boundaries of what is listenable have be drawn all too narrowly.

When listening to Wolf Eyes' 'Human Animal' the listener may be struck by its similarity to what we might specifically term not to be 'noise' - i.e. music. The gamut of tones, timbres and rhythms arranged by Wolf Eyes subtly illicit a wide range of dynamic shifts that are evocative of highly textured dance, jazz or even classical tracks. Where Human Animal differs from what is normally categorised as music, it is because it opens up possibilities previously uncharted for the listener. It is worth further considering that given the scope of musical and 'Noise' experimentation throughout history, the fact that these sounds remain unknown and unknowable for many people has more to do with the restrictive nature of the music industry than a failure on the part of the musician to access the unknown (truth) through musical representation. Noise challenges the one-dimensional nature of mass produced cultural commodities.

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## **Paradise: Love and Sacrifice in the 21 st Century**

'Paradise: A Step to the Left' is presented by tactile Bosch  
22nd September - 14th October 2006 at tactile Bosch studios, Cardiff.

**The recent 'Rebels and Martyrs' exhibition, held at the National Gallery, London, (28 th June - 28 th August), displayed a comprehensive selection of works by artists who specifically engaged with arts capacity either; to effect societal change (art as rebellion), or to bring about spiritual attunement (art as martyrdom). One thing that may have occurred to the audience at that show, was the absence of any such political or religious fervour expressed in contemporary art. It could even be ruminated that the level of religious and political awareness in mainstream contemporary art is in direct inverse proportion to the rampant and persistent nature with which political and religious institutions are riding roughshod over the very notions of freedom and God themselves. 'Paradise: A Step to the Left', presented by tactile Bosch, takes a welcome look at the notion of paradise, utopia and freedom, from an artistic perspective, allowing us to reassess the relationship between art and paradise over the history of modern art, to the present day.**



To look at a self-portrait by Van Gogh, Munch or Courbet, to name just a handful of examples, you cannot help but feel the artist is sickening after something. Pallid with intense stares, these painted ghosts of ghosts say something about the hand that made them and something about art in a generic sense: The painter is not saying simply 'look at me', but also 'look at *art* , because this is the experience of art at its furthest tip, and it's as ugly as it is beautiful.'

To take the extreme case of Van Gogh's 'Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear' (the Courtauld Institute, London), which is extreme in that it is quite literally a painting of an artist who is sickening after something, there is something about his fixed stare, and the deliberate display of his bandaged ear that suggests a certain wantonness. His head, turned to one side, as it is, puts on full display the ear that he himself mutilated after being rejected in both love and friendship by Gauguin, and a whore he had fallen deeply for. In light of the fact that he might just as easily (possibly more easily) have painted his other profile, it seems that this painting gives parance to a certain school of thought that considers pain to be intrinsic to painting. Van Gogh wanted us to know this: As deluded as he may have been, we might well ask if the formative moment in this painting being created was the in the literal application of the paint, or in the act that made it possible - the mutilation of Van Gogh's ear, by himself.

There is another lesser self-portrait that also shows to us Van Gogh's mutilated ear - 'Pieta, After Delacroix' (Vincent Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam). In this painting, Van Gogh both puts himself in the position of Delacroix (as he reproduces a Delacroix work), and puts himself in the position of Jesus, as he supplants the visage of Christ with his own. His left ear, the earlobe of which can clearly be seen to be missing, is very much on display. Interestingly, 'Pieta, After Delacroix' is a

directly mirrored copy of Delacroix's Pieta: It is in reverse; had Van Gogh reproduced it otherwise, in accordance with Delacroix's work, his mutilated ear would remain unseen. The reversal of the painting is attributed to the fact that Van Gogh painted from a reproduction that was itself printed in reverse. A simple mistake, put down to a simple impracticality. Yet, in painting, there are no procedural errors as such, only finished products, and gestures that lead to them. Van Gogh's Pieta After Delacroix is the coming into being of a peculiarly modernist phenomenon. It is the expression of the artist as martyr, prophet, Jesus, God, and art as the portal through which heavenly rapture, nirvana and paradise may be reached.

The fixed stare that characterises the self-portrait and the unease with which the artists hold themselves is symbolic of the pursuit of the artist in general. The modern artwork effects a rupture in the false conditions of our existence. In the truly, horrifically, brutally new artwork a wound is inflicted on the sensibilities of a spiritually devoid public. It is through the wound that it may be possible to transcend mundanity and reach a utopic state.

Though Van Gogh's self-harming, and his eventual suicide, reflect perhaps an element of self-delusion that is not to be lauded, the unravelling of events can be said to credit Van Gogh with a spiritual worth, in light of what his paintings have become. It can be reflected that Christ's flagellation and subsequent crucifixion were in a sense suicidal; he was, according to gospel accounts, fully aware that his passage to Jerusalem would result in his death. If Van Gogh was, as Antonin Artaud argues 'the man suicided by society', Jesus' crucifixion has become a symbol of hope for Christian followers ever since. In a way, Jesus was the man who committed his own murder back against his persecutors; the suicide against society. The following proliferation of images, statues and tributary buildings to the crucifixion and the image of the cross, formed the beginnings of iconography, whilst the secularisation of the state in the 18 th Century Europe freed the image from its debts to the church and thus spawned art. In a sense, the crucifixion was to the beginnings of art what Van Gogh's mutilation was to the painting of 'Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear', a spectacle performed in advance of the event, the event being the modern artwork itself, which through a rupture with existing conditions shocks the viewer into seeing beyond the veil of 'capital' which sells paradise, like it would sell its own Grandmother, in the pursuit of worldly gain.

In light of this it may be possible to credit Van Gogh's actions with genuine spiritual import. As there are no mistakes in the procedural development of an artwork, only acts leading to a finality, it can be surmised that the sheer number of people who have been moved to a genuine experience of beauty in the presence of Van Gogh's paintings, justifies his own comparison to Jesus: He makes paradise present. Van Gogh bought forth paradise at a cost: The price he paid was the physical rupture (or wounding) and mental wrecking of himself in the further process of creating artworks, that in turn have created a fissure in false reality, that is experienced daily around the world by tens of thousands of people. This is symbolic of the wider role of art; to make beauty present as an object that can be adequately experienced by

the individual without any pretence to taking ownership, or gaining dominance over that object. Modern Art in causing the individual to experience a rupture is an exemplar in physical form of the proclamation by Jesus in Luke's gospel:

'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'  
 Luke *Chapter 14; Verse 26.*

Demanding that there must be a caesura between the true disciple of God - the true inheritor of Paradise - and the world he is most rooted in (the security of family and home) highlights the fact that in order to reach a heavenly state it is first necessary to depart from the world we currently exist within, which is anything but blissful. The truly modern artwork, that is to say, the artwork that breaks with convention, points toward the possibility of humanity transcending the world we live in, through its non-compliance with that world. Such a dismissal and turning away from the world is, arguably, the root of Christian thought, itself a turning away and break from Jewish tradition. Jesus' extraordinary call for self-abasement at the hands of your persecutors,

('...whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,' Matthew Chapter 5; Verse 39.), further extends this stance in making clear that it is only through the radical dismissal of those conventions that most readily appeal to our natural instincts (such as 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth') that truth can be revealed. Van Gogh's self-harming, and subsequent portrayal of his wounds, and of himself as Jesus, fits this criteria of undertaking seemingly perverse acts in order to realise transcendence; paradise. Van Gogh's portrayal firmly concretises arts position as inheritor of the Christian mantle; art makes anew the rupture in false conditions, and tears through it to expose rare sightings of beauty. In the following formula we can construe art as exemplar not only of truth but also of love:

- Jesus' willingness to die on the cross serves as a deliberate act that inverts normal common sense, thus presenting a rupture with falsity and exposing truth.
- His death paves the way for the beginning of 'iconography' - the widespread representation of beauty through man made representations. This in itself operates as a rupture with Jewish 'ancionism' - the prohibition on man made images. The making anew of icons, constantly, is akin to the continuous re-enactment of the original rupture presented by Christ.
- The Church gained in power and became institutionalised and hierarchical. Accordingly, rituals and conventions were established that served to hamper the creation and reception of 'rupture'.
- With the challenging of the Churches authority, during the early Enlightenment Period and the French Revolution, came the emergence of 'art', itself causing a rupture with the existing church state and iconographic practice. Art is free to proclaim truth through rupture, continually and without reference to God, Christ or the Church.
- Van Gogh's own inversion of good sense (the mutilation of his own ear), and

his subsequent portrayal of himself as the wounded Christ serves to cement the emergence of art as the inheritor of Christ's legacy. 'Pieta After Delacroix' can be seen as a metaphor for the act of producing art, which as a personal undertaking on the part of the artist, with no objective but the creation of truth through rupture, can only be an act of love: The impulse to wilfully toil upon something that possesses beauty and therefore, to use Kant's formula, bares a 'purposiveness without a purpose,' is itself an inversion of capitalist principles, whereby everything must have a use value.

In 'Paradise: A Step to the Left', tactile Bosch present an exploration of paradise in art in the 21 st Century. Artists have been asked to respond to the notion of paradise. In light of what has thus far been suggested, this is a worthy task; whilst art may possess the ability to evoke love, it is a promise that must be constantly renewed, lest the artist falls prey to the cynical malaise that is prevalent in much of society.

Performance artist Kathe Izzo aims to directly 'work with love'. The claim, to be frank, is so bold as to come across as pithy and ironic perhaps, but it certainly opens up possibilities, that if dealt with correctly could enhance our enjoyment of art. It has been often enough stated that 'struggle' or pain is an intrinsic property of art; Izzo merely reverses this formula. Starting with love as art, presents something absurd (almost too saccharine sweet to be true) which gives the lie to art itself: If the presentation of love as art is absurd, perhaps we need to take a close look at how we consider both art and love. It should be noted, that in the formula presented above, art emerges as love only at the expense of a sacrifice - Christ's crucifixion and Van Gogh's self harm. This exposes a further fault line in societal thinking, namely, that it is surmised by some political and religious groups that murder is justifiable in the name of Capitalist Freedom (the right to choose love), left wing utopia (the Socialist state implementation of universal love) and God (divine love).

In her own description of her performance for paradise Kathe Izzo states that:

Love Artist Kathe Izzo will make love to objects curated from her Museum of Devotion. This love will take various forms, from extreme endurance to prolonged physical proximity.

The objects that Izzo will pay artistic/spiritual homage to include a shaving mirror ('an object of meditation by the love artist') and various objects from previous love-art performances, including a 'Baby Doll, Carried by The Love Artist, 5 Mile Distance Up Mountain, Bash Bish, New York.' In Izzo 'making love' to the previous remnants of her own artworks Izzo enacts a doubling of the notion that art takes over where spirituality left off. In the audacity of her undertaking she points to the commodification and trivialisation of arts potential; she conveys a sound-minded person's dismay at Tate Modern containing nearly as many cafes and not nearly as many human-made images as the average U.K. high street.

It could be argued - and we must take pains to acknowledge that the comparison is not to suggest an inherent similarity between art and warfare - that a society that sells art as a mere product and treats artists as celebrities works in compliance with an ethos that promotes murder as necessary to the realisation of Freedom, Utopia and Godliness. Both art and paradise are being 'sold down the river'.

'Paradise: A Step to the Left' re-engages art with spiritual and utopian values through an open critique of arts relationship with paradise and reappraises the redemptive nature of art. Izzo asks if there is a place left for love, and if art might be able to occupy that space.

Another featured performance artist 'Mangina' directly attests to the continuing existence of the restorative power of the obscene gesture in art. Performing, wearing little more than a cod-piece sculpted in the shape of a vagina (and sometimes a large phallus on his head). Mangina explains that:

'Late puberty caused early psychosis, causing me to obsess about my genitalia'

Art allows for honesty and self abasement in a way not even afforded to the patient on the analysts couch. Mangina also confesses to being a nudist and exhibitionist who once indecently exposed his 'nuts' in 'Dunkin' Donuts'. Art allows him to expose himself, and explore his obsession with his genitalia in a legitimate way, whilst providing a spectacle surely capable of distancing the audience from the banality of the everyday. Through the enactment of this kind of ritual a secular and personal religion is formed. Whereas for Van Gogh, the obscene act of sacrifice made redemptive art possible, Izzo and Mangina enter into a direct relation with art, religion and love, reducing the distance between the sacred and the profane once more. In this sense we can add a new stage to the formula set out above: Following our assertion that the crucifixion created iconography, which in turn spawned art as an expression of truth and love, we could add that the direct engagement with love (in Izzo's work) and truth (in Mangina's celebratory-confessional work) narrows the distance between the artist, the audience and love (paradise) once more.

Again, sacrifice and absurdity are an inherent medium in the works of Izzo and Mangina; there is certainly something of the masochist in their approach, perhaps no less than in Van Gogh's. However, the directness of the work and its existence in the world as *is* (no altar to stand upon, no gilded frame to encase it) answers back to another recent innovation in transcendence: The exposure of truth through self-abasement and sacrifice in art is the positive antithesis of transcendence through military sacrifice. The extremist suicide bomber arguably came about through a re-territorialization of the struggle of good against evil - of man making a hard journey towards Utopia. Just as the body has become the centre for artistic activity, making a transcendence to truth a personally achievable aim, so too has the body become the centre for humankind's moral struggle: Destroying one's self in order to reach heaven is a desperate attempt to interiorize and take control of one's destiny. This re-territorialization of the quest for utopia, from the Church, to the State, to the Gallery, to the individual brings responsibilities, and the choice of

whether to blow oneself up in a market square, or whether to parade one's genitalia in the name of art is a personal decision. Art, can stake the claim to being the more reasonable, legitimate and genuine of the two extremes when it comes to accessing truth and love: In the words of Adorno, art must continue, 'in that it's mere existence is not a surrender to cynicism.' Art is non-complicit with state and religious sanctioned violence as art is a choice taken to jilt the human out of a false consciousness through a practice that can have no direct gain in itself: It does not promise an abundant heaven, greater wealth, or power, and for that reason it points to the possible existence of genuine love.

'Paradise: A Step to the Left' is an artistic intervention in a turgid reality. Like all art exhibitions, it stakes art's claim to continue to exist, to challenge tyranny and murder, and to present truth, love and the possibility of accessing utopia, or paradise. Its direct interaction with the concept of paradise is both welcome and timely.

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