

David Robbins

The Wall Safe Suite: A Digital Exhibition

Made during the past few years, the seven videos in this online exhibition are probably an expression of anxiety about the assetization of art, disguised as play. Splashing about in the backwash of industrial civilization artists are more intent than ever on filling the world with art objects. Under capitalism there is nothing wrong with having something to trade, god knows. And why not take advantage of the fact that contemporary art has been accorded the mass acceptance which so long eluded modernist art? What brought that about? The background changed. Modern art coincided with the industrial phase of civilization. Since the modernist art object was determinedly, at times aggressively useless, a baked-in tension existed between modern art and industrial civilization's utilitarian cast of mind. Contemporary art, by contrast, plays out against the background of a post-industrial Information Society, where it is perceived as just one more category of information. Art is fine with everybody, now. The old tension is dissolved, replaced by a new one. Artists are freer to make whatever they want, no one will raise a fuss. But whatever they make will be competing with hundreds of thousands of other, equally "contemporary" art artifacts annually turned out by ever more institutionally credentialed "contemporary artists," all of them feeding, and fed into, an ever-expanding art system. With the supply of contemporary art now guaranteed — fifty years ago, who among the handful of artists in little old Soho would have imagined? — power moves up the pipeline, out of the hands of artists and into the hands of those who control and appraise the flow of product. Artists are no longer in control of the art world. In such an environment is it any wonder that, today, so much art is an expression of nostalgia for art? How to separate the wheat from the chaff, given this oversupply? By inorganic means: mega-galleries, branding, marketing, assetization. Today the art object fights not against mockery but against the stranglehold of embracement! Is it still possible to hear art, for itself, above the white noise of its asset value? Yes, but we must remind ourselves to do so. We must make an effort. That is something new. What does art become under such conditions? What does it mean to produce it? Don't ask me. I'm in showbiz.

October 1, 2022

David Robbins

