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Classification Warfare: The Outsider, The Folklorist, and The Self-Taught

Creating boundaries for art allows the market to thrive within a capitalistic society. Without creating subgroups of these traditionally lesser sought categories of art, they begin to dissipate into the market as a whole. Classification boxes artists into unwanted categories while also creating markets for their work simultaneously. In terms of Outsider and Untrained art, the label itself values the purity and subversion of tradition. In contrast, Folk Art values following the cannons within communities' traditional sensibilities, while prizing their ability to avoid the prescriptions institutions and "high-academic" art place on them. In some cases, this yearning to push against the institution bleeds into the marketplace, encouraging some artists to mark their work at a very low cost in order to control its value.

This obsession with what is different creates a market that continues to grow and evolve for these "outsider" artists. The voyeurism into what is unknown or the distressed artist calls people out in droves to begin collecting art in hopes to resell. Although there is warfare over categorization, it is a necessary evil when looking at something as vast as art. The difference of being included or excluded can mean entirely different markets in which work can be sold.

Categories and boundaries become intrinsically important to describing the work, but if used as a defining factor, it becomes a device to avoid entire critical dialogs. By avoiding a conversation about the work itself, focusing on the category in which it belongs, a disservice is done to the artist and the artwork itself. The debate between using Folk Art, Outsider art, and Self-Taught art as categories are difficult to grapple with, but by allowing all of these categories to coexist and mingle; new markets and sub-categories are created by the conversation alone. Although they have their differences, these categories all appeal to the obsession of the exotic and pure.

Art has the ability to create cultural subgroups on their own; in terms of Visionary and Folk Art work, things like Burning Man and the Grateful Dead come to mind. As music-initiated events, they were brought to the spotlight and fame by their use of outsider and untraditional kinds of artwork to appeal to the masses.

Outsider art is said to have little or no trace of mimicry, if this is the case, how are subgroups within this category conceived? With these categories grabbing more mainstream attention, can these groups develop their own cannons and traditions? Or does that then make them mainstream? Are these labels a veil for something that with the advent of the internet are no more? Does one need training to create classical arts? Does someone need classical training in order to subvert traditions? These questions linger within this conversation and can possibly never be definitively answered. In the new era of the internet, one finds it hard to avoid influences of the insider or outsider, pure art is no more.