

Meditation as art

Contemporary rustic art 2018

The project '**Meditation as art**' began on the 9th August 2015. Between that date and the 20th August 2017 a total of 1,333 one hour public/private meditation sessions have been completed. '**Meditation as art**' is a work in progress and the project is ongoing. '**Meditation as art**' takes place mostly outdoors in a Northumberland semi-ancient woodland located on the Tyne valley urban fringe.

So far so good you may think. But no sooner had the project began than the criticisms started to roll in. Buddhists claim that I am nothing more than an old hippy stoner with bombastic and slacker pretensions of religiosity. They say that to describe what I am doing as Buddhist meditation is nothing less than a spiritual and ethical travesty. At the same time contemporary artists critical of anything rustic and rural have simply dismissed this work as yet another example of me doing a disservice to culture and presenting modern art at its very worst. But to cut to the quick.....

Dump in the dustbin of history all your preconceived ideas about orthodox Buddhist meditation. Here traditional Buddhist meditation is dismissed as nothing more than the virtue signalling of yet another patriarchal world religion. How sad that Buddhist meditation has evolved into a macho self-obsessed exercise in neo-liberal disconnectedness. This is meditation as me, me, me personal piety and big up spiritual materialism with each individual practitioner clocking up the hours to get the prize of enlightenment. Here we have dumbed down meditation as a fake escape from the horror of our western way of life. With the Dalai Lama as a toxic frequent flyer globetrotting the planet as a celebrity spirit guide and the Buddhist monk militia of Myanmar raping and killing as ethnic cleansing it's obvious that modern Buddhism has gone bad. This is Buddhism as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, and helps explain why in 2014 the Dalai Lama is recorded as saying;

'I am a socialist. As far as social economic theory is concerned, I am a Marxist ..I am a Marxist monk, a Buddhist Marxist'.

In practical terms **meditation as art** is the struggle for spiritual and political connectedness. It's very much the opposite of Buddhist meditation and its ideal of emptiness in that it seeks total immersion in our collective consciousness, environment and evolutionary mind. The actual practice is based on one hour sessions and mindfulness tactics includes;

- Formal sitting in half locus or formal recumbent corpse posture with the focus on breathing.
- Attentiveness to our toxic air, mass extinction event, animal cruelty, noise pollution and the evolution of social barbarism happening around us.
- Mindful of nurturing Tara compassion and the childlike freshness of beginners mind to think global, but act local.

- Awareness that we are the universe observing itself and contemplation of the unknowing mystery of consciousness.
- Meditation on death.
- Reflection on Buddhism as socialism and the Bodhisattva principle that no individual can achieve enlightenment until all achieve enlightenment.

With regards to contemporary art as corrupted high culture think corporate aesthetics, consumer culture and the virtue signalling of the super-rich.

Contemporary art is only made possible by neoliberal capital, the junk time internet, biennials, art fairs, asymmetric warfare, property speculation, growing income inequalities, tax evasion, money laundering and deregulated financial markets.

Sponsorship of national art institutions by toxic multinationals makes a mockery of art as the highest form of hope. Artwashing in which developers use culture as a Trojan horse to justify and legitimate unwanted money making redevelopment schemes is now the norm. But truly scary is the fact that creativity itself and everything that artists create immediately becomes nothing more than a money making scam for the culture vulture marketplace. The result is art as a rip-off aesthetic commodity drained of aura and the transcendental, myth and magic. And it's not just nobody outsider artists like me thinking like this, even posh artists are getting really worried;

'For me, it is question of morality...Just doing art, being in the studio, is not enough. You have to think about what you can do as a human being'

Marina Abramovic (artist)

'I think the biggest problem for artists is balancing the need for the market with a detachment from it... We are increasingly mollified by commercial obedience'

Tacita Dean (artist)

'An artist is now someone who sells work through a commercial system, to people they might not know, whose political and social affiliations they might not know. As a director, you wonder how long these contradictions are sustainable. Your exhibition might be sponsored by people you oppose. Stefan Kalmar(ICA director)

In the context of **art as meditation** the creative practice is.....

- Formal meditation as performative and performance without product. In a land where no-one gives a shit and the counter culture is dead who cares anyway, just keep doing it.
- Attentiveness to subject and object, observer and observed. As an artist one can be subjectively self-aware of sitting in a woodland while thinking outside oneself and imagine looking down from on high on this object figure sitting in the woodland landscape.
- Mindful of our bio-political animal consciousness and the urgent need for fresh thinking on the question 'what is art'?
- Attentiveness to environmental aesthetics and ecological notions of beauty.
- Meditation on the rhetoric of rationalism, realism, romanticism and modernity on a planet we have chaotically transformed into an ugly toxic dump.

GEORGE FRENCH 2018