

Letter From the Editor

In a recent Instagram post, art world memester Brad Troemel urged his readers, “Here’s a test to try out: EXPLAIN ART TO YOUR MOMMA.... This person taught you how to walk and speak, those are difficult things to do....” He was in the middle of a rant about art world over-specialization, and continues on with: “You’re making photographs of clay boobs or painting someone’s face.... you’re not inventing a rocket propulsion system. Plain English will do just fine folks.”

Strangely there is vulnerability in explaining art to our mommas. Art jargon acts as a division, between those that “get it” and those that don’t—an insistence on self-proclaimed importance. Describing art to momma would mean stripping ourselves of our linguistic chops, altering that hallowed art-speak we have worked so hard to perfect, and in doing so, simplifying not only language, but the ways in which we talk about objects. For the uninitiated momma, an explanation as to why, say, a Cheeto installed on the floor of the gallery is a stand-in for issues of manufactured desire within the agricultural industrial complex—and not just a discarded snack—may prove difficult.

The other unnerving aspect of explaining art to momma is the looming question, “what is it?,” that she will inevitably ask. This too is somewhat vulnerable, as we in the art world love to name things: That is a sculpture; that is a painting; that is *conceptual*—our wonderful catchall for unnamable

things. Sometimes though, artwork exists as what it is not. Travis Diehl describes later in this issue how a certain work might “[writhe] through our categories until we feel like it’s the categories that are lewd and need to go.”

In issue 15, the art world becomes a sieve to collect celebrities, robotics, rape-culture, fashion, comic-books, and more. It isn’t shocking that these distinctions have become blurred—after all, some decades have passed since Rosalind Krauss categorized minimalist and land art as “not architecture,” “not landscape,” and therefore “sculpture.” What is more revealing, though, is the thinness between these perceived boundaries.

Perhaps in some instances we should be less focused on naming and more focused on understanding (as Catherine Wagley’s discussion on rape jokes reveals). We’ve seen first-hand over the last few years the damage that categorical divisions can do—and many have proposed initiating conversations with others outside your own political worldview as a way to break down destructive barriers. So, what if we put aside our degrees and accolades and talk to our mommas, or our neighbors, about art? They may not know who Bruce Nauman or Jerry Saltz are, and that’s ok. Many of us get into art in the first place because it is a place of acceptance and openness that counters the rigid structures of society-at-large. How radical would it be to share that space with our own mothers?

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