

Transcription of a conversation-interview conducted on Sylt Island, in Northern Germany, at an artists' residence organised by the Sylt Quelle Kunst Raum.

On a sunny, cloudy day, I was asked

What isn't art? Or: What isn't art anymore? Do you have to have a special talent? Love or money? What is important today? Why do I buy? Do I sell the art I make? Is it a trade? Where or when does art end?

Art is something about which you can sometimes have strange doubts. You have doubts about what it is; you might not even know what it is. In reality, anything can be art, it depends on our attitude or how we stand as regards certain objects or doing certain things.

I think it is necessary to have a special talent; not in the sense of something that only a few possess but something that could be awake in each one of us and that begins with the realisation that we have capacities that allow us to feel and understand, on different levels, the small things we do or see and that are all around us. I make "works", maybe I don't know whether it's art or not, perhaps I'm not interested in knowing. I make paintings, objects. I make them firstly for me. I make them because I like to. I make them because I want to reveal the small things I observe. I get enthusiastic about the small things I see in nature or about a drop of paint falling on a piece of paper, and if it happens I am asked about what I do, I say that I am making art. I don't know how it is with others, in truth it's society that is constantly defining what art is and isn't, but artists don't need others to legitimise their work.

Artists decide because they are the ones doing it, and doing it for themselves. Everything else to do with art and the art market is the result of us living in a society. We could say that the system, in itself, is dominant. Artists are part of it and only with difficulty can they determine the value of the objects they sell or how they are commercialised. We live in a society based on consumption and it seems impossible to me to live outside this system or oppose it - unless one makes a break, rejecting the rules of the "democracy" in which we live today. Therefore, the solution is to be aware of what we're involved in and what we're negotiating. So in relation to the "love or money" question, I would say that they are both inevitable. Concerning "what is important today", my answer is that everyone can think, can know, whether they're artists or not, how to relate to others, how to understand the things that constitute life. Art is always present because it is connected to a more profound way of life.

As regards “love and money”, I said both earlier. It’s no longer possible to survive without both of them. Of course, we can imagine living with the minimum, on the border of poverty, but that will always bring dependence on something or someone, on charity, on society. Love undoubtedly arises in relation to others, also depending on the way each person builds in the world around them. From the artist’s point of view, art comes from a profound love, I would even say passion, which turns into an obsession. I don’t know why I do what I do. I wasn’t particularly talented as a youngster – in fact, I drew like any normal child when I was small. I only studied drawing and painting at university, when I discovered that I was interested in the way I looked at certain things and that I loved to memorise my surroundings. This obsession pushed me into doing what I had to do: paint and draw.

My work neither explains nor solves society’s needs and problems, and I think works that try to carry out such a role, explicitly dealing with the contradictions of society are often visually weak. Visual force is very important in my painting, because it takes me into another world, where I can better understand myself. This also happens when I read certain poems or see particular works of art. This doesn’t mean I’m only interested in the eminently expressive character of art. I’m aiming to reach a view that makes me feel and also understand the things I make.

One of art’s objectives has always been, through representation, through drawing, to find Nature: to understand and reveal it to others and ourselves. Through drawing, painting and, later, photography and video, the aim is to take something from what surrounds us for ourselves. But this appropriation of the other, of that which is outside us, is a capacity we all have. We just have to put it into action. We don’t need to be painters or writers. It’s just a question of talking, talking to each other. This is the talent that awakens our capacity not to remain secluded from the world around us.

Where does art end? I think art doesn’t end. From the moment in which it’s alive, thinking, expressing concepts or feelings, whatever means it uses to do so, there can be no ending; or only because we die. This is why it doesn’t seem possible for me to stop doing what I do.

What isn’t art anymore? This is a question from the last century, and the answer in ours is “everyone will do what they have to do”. Anything that can be seen in artistic manifestations today, whether it’s dance, theatre, exhibitions or installations shows that its protagonists are in a dialogue with life, sometimes doing so in an incredible, glorious manner, so we should approach what we are given to see in the spirit of openness. Being prepared to understand and accept the other and what is different in the other is fundamental in life, and when something is so unexpected that that we don’t understand, the only thing to do is discuss, reflect and consider that perhaps it does fit within the parameters of art.

Why do I buy things? As I've already said, I think we live in a society whose rules are buy and sell, and the engine driving this society is how you negotiate. Objects are valued and, put simply, we could say that this watercolour is worth two oranges. I mean, the idea of value has always been present, based on the way each person sees the need to trade an asset. We may not want to fill our heads with this type of consideration and not negotiate, not "go shopping", as it's natural to think that the aim of human beings should be something else, something more than negotiating and trading objects.

I have to say that my aim has always been to manage to live from the sales of my paintings and drawings. For some time, I taught at an art school and did commercial photography to earn a living. Although this was a creative profession, it didn't leave me enough time to do what I really wanted. I, therefore, started to try and find ways of cutting down on my teaching and photographic work, so as to develop as a painter. I still had enough money to pay for my studio, buy materials and live. I'm part of the system and if one day I stop selling, I will start again from scratch. If need be, I'll do other things until I can once again dedicate myself exclusively to painting. In the meantime, I manage to control my work, doing what I want to do and not what the market imposes, which sometimes demands increased production and a greater number of exhibitions. I don't think I'll ever work gratuitously.

The most important thing for me is the possibility of doing what I like, having the possibility of looking at and understanding my relationship with myself and others.

Having talent is not a gift whose origin is incomprehensible and subjective. We should all have the chance of developing the capacity of expressing ourselves, using the means we consider most appropriate. I think that each of us has a talent; it's just a question of putting it in practice.

Where does art end? What stops being art? For me, art ends when I die: my art and the art of others who have really involved me, moved me; or all that I've worked against.

Art and buying? Why do I buy things? I buy because I need. I don't know if I buy everything I might need. For example: I came to work here and I bought paper, good paper. I bought good paper because I want my paintings to last, because there's this notion of time. I want my work to resist, as best it can, the passage of time, so that it has the chance of passing on from my memory to the memory of others. I believe that even something ephemeral, like a dance movement that can never be repeated, continues through memory. This is why I am so careful about the supports and paints I use.

Love or money? There's no antagonism here, it isn't a dichotomy. It's difficult not to have "love for money" in our society. In the world of art, this easily creates pressure: there are too many business

men; there are always middle men between me and my work, and those who see it. This communication is not simple and if, on the one hand, there could be this ingenuous formula: make-sell-have money-survive-make love, the fact is that it isn't so easy to separate these words effectively.

I have to be able to get something for myself from what I do. For example, when I am looking at a painting, or reading, I'm like a selective robber: I steal what interests me so I can use it later, in some way, in my work. Painting is linked to history, linked to tradition. It has a special relationship with recent and past events, with memory, and it's in that relationship that I'm trying to find my way.

Pedro Calapez

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