

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY FRED ROSS AT THE OIL PAINTERS OF AMERICA'S 15<sup>TH</sup>  
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(Slides shown during the course of Mr. Ross's speech can be found at [http://www.artrenewal.org/articles/2006/OPA\\_Speech/opaspech1.asp](http://www.artrenewal.org/articles/2006/OPA_Speech/opaspech1.asp))

I would like to thank the officials and trustees of the OPA for inviting me to speak here today.

Let me start by very loosely paraphrase from the writing of [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#) when he said: 'Artists are born free, but everywhere they are in chains.' Whether we are talking about the chains of the conceptual,...or the dungeons of deconstruction....the leg irons of irony.... or the shackles of shock,...All "have been forged link by link and yard by yard," ...paying lip service to composition and design while long ago having Abandoned all of the parameters of fine art where paramount was the need to harmonize great subjects and themes with drawing, modeling, perspective, color, and tone, and expert manipulation of the paint. Subjects and themes which more often than not are a form of ...dare I say the word out loud...**"storytelling."**

Storytelling has become somehow a dirty word in the world of fine art. Storytelling is demeaned as mere "illustration" and "illustration" itself is relegated to the "commercial arts." Go sign up to study in the fine arts department of any college or university in America, and tell the "officials" who run the place, that you want to paint great anecdotal scenes either as histories, or allegorical paintings which symbolize, capture and express the most powerful of human themes.

What do you think will happen?

After looking down their nose at you, trying to figure out how to say what they want without insulting you, will politely tell you that "Well dear, you really need to go and see the department of commercial arts."

They will tell you that Storytelling is not what they do. It doesn't interest them. It's not a fitting purpose for fine art. What is fitting? Form for its own sake...color for its own sake....line or mass for their own sake are far more worthy of accolades of merit than recreating scenes from the real world, or from our fantasies, myths or legends about our hopes, our dreams, and the most powerful moments in life. Empty canvases, or empty rooms, or piles of rocks are more important and far more "relevant" subject matter, than the moments in life that describe and define our shared humanity. Squares of color are superior to subjects about people of color; Layers of textured paper trumps showing the layered textures of life. Dribbles of paint are more compelling than a child learning how to dribble a ball while being mocked in a school yard. Self-consciously arranged boxes eclipse the passage from self-conscious adolescence to self-assured adult. And a light blinking on and off in an empty room attracts journalistic praise while the blinking passage of life and time are but worthless sentiments These are the precepts, of the

prefects who hold our museums and colleges in a hundred year long grip of banal irrelevancies boring our inner souls and our youth alike in a system where the skilled are ridiculed, the talented are ignored and disillusioned, and the masters were dying off without a trained generation to protect, preserve and perpetuate that which had been, preserved and perpetuated for so many centuries before.

I am incredibly fortunate to be speaking to you on the cusp of one of the most important, moments in all of art history. It is very rare indeed for people to have the opportunity of living through major cultural shifts of the underlying tectonic plates of the art establishment which are bringing about a world wide shift in the perception and definition of what constitutes great art, and the institutions which themselves must change or perish if they are going to survive. After more than a century of blind allies, nightmarish detours, and mind numbing Artspeak to boost up what should have been rejected long ago as lacking the "relevance" which the modernists insist is missing from the "real" artist of today and the real artists of the 19th century: those who chose not to lead the way to [Jackson Pollock](#), [Mark Rothko](#) or [Andy Warhol](#).

It seems that for most of the past century, there has been what is best described as a conspiracy, both tacit and willful, to malign and degrade the reputations and artwork produced during the Victorian era and its counterparts in Europe and America. This struggle for the re-appreciation of Traditional Realism continues to the present day.

There is now an overwhelming preponderance of evidence that has come to light, which makes the Modernist arguments about, and the descriptions of, this era appear to be exactly what they are: pathetic lies and distortions fabricated in order to denigrate some of history's finest art and artists in order to elevate the unskilled works by untrained hands that have been lionized by the tenets of modernism that came directly after them.

The suppressed truth about this period, however, is that during the 19th century there was an explosion of artistic activity unrivaled in all prior history. Thousands of properly trained artists developed a myriad of new techniques and explored countless new subjects and perspectives that had never been dealt with before. They covered nearly every aspect of human activity.

The artists and writers of the day identified, codified, protected and perpetuated the great humanist values and momentous Age-of-Reason discoveries of the day. The writers for their part, were praised and celebrated to the heavens, while the artists were ridiculed and slandered.

But working together, together, they helped free the slaves, protect the environment, stop child labor, eradicate unsafe working conditions, insured women the vote and equal rights, broke up monopolies, and assured minority rights. And for this, their pay back has been to dismiss their work and denigrate their methods and lie about the meaning of their subjects and berate their achievements. Why? Because they didn't lead the way to splattered paint, blank canvases or industrial size Campbell's soup cans? And therefore were called "irrelevant"???

And there in lies the main topic for tonight. For the purpose of this talk, I will focus especially on the concept of "Relevance" that one hears bandied about in discussions about artists and art movements.

These artists are not considered "relevant" by modernism. Only works and techniques that shed all the former definitions and parameters of fine art were to be considered "relevant". Only those artists frankly that lead the way to abstract expressionism were worthy to be called "Relevant".

Nothing could have been further from the truth!

Relevance must be understood on many levels and perhaps the most important of all is the historical context, and how that relates to today's world. Ladies and Gentlemen, what was happening in history at that time was nothing short of "Momentous".

I am speaking about **some of the most significant events in all of human history.**

In order to understand the Relevance of William Bouguereau and other masters of the 19th century it is essential to place them historically and correctly, in their own time. Then we can see how truly relevant they were and also understand why they have not been given their due respect by the reigning ideology.

First: Ninety-nine percent of all paintings being done between 1850 and 1900 were not impressionism or post-impressionism. Instead it was Academic art, which was taught in the great academies of the time, and exhibited in the yearly European exhibitions and especially the Paris Salons.

This words "academic art" have come to be used in a dismissive or disparaging way being called: petty, banal, mundane and uninspired. However, "academic" more accurately means a dedication to standards of excellence both in training and in artistic execution, and a dedication to teaching and learning with great discipline and devotion, to the methods, developments and breakthroughs of prior generations. But while the past was to be fully appreciated, so too were artists encouraged to develop their craft to ever higher levels of creative and technical excellence and expression.

Yet, this Academic art was characterized as oppressive, narrow and superficial by the "official" pedagogues of abstraction. The exact opposite was the truth.

Today I will show that the academic artists of the 19th century and [William Bouguereau](#) in particular, were not only "relevant" to the times, and relevant to the major thread of art history, but they were relevant to the evolution of art itself, as they were working at what will certainly be considered the most important crossroads in human history, when humanity after countless generations as slaves, vassals, and serfs, using the creative words of their newly found political philosophy, threw off their chains, and rebuilt societies based on human rights and democratic rule. The artists of their day, unlike the writers and poets at their sides have not only been unfairly treated in our schools and

textbooks, but have been intentionally degraded and maligned in articles, catalogs, and even art reference books and art history texts that are more accurately understood as massive propaganda brochures put out by the modernist victors writing what clearly suited their transitory cause and interests. Interests which surely are not in the interests of great art, art history, and the integrity of art education which we must pass down responsibly to the next generation.

**"Relevance"** is a word that has been much used and abused when critics and historians endeavor to place artists and writers into the "progressive" view of art history as it has made its way through the centuries from the early Renaissance until the modern day. And while many great and accomplished artists have probably been lost or under appreciated, for the most part, the great and near great have received their due or at least reasonable notice in the discipline of art history.

That was true until the mid nineteenth century. From roughly 1840, onwards, all of the normal criteria for judging, describing and chronicling the history of art by 20th century scholars was tossed out the window. Almost all the art text books that have been used since the middle of the 20th century have rewritten the history of the 19th century to fit the needs and prejudices of the "modernist" art world which sees all of art history through a "deconstructionist" lens that defines as important, valuable, and relevant only those works which broke one or another of the rules and parameters by which works of art were formerly valued and appreciated. Art history was seen as a long march from the "breakthroughs" of Impressionism, through a stream of different movements which led the way to Abstraction, espoused with a strident religious fervor by the followers of this "new history" to be the greatest of all forms and styles of art.

It is one of the goals of this talk to expose the truth of the modernist art history, and it is very much on topic to bring into question any practice which purports to analyze art history, in a way that deliberately suppresses a valid and correct understanding of what actually happened. And it is of the utmost importance that the history of what actually took place not be lost for all time due to the transitory prejudice and tastes of a single era. This is exactly what almost happened to the reputations of [William Bouguereau](#) and the other great academic artists of the 19th century. And while there are few if any left alive from their time who can be currently interviewed, there is fortunately a mountain of information and evidence, still available for the clear, even handed, responsible and fair minded scholar, to access, organize and analyze the actual history, so as to yet save for current and future generations an ability to know ourselves by knowing what came before...not as we might have wanted it to be, but as indeed it actually was.

This must be done if art history as a field of scholarship is not to be ultimately discovered to have devolved into nothing more than documents of propaganda. geared towards market enhancement for valuable collections passed down as wealth conserving stores of value. Successful dealers, who derived great wealth by selling such works...works created in hours instead of weeks... had little trouble lining up articulate masters of our language to build complex fire walls of cognoscenti jargon presented everywhere as brilliant analysis. These market influenced treatises insured the financial protection of these

collections. Such "artsspeak" as it has come to be known is ... a form of contrivance which uses self consciously complex and convoluted babble to impress, mesmerize and ultimately to silence the human instinct so that it cannot identify honestly what has been paraded before it... brainwashing authoritatively, which confounds the evidence of our senses that otherwise any sane person would question. The "authority" of high positions, and the "authority" of books and print, and the "authority" of certificates of accreditation attached to the names of the chief proponents of modernism, have all conspired to impress and humble those whose common sense would rise up in opposition to what would have been evident nonsense if it had emanated from the mouths and pens of anyone without such a preponderance of "authority" backing them up. Finally, with adulation and the highest praise being paid to such artistic shams as cans of excrement, it has at last come to be recognized as the glib Artspeak that it is... first by a trickle, then a stream, and as a child cries out in innocence, a flood of voices will finally be heard above the din of sycophants, struck dumb, as softly, "The Emperor has no clothes" can be heard as it floats above the multitude. As I speak now, the worst has passed as revelation wakes the sleeping throng to their nearly lost aesthetic sensibilities still, thankfully, linked inextricably to human dignity.

In fact, it is in the realm of human dignity wherein one finds the truly prodigious accomplishments of the works of [William Bouguereau](#). Born in 1825, just after the American and French Revolutions, (two events more than any others which embody the breakthroughs of Enlightenment thinking), Bouguereau stood at the top of the list of the leading writers and artist of his day, whose work was to codify those advances, and bridge the gap from centuries of human societies ruled by kings and emperors who dictated by divine right, to a civilization made of men and laws where governments could only gain legitimacy from the consent of the governed.

Theirs was a period of major cultural shifts...it was a time when the elements that made up their world were endlessly competing with the evolving elements of a world yet to come. And while we can look back perched on an outcropping of safety and view these historical shifts with relative clarity and understanding, we must not forget that it was not always so, nor was it at all clear to the artists, writers and populace where the severe and gentle dusts of history would settle. Justice, equality under the law, elections by popular vote; protection of human rights; the obligation of government and society to identify, organize, and protect those rights; freedom of the press permitting and insuring popular disclosure, debate and resolution of countless injustices from or embedded in remaining and recalcitrant institutions which were still riddled with the followers of former rules and rulers who fought to hold on to their power.

Let me quote from Alexis De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, written in 1835-1840, where he states:

"The society of the modern world, which I have sought to delineate, and which I seek to judge, has but just come into existence. Time has not yet shaped it into perfect form: the great revolution by which it has been created is not yet over; and amid the occurrences of our time, it is almost impossible to discern what will pass away with the revolution itself,

and what will survive its close. The world which is rising into existence is still half encumbered by the remains of the world which is waning into decay; and amid the vast perplexity of human affairs, none can say how much of ancient institutions and former manners of will remain, or how much will completely disappear."\* (Alexis De Tocqueville *Democracy in America* (1835-1840; trans. Henry Reeve 1835-1840)

It was not at all clear where we would wind up, but it was clarity that was needed if people were to organize their lives securely, and it was clarity that was essential, for only a free and secure people can build a civilization fit for culture and the arts. So it was the writers and artists of the "first" century of liberty and freedom,... the 19th Century,... that were given the duty and responsibility to organize, to codify, to popularize and protect the systems, laws, and democratized institutions of society which would insure the perpetuation of liberty....a way of life so recently come to the affairs of man. How they were to discharge these duties would surely impact and effect future generations perhaps for centuries to come.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau cried out at the beginning of his landmark work, *The Social Contract*: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains..." Unlike Marx, Rousseau's work focused on one of the most essential concepts that sired the western world from "medievalism," and protected people from being vulnerable to the whims of a despot, or philosopher King alike, either of whom were really only responsible to their own sensibilities which were validated and legitimized by "divine right". The Western world moved from a world filled with edicts of the "Sovereign" to a world ruled by "sovereign states." Terms like the "general will" and "social contract" and "government, of, by and for the people": were disseminated everywhere throughout the newly "free" world. For example in his *Discourse on the Origin if Inequality* Rousseau, ended this great historical essay speaking about current day injustices in France, "since it is plainly contrary to the laws of nature....that the privileged few should gorge themselves with superfluities; while the starving multitude are in want of the bare necessities of life."

He lashed out at an indifferent society and observed "... how poverty could deprave and degrade men and women who were originally good".

These revolutionary ideas became concepts whose meanings and understanding became increasingly embedded in the educated and wealthy classes, "trickling down" all the way to workers in the fields, and laborers in factories and shipyards all of whom were to participate in the benefits of newly free and democratic societies as the 18th century origins led to 19th century codification and 20th century implementation. It started first narrowly, as with only land owners voting in the original US Constitution, and then ever more broadly until by the time the 20th century had finished dealing with two world wars, the great Depression and countless other horrors, we saw an evolution from an agricultural to an industrialized economy, the abolition of monarchy, women voting, slavery abolished, child labor banned, labor movements established, and countless new institutions spread these new found freedoms and rights into virtually every nook and cranny of Western civilization. The rights to confront your accuser and cross examine

witnesses, the cornerstone of "due process" with a common law and written law that protected and defended every inch of those new found human rights.

While it would be possible to write a dozen speeches on this one topic, if you read the seminal Enlightenment works by [Locke](#), [Hobbes](#), [Mill](#) and [De Tocqueville](#), the mind set and cultural atmosphere becomes clear, setting the stage for the way in which we feel free to live, work and think today.

While I have taken a lot of time demonstrating many of the core beliefs and breakthroughs of the Enlightenment, it is because it is precisely these ideas and concepts that are so crucial to understanding the context in which the artists of the 19th century lived.

They were, in fact, addressing the very heart of Enlightenment thought.

"RELEVANCE"

Bouguereau painted young peasant girls with a solemn dignity and a hushed and reverential beauty, whether she was holding her staff and standing her ground as in "[Jeune Bergere Debout](#)" or the gypsies were being elevated to the heavens, as in this enchanting work called simply "[Jeunes Bohemiennes](#)". Note his low horizon has these two young innocents silhouetted by the heavens. Their kind and welcoming expressions implies their acceptance of us, the viewers which must by rights be properly echoed by our acceptance of them regardless of the lowly status of their birth. The very truth and reality of their birth once a negative, now elevates them to the heavens a status now where all of humanity resides. Only this time we have been endowed by our creator with certain "inalienable rights" of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or in his native France: liberte, egalite and fraternite. How assuredly he shows the values and beliefs newly elevated in his day, that the peasant class was just as noble and worthy of respect as any previous nobility whose rule by "divine right" has been eclipsed by the rule of human rights! And, if all people are equal, than all must rule together....Hence "Democracy!" This was a completely revolutionary way in which to depict the peasant class or human beings in general.

"RELEVANCE"

Each of his figures is an individual, extraordinarily real and ideal at the same moment. Bouguereau has chosen real characteristics present in many or most people to idealize. And his message of values, dignity and self respect and respect for others is thereby enhanced by individuation. Artists such as [Julien Dupre](#), [George Laugee](#), [Leon L'hermitte](#) and [Jean Francois Millet](#) painted the peasant class at work or at rest, they were also communicating values and beliefs in how to live and what constituted proper modes of conduct:

"RELEVANCE"

Hard work, family life, caring for our children, the value of romantic love as well as familial duty, honor and taking responsibility for oneself and one's life. This supplied endless subjects, compositions and themes that had never been encountered before.

## "RELEVANCE"

From there other artists tackled the cultural evils and social ills and countless injustices left behind by the old order that receded every year further back into the smoky recesses of memory, as new societal institutions and structures sallied forth to teach these values, expose the social ills, solve societies problems, and then through hard work, just laws and a thorough education, they were codifying, protecting, fine-tuning and preserving these achievements for our children.

## "RELEVANCE"

Paintings of the poor and homeless, women thrown out in the cold by husbands who controlled their money after marriage, and wielded absolute power over their homes much as the Kings had wielded such power over them. Scenes of unsafe working conditions, or children toiling until late at night after 16 hour days. Scenes of marriage and children and family life. Scenes of schools and courts and hospitals and industry...parks and mountains and countless other topics. For example, Clergy preaching to give up worldly possessions from their opulent apartments filled with art and antiques and servants. How revolutionary this was for artists. When Vibert, Brunery or Crogaert satirized the clergy, and painted cardinals in sumptuous surroundings playing cards with pretty young socialites, or hiring the services of a fortune teller, he was saying that the clergy was human and vulnerable to the same weaknesses and frailty of character as other people. But beyond that, to spoof the clergy represented our new found freedom of speech. A modernist professor once said to me "how inane and silly to show Cardinals in silly poses like that" His prejudice blinded him from even beginning to figure out what Vibert had done...what rules of conduct he had broken from the prior rulers of society. We have been taught to elevate artists for breaking rules and conventions of perspective or for undermining realistic drawing, or daring not to follow prior precepts, but the academic artists who had been on the front lines helping all of us to win our freedoms and rights, were also helping to create a climate where it was even possible to consider breaking the rules of art...which by comparison, were unimportant to the rule breaking which lead to freedom and justice.

What could hold more "Relevance" than this and it is they who are made fun of and put down through stilted ignorance and ungrateful arrogance. In previous centuries, an artist would have had his head cut off for spoofing cardinals in this way. From exposing societal ills and portraying the value and equality of all people, it was but a half step away to explore the personal inner life of individuals and to value and elevate mankind hopes, fantasies, and dreams, both the good and the bad, and if necessary, with all of our boils and warts on display. Literature captures these same things in poetry, and novels. And such story telling was a cornerstone to paintings and sculpture as well. What would happen to literature if storytelling were to be banned? Well that's what happened to fine art when story telling for all intents and purposes was banned.

## "RELEVANCE"

What used to be scenes of religion, history, kings and the nobility, were supplanted by simple men and gentle women, working, playing, living and praying, fighting soldiers and dancing girls, perhaps with toys or ponies, or dogs and cats. Churches and castles

gave way to farm houses and playgrounds. Humanity was what counted, and everything that makes us human...how we see ourselves and how we see the world...humanity was glorified and people of every type and shape, every nationality and color, every occupation and avocation,....we were what counted...we were what was important....and we were the greatest of all subjects for the creative bounty of the top artistic minds on earth. Everything about humanity became the new fodder for the unique forms of communication produced by the writers prose, the poet's pentameter, the painter's pigments. And glorified we were as thousands of artists produced millions of images, mostly new and original, and the best of the best of these were masterpieces of the highest order.

The methods of painting were so advanced, and the best subject matter of this period was so unique and powerful, that I didn't recognize it myself when I first came across one such canvas.

In October 1977, I walked into the [Clark Museum, Williamstown, Mass.](#) to see their thirty Renoirs, and after leaving the Renoir galleries walked out into a major hall, at the end of which was a painting that grabbed me body and soul. It was [a life-size painting of four water nymphs playfully dragging a mythological satyr into a lake against his will.](#) Frozen in place, gawking with my mouth agape, cold chills careening up and down my spine; I was virtually gripped as if by a spell that had been cast. It was so alive, so beautiful and so compelling. Finally, after about fifteen or twenty minutes of soaking up wave after wave of artistic and spiritual ecstasy, I started to take back control of my consciousness....my mind started racing with unanswered questions. My first thought was "I haven't felt this way about a work of art since I stood before Michelangelo's David. Then I thought, "This must be one of the greatest old master paintings every produced. But no name or country or time would come to mind. Italian High Renaissance, 17th Century Dutch, [Carravaggio](#), [Fragonard](#), [Ingres](#), [Prud'hon](#) ... back further perhaps ... [Raphael](#), [Botticelli](#), [Leonardo](#), no! No! **NO!** Not one of those names or times felt anything like what I was looking at.

Then I approached the painting more closely, and saw the name mispronouncing it as [Bouguereau](#) at the bottom, and the date 1873 -- **1873?**

**How was that possible?** I'd learned that the greatest artists at that time were, [Manet](#), [Corot](#), [Courbet](#), and [Renoir](#) ... that the techniques and greatness of the Old Masters had died out, and that nobody knew how to do anything remotely this great by the 1870's.

Years of undergraduate courses and another sixty credits post graduate in art, attaining my master's degree from Columbia University, and I had never heard that name. Who was he? Was he important? How could he not be important? Anyone who could have done this must surely be deserving of the highest accolades in the art world.

I was at the Clark on Sunday October 2nd 1977. That Tuesday, October 4th, I stopped in at [Sotheby's](#) and as fate would have it, there were three Bouguereau paintings being offered for sale that coming Friday. I purchased one of two babies asleep in each other's

arms. During the next few weeks I started researching Bouguereau and the entire period using any free time I had. I discovered that he had won the Grand Prix de Rome in 1851 at the age of twenty-six, and after winning nearly every accolade and award imaginable for an artist of his time, ultimately become the President of the Academy, Head of the Salon, President of the Legion of Honor. He was in fact, considered the greatest French artist from 1870 to 1900, and Paris was the center of art world. All this made me feel very good about my instincts, and that I had intuitively identified as being one of the worlds' greatest artists somebody who had generally been considered as such by most of the world during the final decades of the 19th century. That included the greats of the time such as Henry James, Frederic Chopin and Charles Dickens. I was in good company as far as my recognition of genius. I then studied further and found out that Bouguereau so revered in his time that he was practically a household name and was as famous as Picasso is in ours.

The biggest discovery about Bouguereau's life was to come to me in more recent years. Mark Walker the former world expert on William Bouguereau and Damien Bartoli, who I helped in writing the Catalog Raisonne on Bouguereau to be published in 2007, discovered that Bouguereau singlehandedly, using all of his power in the art world, opened the Academy Julien and later the Academie Francais, to women artists for the first time in history. This fact alone should have saved his reputation from the onslaught of derision that nearly drove his name out of art history.

It didn't take long before I discovered a lot of other major names that I'd never heard of before: [Tissot](#), [Cabanel](#), [Lefebvre](#), [Meissonnier](#), [Waterhouse](#), [Rossetti](#), [Alma-Tadema](#), [Burne Jones](#), and [Lord Leighton](#)...the list was near endless.

After years of study and research, taking all the evidence into account, I came to the certain and indisputable conclusions which I am sharing here with you today.

There is a very relevant and fascinating story that needs to be added at this point in the talk. I came across an article in the *New York Times*, published on April 7, 2000, by KATIE HAFNER. It was about Lenn D. Lowry, the Director of the [Museum of Modern Art](#).

(let me repeat "the Director of the Museum of Modern Art"). She Writes, Lenn D. Lowry..." has a vivid memory of the first time he was profoundly moved by a work of art. At age 7, during a visit to the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass., he was separated from his parents.

While wandering in search of them, he came upon a huge painting, [Nymphs and Satyr](#), by [William Bouguereau](#). His parents found him a half-hour later, still staring at the 6-by-8-foot painting. "I just remember being completely transfixed by it," said Mr. Lowry, who is now 45.

The experience helped Mr. Lowry believe in the transformative power of art and what he calls the "unique encounters that occur when one is fortunate to confront directly an

extraordinary object." Mr. Lowry, as well as other museum directors, wants to broaden the opportunity for such transforming moments by providing encounters with virtual art, viewed on a computer screen and brought to the art-viewing public via the World Wide Web.

Ironically, this is exactly what we've done at the Art Renewal Center.

I can't help but wonder why Mr. Lowry after having such a similar experience to my own with the same exact painting, has not aided in the resurrection of academic art. But many with careers in the art world are intimidated, and afraid to speak out against accepted gospels of modernist theory.

Before I saw Bouguereau's *Nymphs and Satyr*, I thought that the methods and techniques of the great Old Masters had somehow been lost over time accidentally. It never had occurred to me for two seconds, that people would actually have deliberately destroyed all of the institutions and methods by which the knowledge could be gained of how to create great works of art. This is one of mankind's greatest achievements ... one of the defining characteristics of advanced civilization ... a skill that makes us so unique, so sophisticated and so special. We are talking about the great arts of drawing, painting and sculpture, through which it's possible to express our shared humanity, including all of the universal, profound, complex and subtle emotions of what that means: our hopes and dreams, our fears and fantasies, our jealousy, and joys, our grief, loneliness, expectation, insecurity, intrigue, and compassion,

**This is what art is really for;** whether in theatre, in music, in literature, in sculpture, or in painting. Not the modernist cry of, "art for art's sake," or the modernist's belief that it is the duty of the artist to be honest and "prove that the canvas is flat". Any three-year-old knows that the canvas is flat! It is making the canvas come to life with reality and meaning that is the accomplishment. And these skills and humanistic values became precisely what the theories of modernism decided to attack and label as uncreative, confining and sentimental. They called great skill obsession with technique and worthless. They called story telling and the use of universal symbols as boring and repetitive. Realizing this we see that modernism didn't attack *academic* art. **It attacked art itself.** All art was without value, because the essence of what art is, the communication of our common humanity, was banished. And all this destruction was supported by journalistic art criticism, which was also held hostage by the same insanity. No longer was art allowed to use any of the parameters by which we can seek universal concepts and communicate with each other. Art was to only be about art and to be continuously novel for the sake of novelty. Not only did this create "empty art" it created quick and easily available products for sale at high prices. Now there is a huge establishment invested both philosophically and financially in this dead-end art...in such "work" as canvases using excrement and empty rooms with the light blinking on and off. In case any of you think I'm making that up, just such a room was the winner of the most prestigious award given out each year in Great Britain, the [Turner Prize](#).

Let's go back now to look at what a collector looks for before making an acquisition. The answer is that every collector is different and has different motivation from every other collector. For me, I look for works that deal with some of the most compelling moments during life, and then harmonize this theme with superlative technique making the canvas come to life. Normally the best way to do this is with illustration or storytelling of some degree.

So many students and even teachers have written and told us how realism has been virtually or actually banned from their art departments.

John Stuart Mill's remarks on this very issue are as alive and pertinent today as they were two hundred years ago.

"Where there is a tacit convention that principles are not to be disputed; where the discussion of the greatest questions which can occupy humanity is considered to be closed, we cannot hope to find that generally high scale of mental activity which has made some periods of history so remarkable."

And

"However unwillingly a person who has a strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not a living truth." John Stuart Mill's essay [\*On Liberty\*](#) (From *Great Political Thinkers* by Wm. Bernstien p.569)

Without a dynamic living coterie of experts teaching traditional techniques in drawing and painting, it will never be possible for college art departments, to have students who are able to enrich the debate and the academic environment for all students by producing works of art that are capable of expressing complex and subtle ideas. To forbid these skills to be taught on campus in any real depth, is as ridiculous as having a music department that refuses to teach the circle of fifths or only teaches three or four of the scales from which they insist all music must be composed.

If there was nothing to be ashamed in their teaching methods and in their results, they would welcome the chance to confront the ideas that they should be well equipped to refute. They have a solemn duty to maintain the integrity of thought made possible by what has been handed down to them by those artists, writers and thinkers of the 19th century and before, who established a system where freedom of thought would prevail. And where is it more important to vouchsafe these principles than at our nation's colleges and universities who are training the next generations of leaders?

Even if they don't agree they had a duty to expose their students to what is the "state of the art".

There is a concept which explains how It works. It's called "prestige suggestion".

**Prestige suggestion** causes people to assume automatically that a work must be great if it is by any of the "big names" of modern art, so they at once start looking for greatness. If they don't see greatness they are made to believe that it is due to their ignorance or lack of artistic sensibilities, but never because just maybe there is some failing in the art work. To acknowledge doubts is to make oneself vulnerable to ridicule and derision. It's so much easier to go along to get along. Students operating under that kind of intimidating pressure, you can be sure, will find greatness no matter what they are looking at. The reverse of this has been trained into them when they view academic paintings. They have been taught that works exhibiting realistic rendering are "bad" art and therefore any good that is seen is not due to qualities in the artistic accomplishment, but are rather due to a lack of intelligence and taste in the viewer. But political free speech is so important, so at the heart of what America stands for, so integral to our entire way of life that this danger is being spotted by a new generation and many thoughtful scholars and more mature members of culture who have been able to unplug themselves from the Modernist propaganda machine to finally see with their own eyes.

### **Now, what of the future?**

Artists, Oil Painters of America!

Modernist educators....and I use that term loosely....love to tell their charges...their students... the object of the fiduciary responsibility that they have been licensed by the state for, and whom they have a sacred duty and promise to guide and gain safe on their educational journey before entering the ranks of art professionals.

Educators have determined en masse, apparently, that the best way to impart the benefits of modernism, and all of their own years of hard work, experience and knowledge, is to tell their students to...

"Do your own thing."

**"Do your own thing????"**

Aren't they really saying to "figure out how to teach yourself, because I sure as hell don't know how to teach you anything?"

We all know adolescence normally entails some degree of rebellion from authority, and truancy from participation and practice. Shirking of one's work and duties is not the kind of thing that teachers are supposed to encourage. Young people love getting out of doing work, especially work that is hard and takes great concentration and focus. What do you think goes through their heads when the "authority" in front of the room in art class tells them to "do your own thing"???

Despite the gross misuse of this phrase, and as practicing artists, already educated, whether you have suffered through this system or lack there of, you have come out on the other side, and you are building your careers. And I know that many of you must take commissions in order to make a living. But let me please encourage you to not lose sight of the inspiration that originally seduced you to become artists and painters.

Each of you have different subjects and themes that excite you and when it comes to subjects and themes, for the already educated and skilled, it is there that the directive of "do your own thing" can and should be used.

And please people, don't turn away from great painting.

Despite the warning of modernists, that it's already all been done...

It has not already all been done!

It has not even remotely all been done!

Would anyone say it's all been done when it comes to literature, theatre, poetry, music, or dance?

It has not ...already ...all.. been done!

Not even close.

In fact, I would say that we are really just beginning to explore the great themes about the human condition, whether subtle or evident,

Whether psychic, or psychological

Whether history or story telling

Literal or Literary ----Fantasy or faith,

Fiction or fact----Romantic or realistic

Legend or landscape---Whether of inner life, or interstellar travel.

The last century has unquestionably been the most complicated and expansive to the human mind and human sensibilities, and the tenets of modernism which have held the art world in an iron grip were absolutely paralyzing to the discipline of painting, and the fine arts.

All of the breakthroughs in thought and science over the past hundred years during which the knowledge of the world went from doubling every 50 years to doubling ever 6 years, the entire experience of humanity during this timeframe which ...if the math is right, takes us at this moment in time to a point where 98+% of the world knowledge has been generated during....the century without Traditional Realism.

This entire past century has barely been touched at all by your chosen field.

It's all been done?

My god, you'd have to be living in Plato's cave to believe that.

We have hardly begun to even consider all of the possible areas of thought, emotion, knowledge, and experience which have yet to be conceived, drawn and painted, in which the expressive, poetic and creative powers of the artists eye can once again enrich society, culture and civilization with the outpouring of countless masterpieces from the hands of our Living Masters, either here today, or who may now just be entering one of the 63 ARC Approved schools which we have identified which are finally teaching once again thousands of talented young people how to become...really become..."Real" artists.

With the power of the Internet and with credible organizations such as the OPA and the Art Renewal Center reaching countless millions of people, it won't be but a few short years before everyone interested in the arts knows the truth about the bondage of and its near total control over the institutions of fine art.

And as our power grows, so to will the power to communicate the truth, and the power of our newly earned sensibilities to recognize beauty, poetry and excellence in fine art!

We are but a half step away from a new birth of creativity... and a vast new outpouring of human expression, an explosive reinvigoration of the visual arts, but this time fully imbued with the true meaning of freedom of expression.

So long as most of humanity is permitted to compare and decide for themselves what constitutes great art, ...truth and beauty, the twin sisters of the human soul, are certain to prevail.

For more information on the Art Renewal Center go to [www.artrenewal.org](http://www.artrenewal.org)

<p>Fred Ross is currently Executive Administrator of the Committee to write the Catalog Raisonnee of William Bouguereau. He is Chairman of the Art Renewal Center, and has been published or interviewed in the American Arts Quarterly, the California Art Club, Forbes Magazine, Artnews, New Jersey Monthly, the Victorian Society in America, and the Classical Realist Journal. He has been a featured speaker at Sotheby's, the Dahesh Museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum, and University of Memphis. He holds a Master's in Art Education from Columbia University, and along with his wife Sherry owns one of the foremost collections of 19th</p>	<p><b><u>Table of Contents for the ARC Philosophy</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chapter I. <a href="#">The Great 20th Century Art Scam</a></li><li>• Chapter II. <a href="#">Good Art / Bad Art - Pulling Back the Curtain</a></li><li>• Chapter III. <a href="#">Bouguereau and the "Real" 19th Century</a></li><li>• Chapter IV. <a href="#">ARC Chairman speaks at the Angel Academy of Art</a></li><li>• Chapter V. <a href="#">ARC Chairman Speaks at duCret School of Art</a></li><li>• Chapter VI. <a href="#">Abstract Art is Not Abstract and Definitely Not Art</a></li><li>• <b>Special Feature.</b> <a href="#">Hockney's 'Secret Knowledge': Refuted</a></li></ul>
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Century European paintings.