

Photographs I Like

Photos are pictures are images. Graphics and paintings are pictures and images too. Distinctions between pictures and images seem to be nil. Images might be less narrative? Yes, but no. Pictures might be more contained? Sure, but frequently not. (Faces are likely images, but not pictures.)

Images are fascinating of course. The image is something fundamentally ourselves, an immediacy that can be difficult to manage; sensations will be sensations and mirrors will be mirrors. A concept like art is a means of image management. It employs the strategies of: look, but do not touch; think about what an image is doing rather than what it is. Art, part and parcel of art history, assumes spiritual guidance: there is no divinity represented in or by the image; the image itself becomes the divine.

Art [history] chooses images to represent this divinity, images largely culled from the graphic and plastic arts, disciplines in which manual skill is implicit—an artist literally *making* images. Recently, this image-making has become less about image and more about material surfaces: canvas is fetishized as canvas, paint as paint, veneer as veneer, debris as debris, figment as figment, etc. as etc. Meanwhile, images remain images.

The photographic image is the closest to “pure image” we have short of our in-built optics. Perhaps that’s why the photograph scared the shit out of art when it first showed up. Perhaps that’s why it still scares the shit out of iconoclastic image-makers. The photograph has neither surface nor volume; it is both. A photograph can graphically remind us of a painting or illustration, but is inexorably a photograph.

Of late, a photograph is an image often indistinct from other images. We can see all types of images online, each one brought together under rubrics of “like” and “share”. When I “like” a photo, I know it’s a photo, but the medium is less photo than “like.” An image of a painting or a drawing I find online may be something I “like” because I like the idea or the memory of that painting; I might just like the reproduction itself (72 dpi can often work some magic).

Can one “like” art? “Like”ing is prosthetic touch, and art is fairly defined by proscribed touch. If art was a way to manage the spirituality of images in an increasingly secular world, it now prioritizes safeguarding the materials of the graphic and plastic arts over tending to images and their immutable power. Might “like”ing manage the spirituality of images? Is this spirituality now part and parcel of the multiple means of viewing and culling at our “immediate” fingertips? Medium specificity; I “like” to “like”...

I came to like art because it made me believe in something greater than myself (even if in my cloister). I don’t know if the art I see in its contemporary quarters makes me believe in that something-greater. Much like with the images I see online, it’s quite easy to “like.” And yet, the infinity of images online does give me faith, just as the spiritual infinity of art keeps me company. I trust a past I never lived and I doubt a present(-future) I can’t see.