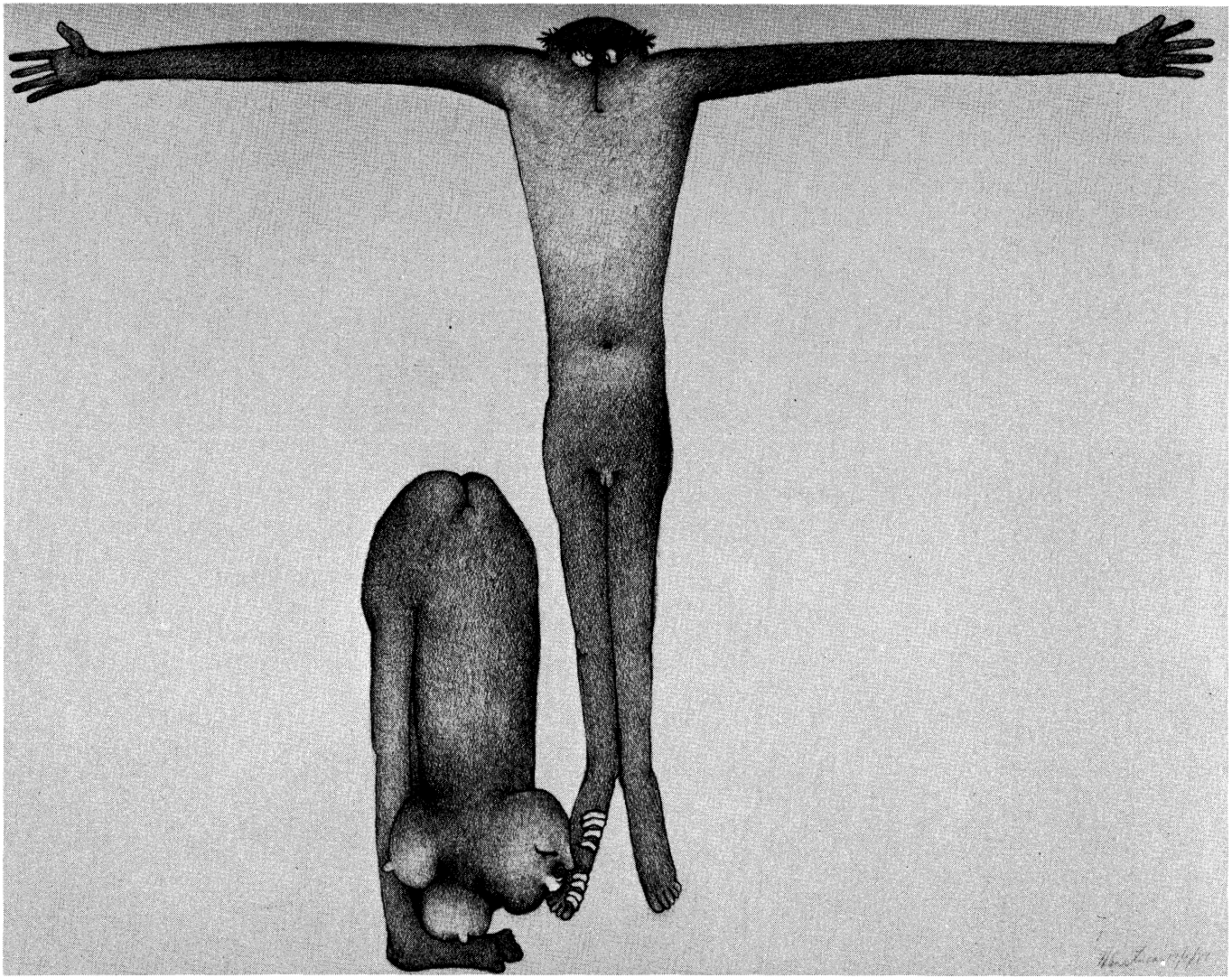


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# THE ARTIST & THE ELUSIVE ROLLS-ROYCE



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## Helen Lucas

*Helen Lucas nous dit la difficulté pour une femme artiste de se faire payer ce qu'elle vaut.*

Recently I had the occasion to hear someone say with absolute conviction: 'Artists should not concern themselves with matters of money'.

Why artists? Who then should pay their living expenses, their material costs? Or for that matter, why

should anyone else pay for them? Not only are such attitudes totally unrealistic but they also do much damage. First, they separate artists from the rest of society by making them appear different.

Are they then privileged or underprivileged? To separate them means to separate their work as well. Art, rather than being an integral part of everyone's daily life, becomes a thing apart, the private domain of a privileged few who enjoy its exclusivity and use it to affirm their status and their egos.

Secondly, such attitudes put artists in positions of need. If they cannot concern themselves with money they will need others to support (patronize) them. These positions of need make them vulnerable to exploitation by anyone willing to do them a good turn. Every art discipline has its collection of horror stories.

The problem of course, when you are young and naïve and doing what you love doing, is that you feel guilty being paid for enjoying yourself! Working alone also makes

you crave affirmation to counteract your insecurities. The idea that someone actually wants to buy something makes you so grateful, you almost give it away.

The myths are perpetuated — artists are willing to work for nothing; artists should be poor, it helps them to do better work; artists expect to be poor, they don't seem to mind; they don't need money. Many prospective buyers play on this. They make artists feel they are doing them a favour by buying, and expect big discounts.

Yet the blame lies with the artist as much as with the buyer/patron. Many a young artist rejects the bourgeoisie in favour of poverty and left-wing socialism. It's easy to reject money when you don't have any; it's easy to be poor when you're young. What you realize as you grow older is that you are a contributing member of society and therefore must be paid as others are.

Money taints art? History is filled with the names of too many successful, hence wealthy, writers, painters, composers, dancers etc., for us to believe such nonsense.

In the Renaissance an artist was a *craftsman*. He apprenticed to a master, learned his trade, graduated, set up business and supplied a needed product, a portrait, a landscape, or whatever. The price was usually determined by guild standards. The world of the artist then, as Robert Hughes points out, was a very public world. He fit well into society. Like all businessmen he had his good and bad days.

Then the Industrial Revolution — printing facilities for mass-produced work and the camera, helped put an end to the traditional role of the artist. The artist left the active public world and withdrew into the limited private world of his own experience. This was a time when women living in the private world felt equally qualified to express themselves. But the next step remains to be taken. We haven't learned to sell ourselves. Artists now paint knowing there is no one out there waiting to buy their work. Who needs the subjective expressions of a total stranger on their walls? Without some printed words

## ... Georgia O'Keefe bedsheets ...

### Is there a better way to help people appreciate art?

telling us of the importance of the work, it has little chance of being discovered. Artists remain isolated, private. . . and vulnerable.

What they have forgotten is that they still have businesses to run, and like it or not, they need customers. They must find them — it rarely goes the other way. So they have to concern themselves with money and selling, by interacting with the public world. They must do it. The very nature of modern work means that it won't reach the public unless artists put it there. It's that or waiting. Perhaps someone will come along and do it for them, but if they're smart they won't be flattered. They'll ask: 'Why?'

There will always be more painters than galleries, more musicians than concert halls, more authors than publishers. For anyone in the arts, the problems of earning a living will always be there. Yet these problems are directly related to the separation between the arts and society at large. The separation can be removed if both sides acknowledge the fallacy that artists need not concern themselves with matters of money. The more artists reach out to the public, the less will be their dependency on those all too few and slowly disappearing monied benefactors.

A term insidious in its own way is 'fine art' — implying that all other visual arts are less than fine and another way of keeping artists out of

reach of the public. 'Free art' is a better term in the context of modern art definition. Free artists are permitted to teach forty hours a week in order to supplement a living (it's considered respectable) but they are not permitted to put a design on a tissue box. Why not? They must find ways to incorporate themselves into the lifestyle of the masses.

Is there a better, less arduous way to help people appreciate the pleasures of art forms? A cereal box by Alex Colville, Georgia O'Keefe bedsheets, a Henry Moore toothbrush? Of course artists must proclaim the magnificence of man/woman by striving to do great works, most of which, unfortunately, are cloistered within museum walls; but that talent can also create the inescapable billboards that confront us daily.

The economic survival of artists depends on their reaching the masses, not just the privileged few. The cultural survival of people at large depends on a renaissance of the arts made easily available in their daily lives. They are bombarded by things that make them think, deprived of things that make them feel. A new recognition of the worth of artists is long overdue.

Photos by Derek Fuller

1 'This is My Beloved,' by Helen Lucas

2 'This is My Beloved, Sometimes,' by Helen Lucas