

## **Not Yet**

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(Qualifying note: I approached this response rather quickly, without outside proofreading or editing, and in a casual conversational way. This is how I understand 'wordswithoutpictures.org' to be mainly functioning. I am primarily an artist, not a writer or historian.)

To simplify, I interpret Mr. Evans' essay to be expressing his frustration that more "serious and independent photographers" are not making more interesting work for the Internet, as an alternative to gallery and museum installations. Why is this the case? Why haven't they? Why not?\*

Well, one somewhat boring reason may be because it is just not time yet. These sorts of things seem to happen organically and with a sense of critical urgency, I'll even say necessity, not wishful thinking or desire. My interpretation is that, despite the imperfections within the 'art world proper', the gallery and the market, it is nonetheless a finite forum that has some sort of system of checks and balances, problematic as they may be. There is an evolving structure in place. Artists that choose to participate within this structure, knowing its faults and potential for dysfunction, are doing so because of a shared sense of desire to be a part of a language, a history, and a multifaceted and ongoing contemporary art dialog involving regular exhibitions, critics, journals, reviews, curators, etc. For me as one of these participating artists, the potential for failure and rejection are as important as aspects of critical success and peer support. In short, there is something at stake.

With photography made for the Internet, there is no such community. There is no such system or power structure. Thus, there is no such potential for failure. Not yet. If no one 'hits' your website, you are the only one who knows or cares. If someone does come across the site and wishes to engage through some sort of critical response, there are the forums of blogs and comments, which have little impact at this point (I think 'OMG' or 'LOL' are probably the most popular responses to images one finds online). There is very little at stake. Therefore, it's very safe. And, as Mr. Evans states, it is free. It is democratic. But, I'm not convinced that democracy, in the way I understand it, is a system that is best suited for all or just any areas of cultural production. In fact, I 'vote' against a democratic art world if I am to continue to take it seriously.

For the sake of comparison, please imagine that instead of art, we consider the field of philosophy, a relatively parallel mode of creative cultural production. There are contemporary philosophers, mostly academics, who participate within a rich history of incredibly rigorous dialog and debate in the world of ideas. In order to be taken seriously, most of the time, their work is reviewed in academic journals and books, scrutinized, torn apart, refuted, dismantled, challenged, praised, expanded upon, etc. There is a community and structure in place. And, if it is like many other fields of study or inquiry, it is not perfect. There is probably nepotism, feuding camps, some injustice, etc. Despite these ills, like a close family with it's own problems and difficult relationships, organized groups function better than nomads. But, certainly, there must be some independent philosophers philosophizing online without any of these constraints, right?. I'm sure some of the content is also incredibly rigorous and interesting. However, at this

point, there isn't nearly as much of this serious work happening as there is nonsense and 'philosophy-lite' ranting or opining.

Similarly, within the realm of contemporary art, I think there is some incredibly engaging and serious work that's final destination is the web. However, at this point, there are infinitely more examples of terrible and uninteresting, albeit VERY popular imagery floating in cyberspace. The majority of myspace.com is but one example. Countless videos of people doing 'faceplants' on YouTube.com or Break.com are certainly entertaining if one is in the mood to comfortably revel in the low rez excruciating pain of others, but it isn't good art, no matter how many thousands of 'hits' these sites get. When considering the benefit of having a potentially much larger audience online than in the gallery or museum venue, Mr. Evans states, "If an audience is what you prefer (as opposed to a physical thing like a book or a show as the testimony to your photographic talent), then the Internet is for you". With this logic, one could stand on a freeway overpass holding up a large photograph and, during rush hour, could have an incredibly large audience. But, what does that mean? Personally, it means more to me to have 10 people intentionally spend 20 minutes each seriously engaging with my photographic installations in actual space than it does to know that 100 people happened upon my website, half of whom got there by accident when Googling their favorite guitar virtuoso who happens to share my name, and spent 5 seconds or less before they were onto yet another adventure.

I understand that the potential that Mr. Evans describes for much more interesting work to exist on the web is there. I happily welcome these expansions of the medium, both formally and conceptually. However, we have many historical examples of artists who begin by working outside of the fuzzy boundaries of what is then accepted as art. Their ultimate success is not so much in forcing (or even caring about) a dramatic alteration in the existing structure, it's in the structure's ability to slowly grow, adapt and absorb that work within its boundaries. Mr. Evans invokes Andy Warhol as a pioneer, which he certainly was (One could easily replace Warhol with Duchamp or several others in this example). But, the reason Warhol's radicalism took hold is because it was time for it to do so. Had he made the same work 50, 15 or even 5 years earlier, there is no guarantee that the response would have been as strong. All the wishful thinking and desire one could muster wouldn't make a difference.

I suspect that Mr. Evans is foreshadowing in some way an inevitable evolution in contemporary artistic production and public reception. I suspect that the art world, sort of like the commercial music industry already has done with some success, will eventually incorporate more art that exists as digital information in addition to discrete objects. But, like the music industry, it will happen when it absolutely has to, when all parties and the technology are ready, which will be later than it's pioneering participants wish, and I bet it won't be free.

\*"Why Not" was the working draft title of Mr. Evans' essay.