

## Apples and Oranges: The L.A. vs. New York Question

" . . . artists can no longer sit back and take the attitude that the work speaks for itself . . . "

After opening a second office and gallery in New York last September, I have spent a good deal of time accumulating frequent flier miles. On the average, I spend one week each month in New York, which has been a real eye-opener for me, a native Angeleno who has been actively involved with the Los Angeles art scene for twenty years. Admittedly, yes, the LA art world has had its ups and downs, but until this year I always believed that we on the West Coast were just as good, just as educated, and just as committed to the arts as New Yorkers. What the past ten months have made painfully clear is how wrong I was, though not for the reasons I suspected. It isn't that New Yorkers are smarter or more driven than those of us on the West Coast. The major difference is that *art is relevant* to New Yorkers in a way it isn't here in LA, a point which has become abundantly clear to me.

This is not necessarily our fault, of course, but we do suffer the cumulative effects of our indifference to the sagging (non-existent) state of the current art market. We have not properly educated our collectors, for example. Therefore, when the investment value of art is gone, the market evaporates because no real foundation exists to sustain it. The solution is not simply increased sales. Sales may provide a quick fix, but they should not be our immediate goal. And, until we can visualize our immediate goals, we will not achieve them. The answer lies first in education.

You can not open the *New York Times* on any given day and not find an article about art-not necessarily contemporary art, but art. You can't walk six blocks in Manhattan without passing a gallery or museum, and can't meet six people for the first time without discovering that at least one of them works in the arts (theater, visual, music, etc.). What this accomplishes over a period of time, I feel, is education by osmosis. It's the trickle-down theory of culture. I read an article about Clyfford Still in the *New York Times* that was so well-researched and well-written that it taught me more about Still's work than I'd learned in four years of art history at UCLA. It's true-a unique vitality emanates from the congestion of New York City. This energy tends to fuel itself, so that each art activity breeds more art activity. Networking in New York is not a strategy, it's a religion. But these are the results of a foundation that has been established over many, many years.

If we on the West Cost have any hope of revitalizing our art market, we must start at the ground level and rebuild the foundation. We must all voice our concerns for more local and national press coverage, more public funding of the arts, and better educating in our schools. Artists must assume the responsibility for education their dealers and collectors by speaking intelligently about their own work. One of the great advantages of collecting contemporary art, after all, is that artist is still alive, available for discussion. Artists can no longer sit back and take the attitude that the work speaks for itself Take the time to articulate your reasons for working, your influences, your sources, and so on. Develop a firm foundation in art history so that you can realistically assess the ways in which your work fits in the current scene. Create dialogues with other artists in order to hone your skills at expressing yourself. If you feel incapable of doing this, hire a writer to spend time with you in your studio, developing an artist's' statement.

We *can* create a viable art market. But it's going to take a lot of hard work, and the burden of responsibility begins with the artist.