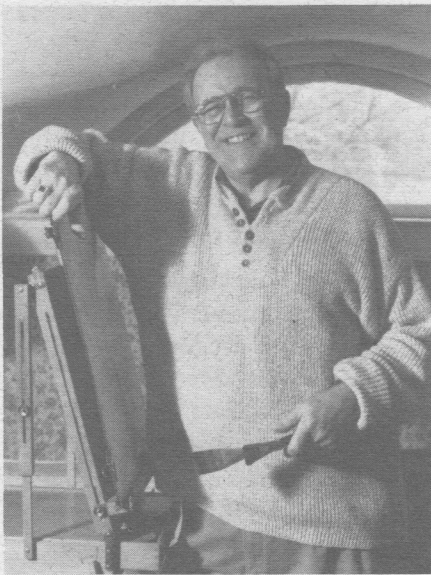


# TALKS ON ART

## THE COST OF BEING AN ARTIST

by Frank Webb



In tragedy we see an outward defeat but an inward victory. Typically there is much conflict in an artist's life since the artist is one who works strictly from the self amid a mass culture.

In 1950 Lewis Mumford prophesied that we were becoming technological supermen and aesthetic idiots. His prediction is made even more ominous today as the technicians and bureaucrats encroach by way of the information highway. The private life and the introspective life are threatened by these depersonalizing forces.

The first cost to the budding artist is usually the dulling of the sensibilities by public education. This numbing down may continue through college where the bland are expected to lead the bland. The upshot is that one's art education is mostly self-education and must be pursued during one's spare

time.

The way of art is through a barren region of insecurity. It is the way of countless beginnings and vacillations between opposing aims. A great rift separates what is from what ought to be. The artist who moves with the crowd relinquishes independence of thought as the self is denied. On the other hand the artist who competes aggressively becomes alienated.

The artist must possess a fierce independence as a producer of art but must also have the opposite sensibilities of the consumer. This means that even during the heat of execution the artist must be aware of the judgement of others. Thus it requires an almost superhuman power to be simultaneously the origin and the terminus of artistic production.

Each artist must endure rejection of his/her work. It must be faced alone even as the works are produced in solitude. Forced to deal with the art world's usual charlatans, dilettantes, fund raisers, and Philistines; the artist finds no organic relation between the self and the public. This schism is exacerbated as the artist looks within and sees on the one hand a need for bourgeois comforts and the happy life, and on the other, a calling for a greater task. This higher calling usually limits material possessions.

Then comes the nagging awareness that there are always those who dislike one's work. Or worse yet, what if the great masses loved one's work? Who would wish to strike that perfect chord of mediocrity which would

vibrate the bourgeoisie?

Whole cadres of critics tell the public why the painter makes images and what they mean. Furthermore they tell the public whether to like or dislike these works. No other profession would give such power to outsiders to devalue careers.

But the highest cost of all is indifference. It is the real toad in our imaginary garden. Silent uninterested censorship comes from a public satiated by overkill by the mass media. This lack of appreciation is the most debilitating and pernicious of all.

### SO WHAT ARE THE REWARDS?

Painting is fun as life should be fun. Painting with colors is a fine activity as every child knows. The painter is one of few workers who is able to fuse thinking and feeling with action.

The benefits are ego satisfaction and identity. Even the public, indifferent to art works, is inclined to be in awe of the painting person. This is because art is one of the four grand inquiries: philosophy, theology, science, and art. They see that the artist among us teaches the significance of life. Art renders life in a higher intensity. It gives us a glimpse of what life might be, or ought to be. Thus art redeems us, if not from evil, at least from boredom.

The fruits of art lead to wholeness, integration, pleasure, knowledge, delight, unity, harmony, and quality.

Art awakens the longings of man, imparts ideas and vivifies truth, goodness, and beauty. It is fullness of being.

The cost of being an artist is not worth comparing to the qualities it adds, not only to our personal lives but our public life as well. Enjoy!