

“It is useless and tedious to represent what exists because nothing that exists satisfies me... I prefer the monsters of my fantasy to what is positively trivial”

Baudelaire, salon review (1859)

Is Baudelaire's position defensible in light of case lens-based art forms make to ‘represent what exists’ or, from a contemporary perspective do the ‘monster of fantasy’ still allow artists to engage with ‘what exists creatively?’

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Documentary photography and visual activism

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Is Baudelaire's position defensible? I believe Baudelaire's position is definitely defensible but I also believe that it isn't in some cases and I'll explain why in this essay. first of all, let me introduce you to him, his name is Charles Pierre Baudelaire he was born on April 9 in 1821 and he died on August 31 in 1867 he was a poet, translator, literary and art critic. Who didn't see photography as an art form because he felt that it was too realistic and art is supposed to be about the expression of yourself or the world around you rather than the raw plain picture.

“Since photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could desire (they really believe that, the mad fools!), then photography and Art are the same thing”

In some ways I think his position is defensible but in other ways, I don't, for example in documentary photography you are meant to photograph what you see and you can't really edit it or use monster of fantasy in it as it is meant to be truthful and educate people on important subjects and the world around them, you could not do this if you were editing or changing the content of the photos and it would not be true and correct. In other forms of photography, you can edit and change your work to make it less literal, for example as a photographer in the arts or a fashion photographer, these photos are regularly edited to change the picture itself for example removing or adding items to the picture, enhancing facial features, makeup and clothes that the model is wearing. This is something that I feel Baudelaire would have loved to have seen and been a part of. what we have to remember is that back when he made this review, photography was a very new thing and was incredibly basic, there was no form of editing or enhancing the photos you could take

the photos were not even colour they were all black and white and they only had the use of simple pinhole cameras, as time went on new technology was invented and colour photos were able to be taken this was a huge turning point for photographers and artists alike. As time has gone on things have progressed massively and we are now lucky to have digital and mobile technology which makes editing and playing around with pictures and their content easier and reliable and therefore more things can be molded into what people see in their imaginations this has allowed people to become more creative with their work. Many people called Baudelaire the father of the modern world I believe that he could be one of the many reasons we are living in a post-truth era by this I mean, we are now living in a world where the truth is scarce and you can hide the reality behind images. An example of this is the photographer Steve McCurry he used someone who worked for him to fake his photos the main reason he did this was that the fancier or the more beautiful photos sell better than the actual reality of the documentary-style photo, when he was supposed to be photographing refugees in a refugee camp in Afghanistan he decided that the pictures were not appealing enough and the photos were not eye-catching enough so instead took photos of someone who worked for him as he felt it was a more eye-catching picture that the public would appreciate, but unfortunately some photographers use the faked photos just to gain recognition by doing this they are making the public numb to important situations like the above in some ways they are making you look at the world through rose-tinted glasses. In some cases I feel the photographer can stage photos in order to express their feelings as long as it's not through the medium of documentary photography as this is then misleading the viewer, I feel it's only ok to do this if its to get your feeling across to the viewer if

you're not doing that then your just trying to gain attention which is where the problem lies.

In my opinion, I believe in this day and age we are very lucky because we have the ability, technology, and knowledge to embrace the ideas of Baudelaire and do the things that I feel he would have loved to do.

You can see this today as evidenced by thousands of photographers who always use their imagination in their work, this is also a way they use to express themselves For me personally, I sometimes like to express my emotions in my work as a form of self-expression and in doing this I believe some of my work would have satisfied Baudelaire because I also enjoy the contemporary version of photography in some of my projects I really think it is what he would have liked to see as he said in his quote the plain world bores him.

If Baudelaire didn't consider photography an art then why are some drawings considered art because some can be a hyperreal drawing meaning that they look just like a photo this could be of many different things such as a flower, the eyes, and portraits some of these are so well painted or drawn that you would not know they were not photos.

Because of Baudelaire, well in part, we have advanced so much in our technology and it is now at a point where we can erase or add things with a couple of clicks of a button this has allowed us to take something very simple or boring and make it into

something extravagant, beautiful, unique and eye-catching, the simplest of photos can become the most unusual and unique,

Baudelaire is very fascinating with the way he thinks for example take his quote

“Genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will – a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood’s capacities and a power of analysis”.

This has helped me to understand in some way where he is coming from. I

feel I can see where his passion for the arts and his mindset for

photography has developed because of the way he looks at the world.

Looking at the above quote we can see that he feels like he can revert

back to a child-like mindset when in his creative state in order to free his

mind of the day to day stress of life as an adult, by doing this I feel he is

opening his mind up to the creativity of a child while having the knowledge

and resources of an adult.

After he made the review of the salon in 1959 people started looking at

photography in different ways. because of Baudelaire’s words and strong

opinions I personally feel this challenged people to develop their

knowledge and skills and pushed them to think more out of the box than

they would have before, therefore through the years they have found new

and exciting ways to produce and develop more eye-catching and

astonishing images, this is something that’s developed over 100s of years

and even at this point where I feel photography is at its best I still feel there

is room for improvement and technology will continue to show us new and exciting ways to produce better images.

Baudelaire wrote that “that the artist should look at his surroundings as if they were a drunk child seeing everything in a state of newness” and what this means to me is that he wanted the artist to paint or write it like it’s brand new and something they have never seen before almost with the innocence of a child-like mind, this will also help them to learn to break down barriers and to not be afraid to produce something that was different and not the norm. Baudelaire wanted the person to immerse themselves in the paintings or poems so as to almost become one with what they are creating. All thought I may not agree with his statement that all photography is boring and stupid, “the stupidity of the masses” The main reason why he said this was because he felt as if photography showed the world in a realistic way it could never be beautiful I think this could be because the images were to him boring because the quality was poor and of course had no colour.

On the other hand, he did think that the reason why many people loved photography was that they love the truth that a photograph can bring especially back in 1859 when photos couldn't be edited.

I feel everybody is entitled to express their creativity and own unique style in a way that they appreciate and enjoy.

In one of my last contextual essays, I learned about Plato's cave theory which is about three prisoners chained to a wall and all they had ever seen was the shadow cast on to the wall from objects passing by the fire behind them and that is all they thought life was but then one day one of the prisoners were freed and he went and saw that there was so much more to the world than just shadows so he went back to his prison inmates and told them everything he had seen but they thought he was crazy since all they ever saw was this wall and its shadows they even go as far as threatening to kill him, I am explaining this because Baudelaire opinion can relate to this in some way from the point when the prisoner returns and he tells the other prisoners about what he has discovered they argue and fight because they refuse to believe what he is saying is true this reminds me of the way photography had a hard time entering the world of art because Baudelaire had said that

“This industry is invading the territories of art has become art's most mortal enemy. “

This quote alone reminds me of the distrust that the prisoners had when hearing about the outside world he believes that art and photography are two separate things as he thinks photography is just copying or mimicking nature “kills man's inner life” and as photography has develop we have created a trust issue within photography because it has become an art where people can easily make false images in this day and age, this is something that Buadelaire would really enjoy as it takes images a million

miles away from the “normal” “boring” images Buadelaire talks of when he wrote salon in 1859, unfortunately being able to do so many different things with these images does create mistrust and he was right with the above comment because we do record reality through images but slowly it has become more exciting than just one click of a button we are also getting further and further away from it at the same time photography is more than just a two-dimensional picture it can be so many things, we now use images for virtual reality games and software, when you're immersed in that image you can not just see the image you can hear the images you can smell the images and in some cases you can even feel what's happening in the images, this takes photography to a whole new level, we have also gone from being able to do a 180 picture to a 360 picture. This allows the viewer of the picture to get the full experience of what you're trying to capture.

In my own opinion, I personally believe that photography itself is one hundred percent a form of art. There are so many creative things and different approaches to photography such as dramatic photography, cinematic photography and poetic photography all of these require a different approach and technique. There are many editing techniques which include lightening an image and darkening an image, you can even replace things or add things that were not in the photo originally.

Photography is not only art, but it is also memories that you can capture and keep forever because we now have the ability to save and store these images on mobile devices, SD cards, hard drives, and many other things, with this in mind we now have the technology to edit a single photo over and over again while keeping the

original photo, this was something that was not available when photography was new as the only form of storage available to them was a film canister and even those would slowly fade away after a certain amount of time in fact it is documented that the early films would only last approximately 2 years undeveloped and 7 years fully developed. It's amazing that the smallest camera can go a long way, Though Baudelaire had his opinions, I believe that if he were alive today, I think he would definitely appreciate how far photography has come and appreciated this true form of art.

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