

The Brain is Not the Mind, The Mind is Not the Brain

Why do artists make artwork? And can artists find a purpose for their artwork that lies beyond monetary value?

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Link to my video: <https://youtu.be/BNEftFQLpSc>

This is a video essay that will aim to answer two questions. The first of which being. Why do artists make artwork? And the second being How can artists find a purpose for their artwork that lies beyond monetary value? I cannot answer these questions for anyone else so will attempt to answer these questions with the reasons and theories of myself and artists who inspire me. I will achieve this by breaking down the theoretical framework that guides my art practice and my reason for making. After doing this, I will dive into my practice, the works I have made, and the context of those works.

Then I will dive into the works and theories of two artists that inspire me to make work. In doing this I will also explain why I think they create artwork and what motivates them. The first artist will be Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and the second will be Ed Moses (1926-2018). While doing this I will also be comparing the philosophy and practice of Kandinsky, Ed Moses and myself to the practice of artists such as Andy Warhol (1928–1987) or Jeff Koons (b. 1955) whose works only exist in the neo-liberalist world of contemporary capitalist art. A world of constant commodification, where art is only made to be sold and has no true worth other than the arbitrary monetary value someone gives it.

Part one

My art practice is centered on creation for the sake of creating. There's an energy within me that drives me—if I don't make things, I feel like I'll lose my mind. I can't explain why I create artwork; I simply feel the need to express something. I deeply care about every piece I make, but I rarely concern myself with how others perceive it. My focus is whether the work satisfies me. For me, art is a personal and selfish

practice—but not in a negative sense. I am an individual who knows what I like, and my art reflects that.

To me, art feels as natural as a conversation. If I'm speaking with someone I don't connect with, the dialogue is brief. But when I encounter a person or a piece of art that inspires me, sparks thought, or evokes love, I can engage with it for hours. This comparison shapes how I view art: some things I resonate with, and others I don't understand or care for.

I often grapple with the purpose of my artmaking. This struggle likely stems from living in a society where everything is expected to have a motive or serve a function. Mark Fisher articulates this tension in *Capitalist Realism Is There No Alternative?*:

The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all previous history: one effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or *Das Kapital*, a monetary value. (2012, p. 4)

This system erases the personal, cultural, or intrinsic meaning an object might hold, reducing its worth to mere monetary value. For me, this highlights a conflict in art: within this 'system of equivalence,' my work is stripped of any value beyond its potential as a commodity. This realization raises a question for me as an artist: if my creations serve no material purpose in our capitalist framework, where do they stand?

Despite this, creating gives me immense joy. It's a personal, vital act for me, even if it doesn't neatly fit into the economic or utilitarian demands of our time. As an artist, I must find balance within this complex reality.

This takes me onto my first body of work with the title "*THE LAND IS HOLDING YOU*". This series of images were made with a medium format camera and came from a series of meditations in and with the land where I spent most of my time in the Gower A.O.N.B. This land was my church and place of inspiration. I spent as much time as I could on it. I would devote hours on end in the sea surfing, I was often alone, admiring the cliffs, hills, water, trees, sun, rain, light, and shadows that surrounded me. Sometimes, while in these environments I would contemplate the world around me. I often had no idea of what was around me and I was fully immersed in the landscape to the extent I would forget where I was or what I was doing. Furthermore, I would spend hours on end walking along the coastal path and on the land that is connected to the water. I would again absorb all the elements that surrounded me. Sometimes I would think, sometimes I would not. What came from these long meditations is a series of sixty such photos. Each photo was a slow process and would take minutes to frame. The photos reflected my subconscious mind internalizing the world surrounding me. Like my contemplations in the land, sometimes I would be fully present in the image I was making and sometimes my mind would be empty, giving space to my subconscious mind to make the images. I can't differentiate between the two.

The theories and philosophies that influenced me then were those of Suprematism. This quote from *The Non-Objective World* by Kazemir Malevich would go

on to guide the making of this whole body of work and reframe how I understood art at the time:

Artists of the third category, on the other hand, who are not endowed with the capacity to create original or composite works, are forced to content themselves with copying nature "as it is". The works of such artists are always comprehensible to the public (the majority of people) because they present nothing new, whereas the works of the creative artist contain new solutions to the eternal conflict between the subject and the object and bear little or no resemblance to accustomed reality.(1915, p. 34)

I read this quote before I made the body of work *THE LAND IS HOLDING YOU*. This excerpt led me to question my whole art practice. It made me feel like I had been driving in the wrong direction on a motorway. It caused a large shift in my thinking as well as practice and allowed me to begin making new types of work. Similarly, in the photographs for his project, I focused more on creating something new rather than attempting to mimic nature exactly as I saw it through my camera lens.

Part two

This is part two of my exploration into why I make art. In this section, I will be focusing on the theories and practices of Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky's revolutionary ideas about art's spiritual purpose offer a counterpoint to the commodification of art in the neoliberal capitalist world where most contemporary art currently exists. His theories, as articulated in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1912)*, emphasize art's

potential to awaken deep emotional and spiritual responses in both the creator and the viewer. This section will aim to compare Kandinsky's ideals to my practice and explore the trends of contemporary art while also providing a framework for understanding why art continues to hold profound personal and cultural significance despite societal pressures.

Kandinsky's approach to art resonates with the notion of creating for the sake of inner necessity. He believed that art could transcend its material form to become a living, spiritual force. This concept mirrors my own experience of making art as an essential, almost involuntary act. Kandinsky writes in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

In an obscure and puzzling way, the artist develops a work of art. As it gains a life of its own, it becomes an entity, an independent spiritual life (...) It lives, has power, and actively forms the above-mentioned spiritual atmosphere. From an innermost point of view, the question finally should be answered as to whether creation is strong or weak. If too weak in its form, it is impotent to cause any kind of spiritual vibration. (1912, p.91).

This description captures the transformative process of creation that I feel in my practice while making. The idea that a piece of art can carry its own life and impact aligns with the way I perceive my work, it feels alive, like a reflection of my internal world. Furthermore, Kandinsky's belief in the power of art to generate "spiritual vibrations" (1912, p.91). Validates the personal and emotional satisfaction I derive from making art, even when its broader purpose feels lost today.

Kandinsky advocated abstraction as the ideal vessel for expressing universal truths and inner emotions. He argued that abstract forms, unbound by representation, allow art to transcend the physical and mental space. He described two modes of creation in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

Two basic types of creation can be distinguished: one, initiated by the conscious mind, serves practical life, so-called, and deals with concrete visual phenomena; the other, stemming from the subconscious or superconscious mind, stands apart from all "practical utility" and treats abstract visual phenomena. (1912, p. 11)

This idea resonates with how my subconscious mind influences my work. In an equivalent way to meditative practice while creating *THE LAND IS HOLDING YOU* Kandinsky's abstraction relies on intuition and emotional depth rather than a direct imitation of reality. His assertion that abstract art can open a path to spiritual understanding validates the abstract, subconscious nature of my photographic process, where thought and intuition often merge.

Kandinsky believed that color was central to art's spiritual dimension, functioning as a bridge between visible phenomena and inner emotions. Henri Matisse (1869–1954) had these same beliefs and expanded on *Kandinsky's* ideas. Matisse wrote in his essay *Notes of a Painter* (1908):

In studying the paintings of artists whose knowledge of colors depends upon instinct and feeling, and on a constant analogy with their sensations, one could define certain laws of color and so broaden the limits of color theory as it is now defined. (1908, p. 4).

The way I understand what Matisse is writing here is that he thinks there should be no laws of applied colour in painting and the so-called “knowledge” of color theory should be forgotten. Furthermore, what I understand he is saying is that color and structure should all depend on the instinct, feeling, and sensation of the artist.

For Kandinsky, the merging of religion and art was a profound experience. The feeling of walking through brightly colored Russian Orthodox churches inspired his understanding of art's spiritual potential. He saw these sacred spaces as places where color and emotion merged to induce transcendence, something he sought to replicate through his paintings. Similarly, I have felt moments of transcendence in the landscapes of the Gower A.O.N.B., while these landscapes may not be what is considered your typical church, to me these places are sacred places. Where the interplay of light, shadow, and natural forms creates a transcendent experience. While my work then used black and white photographic tones rather than vibrant paint, I aimed to capture the same sense of immersion that Kandinsky and Matisse described, where the external and internal worlds converge.

In contrast to Kandinsky's spiritual aspirations, the contemporary art world is often dominated by materialism and commodification. Donald Kuspit in his 2003 speech

titled *Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art* critiques this shift, stating: 'Materialism has completely swept the field. People think of art in completely materialistic terms—what does it cost, what is it going to bring on the market... the real galleries are the auction houses'. This critique mirrors my frustrations with the current capitalist art system, where the value of art is reduced to its monetary worth. Kandinsky's practice, which seeks to awaken profound spiritual and emotional responses, offers an antidote to this materialist perspective. His art resists commodification by emphasizing the intangible, immeasurable aspects of human experience, an approach I aspire to reflect in my work.

Comparing Kandinsky's ideals to the practices of artists like Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons highlights the divergence between spiritual and materialistic approaches to art. Where Kandinsky sought to evoke the sublime and the spiritual, Warhol and Koons often embraced irony and consumer culture, reflecting the neoliberal capitalist world. Kuspit continues to critique this in his speech *Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art*, stating: 'Irony has become the ruling desideratum of contemporary art... redeeming its materialism'. This irony is smart but sacrifices the emotional and spiritual depth that Kandinsky advocated for. Kandinsky's art, like the works of spiritual provocateurs Mark Rothko (1903-1970) and Barnett Newman (1905-1970), stands as a reminder of art's potential to transcend the physical and touch the soul. Their improvisations create a sense of immeasurability, akin to the awe-inspiring spaces of churches and sacred landscapes, offering a counterpoint to the commodification of modern art which we are constantly consumed by in our culture.

Kandinsky's belief in the transformative power of art resonates deeply with my journey as an artist. His emphasis on abstraction, emotional depth, and the spiritual significance of colour validates my intuitive, meditative approach to creating art. His defiance of materialism and determinism inspires me to continue pursuing authenticity and inner meaning in my work, even within the constraints of a capitalist society.

Kandinsky's art challenges us to look beyond the commodification of creativity and rediscover its capacity to evoke profound spiritual experiences. In this way, his work serves as both a guide and a sanctuary, reminding us that art's true value lies not in its market price but in its ability to awaken the soul and connect us to something greater than ourselves.

Part three

This concluding section explores the work of Ed Moses, a celebrated abstract painter whose experimental approach offers a compelling lens through which to consider the value of art created outside the gallery and market system. Moses exemplifies the ethos of 'outsider art' or 'amateur art' — a kind of creation that resists commodification and seeks meaning beyond monetary or institutional validation. By analyzing Moses' philosophies and practices, I aim to further distinguish the personal and spiritual fulfillment found in artmaking from the constraints of contemporary commercial art.

Ed Moses' practice was deeply rooted in experimentation and process rather than outcome. He rejected traditional expectations of art as a fixed, finished product and

instead embraced the unpredictable and ephemeral qualities of creation. In an interview, Moses stated that 'the process is the product' (*Ed Moses- The Explorer, 2020*)

Emphasizing that the act of creating itself holds intrinsic value, independent of the work's reception or marketability. This perspective resonates with my approach to artmaking, where the act of creation often feels more vital than the finished piece. Like Moses, the true purpose of art lies in the experience of making it, in the intangible moments of discovery, self-expression, and emotional release.

Outsider art and amateur art, like much of Moses' work, exist outside of the gallery system and resist integration into the capitalist framework. These forms of art prioritize authenticity over professionalism and self-expression over market appeal. Moses himself embodied this ethos even while operating within the art world. His works often defied categorization, and his refusal to be pinned down to a specific style or movement mirrored the ethos of those who create for personal or spiritual reasons, rather than for recognition or profit. Reflecting this philosophy, Moses stated in an interview:

I don't want to be an artist. Everybody is an artist now. It is a meaningless term. My m.o. is explorer. I like to reject the idea of being creative or expressive and replace that with the idea of being inventive and discovering. I'm against interpretation. I'm for just experiencing the thing instead of projecting our baggage, which we can't help because we always do. (*Ed Moses-The Explorer, 2020*)

This perspective reinforces his commitment to art as a process of exploration and discovery, free from the constraints of traditional artistic labels or market-driven expectations.

This philosophy of making contrasts sharply with the commodification of contemporary commercial art. Artists such as Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, while undeniably influential, often exemplify the neoliberal capitalist art world that reduces art to a product designed for consumption. This approach risks stripping art of its deeper meanings, reducing it to a status symbol or an investment vehicle, and prioritizing monetary value over emotional or spiritual resonance.

In contrast, 'outsider art' offers a form of resistance to this commodification. Consider the works of amateur artists, who produce art purely for their satisfaction or to connect with their communities. These creators often operate outside the gallery system, free from the pressures of marketability or institutional validation. Their art, like Moses' process-driven works, becomes an act of defiance against the materialism of contemporary culture. By existing outside of traditional hierarchies, outsider art preserves a sense of authenticity and immediacy that is often lost in commercialized spaces.

Donald Kuspit, in his critique of contemporary art, observes that materialism has overtaken the field entirely:

People think of art in completely materialistic terms, what does it cost, what is it going to bring on the market, and the joke is that the real galleries are the auction houses. So searching for the inner life of a work of art or expecting any art to

have spiritual significance is like searching for the proverbial rare needle in a haystack. There is usually no concealed, to think of Kandinsky's idea, a spiritual point in most contemporary art, nothing unexpected that would sting the spectator's spirit into self-awareness. To put this another way, there is little that is sublime—which was an idea that Kandinsky also used—about contemporary materialistic art, that is, little that would awaken the capacity for experiencing the spiritual. (*Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art*, 2003).

'Outsider art,' 'amateur art,' and the works of artists like Ed Moses stand as a counterpoint to this trend. They serve as a reminder that art does not need to conform to market-driven expectations or practical purposes to be meaningful. Instead, its value lies in its ability to foster connection—to our inner selves, to the world around us, and to one another.

Moses' belief in the importance of experimentation also resonates with the ethos of 'outsider art.' He often worked in ways that prioritized intuition and play over technical mastery or adherence to trends. His works, characterized by their bold gestural marks and layered abstractions, evoke a sense of immediacy and raw emotion. In this way, Moses challenges the polished, overproduced aesthetics that dominate the commercial art world, favoring instead an unfiltered connection to the artist's hand and mind. Moses' philosophy and the concept of 'outsider art' highlight the essential truth that art is not merely a product to be bought and sold. It is a deeply personal and human act of creation, one that transcends its material form and exists as an expression of the artist's inner life. This perspective challenges the dominance of commercial art and reclaims

art's potential to inspire, transform, and connect. By embracing the spirit of 'outsider art', 'amateur art,' and the philosophies of artists like Ed Moses, we can resist the commodification of creativity and rediscover the joy of making art for its own sake. In doing so, we affirm that the true value of art lies not in its price tag but in its ability to express what cannot be spoken, to connect us to the world around us, and to reflect the complexity of human experience.

Conclusion

In a world increasingly driven by commodification, where everything is valued in monetary terms, art risks losing its deeper significance. Yet, artists like Kandinsky and Moses offer a path forward. They challenge us to resist the pressures of market-driven art and instead embrace creativity as an act of discovery, connection, and spiritual fulfillment.

For me, the answer to why I make art lies in this resistance. Creating art allows me to find meaning and joy in a commodified world. It enables me to explore my inner world, connect with my environment, and transcend the limitations of contemporary capitalist culture. Ultimately, the value of art is not in its price tag but in its power to inspire, transform, and awaken something profound within us.

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