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**Book Review. *Artists Remake the World, a Contemporary Art Manifesto* – Vid Simoniti, New Haven and London, Yale Press University, 2023**

Faced with numerous political challenges of capitalist democracies, such as climate change and global inequality, the contribution of art may seem negligible. However, over time, artists have increasingly incorporated social and political themes into their works. This prompts a crucial question: what meaningful contribution can contemporary art offer to politics? Vid Simoniti, in his book *Artists Remake the World: A Contemporary Art Manifesto*, sets out to answer this question. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines different philosophical and art-historical traditions, the author explores the relevance of contemporary visual art in modern democratic-capitalist societies. His intention is to demonstrate how artistic experience possesses a unique potential to emancipate audiences from conventional patterns of thought, prompting them to conceive possibilities beyond the political *status quo*.

The volume is structured into seven chapters, each of which is introduced and enriched by a series of examples from works of art created over the last two decades. Among the many artists carefully discussed by Simoniti are Ai Weiwei, Wangechi Mutu, Olafur Eliasson and Naomi Rincón Gallardo. By positioning itself as a manifesto, Simoniti's work aims not only to describe but also defend the presented artworks, elevating them to models for the evolution of art and its political engagement. This programmatic aspect sets it apart from a conventional book, signaling a commitment to shaping the discourse and direction of contemporary art.

The first chapter outlines the origins of political engagement in contemporary art. Simoniti traces this engagement back to the 1960s, a period that witnessed the emergence of the *avant-garde* and the simultaneous abandonment of traditional media in visual arts. According to the author, the flexibility gained through this abandonment is the distinctive feature of contemporary art exhibited in museums and galleries, determining its political potential. Building upon this premise, the subsequent three chapters explore various forms of political expression in which contemporary artists actively participate.

The first form of political art presented by the author is *evidence-based art*. In this genre, artists employ a new form of realism to contribute to public debates

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by using their works to portray injustices or direct the public's attention to neglected aspects of society. A notable example highlighted by the author is the installation *77sqm\_9:26min* (2017) by the British collective Forensic Architecture. This work features a reconstruction of a crime scene, contributing to the debate about the role of police in a racially motivated murder case.

The second form of political art explained in the book is *socially engaged art*. This type of art goes beyond discourse and directly involves the audience in concrete actions that can have an immediate impact on people's lives. Prominent examples of this engaged art are Tania Bruguera's *Arte Útil*, wherein the artist strives to improve people's lives, and *Artivism*, a practice where artists actively participate in existing movements.

The third political form of art discussed in the book is 'Worldmaking'. Instead of offering a direct commentary on a political situation or advocating for a specific cause, artists participating in Worldmaking aim to provide alternatives to the world as it is given to us. Among the examples provided by Simoniti, Naomi Rincón Gallardo's work is particularly interesting; through imaginative performances such as *The Formaldehyde Trip* (2017), the artist seeks to re-organize public perceptions of issues such as social justice, making queer and indigenous lives more central and valued.

The author contends that the most effective manifestation of political art occurs in this more experimental and daring form. While evidence-based art and socially engaged art run the risk of assimilating entirely into practices like investigative journalism or activism, this more experimental form of political making appears to be the most promising in preserving artistic specificity.

Throughout the book, Simoniti expresses skepticism about the arts' tendency to assimilate with other forms of thought and action. Aligned with thinkers such as Adrian Piper, Claire Bishop, and Jacques Rancière, Simoniti advances the thesis that a work's political potential is maximized when art retains its distinctive, namely aesthetic, character. By the term 'aesthetic', Simoniti refers to the ability of artworks to generate reflective, non-ordinary experiences through which art reorganizes our perception without imposing conclusions. This inconclusiveness serves to prevent the oversimplification inherent in polarization, a demand often placed by politics. Instead, it allows individuals to reflect on issues with which they may not feel directly involved or in agreement.

Simoniti's manifesto finds practical application in the chapters dedicated to the pressing issues of the Internet age and climate change. Here, the power of art to critically address crucial issues such as global warming and the impact of the Internet on democracy becomes evident. Art, functioning as an experimental terrain, encourages us to reconsider our surroundings. An illustrative example is David Hockney's work, *Peter Getting Out of Nick's Pool* (1966), contributing to a world where homosexual desire takes center stage, challenging prevailing social norms, and fueling the civil rights debate. Similarly, environmental art can reshape our perception of the existing economic system, offering glimpses of possibilities to reconsider our consumption habits.

In the concluding chapter, Simoniti summarizes the addressed issues and clarifies his own philosophical theory. In this section, the author engages with the theories of Adorno and Rancière, sharing with them the idea that art should opt for its own autonomy, but he does not echo their pessimism. Through his engagement with Piper's philosophy, Simoniti articulates the notion that contemporary art, in its most successful form, serves as an experimental branch of politics capable of addressing problems and confronting hard truths that traditional politics may not yet be equipped to discuss.

Although Simoniti's book makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the essence of contemporary political art, it must be recognized that contemporary experimental art often faces two obstacles: the elitism of exhibition spaces, such as biennials and galleries, and the complexity of the works, which undermines their comprehensibility. I believe it is essential to address these challenges in order to actualize the political contribution that Simoniti's Manifesto recognizes in contemporary art. By embracing the strategies outlined in the Manifesto, which encourages a balance between experimentation and comprehension, those working in the arts can strive to overcome the accessibility limits of contemporary art. In doing so, contemporary art could authentically play a significant role in democratic capitalist societies.