



ANOTHER
ART
HISTORY

THE LOCAL REFUSAL MANIFESTO

DENYS TREMBLAY

**“We are all the centre of the periphery of
someone or something... If the former fixes us in
a position, the latter catapults us along
a trajectory.”**

ANOTHER ART HISTORY

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DENYS
TREMBLAY



Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, Édouard Manet, 1863
Considered as the first modern painting, it breaks with academic art without renouncing its lineage within the history of art.

ART: YES OR NO

It was once believed that for art to be, three things, or conditions, were needed: **an artwork, an artist, and an audience**. Evidently, having the support of a prince was an advantage, but the latter absolutely had to choose an artist for the quality of his work. The work of innovators was exclusively to question the academic criteria¹ of quality to replace them with other, modern ones, which had until then been refuted.

IT IS ACADEMIC ART OR IT IS NOT.
IT IS MODERN ART OR IT IS NOT.
(It is two-dimensional art: yes or no.)

WORK
ARTIST
PUBLIC



L'âge d'or (1863) by William Bouguereau illustrates the academic criteria of the “pompiers” who were eclipsed by the moderns.



Fountain, Marcel Duchamp, 1917

Considered to be the most influential model of 20th century modernism, *Fountain* can be regarded as the fundamental archetype of contemporary art.

ART: YES, NO OR MAYBE

Marcel Duchamp, with his **readymade** movement, added a **fourth condition** to art: an **artistic context** (institutional) which accepts the object as art and makes it visible as such, thus making it publically legitimate. Evidently, being supported by a rich collector is nice, but the latter must absolutely choose an artist who is admitted or admissible to the existing artistic network. Henceforth everything, including a trifle, can be art if an artistic context makes it visible and legitimate as art. By extension, anything can be art but everything is not art. The work of innovators was to question one or another of those four conditions, to push to the extreme this conceptual extension of art.

IS IT ART? ²

Or rather, IS THIS POSITIONED AS ART?

WITHIN THE NETWORK OF ART?

IS IT CONTEMPORARY OR CURRENT ART?

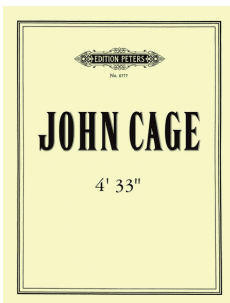
(It is three-dimensional art: yes, no, or maybe.)

WORK

ARTIST

PUBLIC

+ ART SYSTEM



The famous silence of 4'35" (1952) by the composer John Cage decentres a concert listening experience by turning attention to ambient noises.



The Diplomatic Reallymade, Denys Tremblay, 1987
This real doctoral diploma provides a social reality for the imaginary constitution of *The Notorious Nobody*, which in return was to provide an artistic reality for the report that Tremblay presented to the Commission on the future of Québec in 1995.

ART: YES, NO, MAYBE OR PROGRESSIVELY

With Denys Tremblay and his “**reallymade**” concept, a **fifth condition** is added. It is no longer a museum, an art gallery or a cultural institution, but a **civil authority** which interprets, legitimizes, and brings into existence the artistic act as a tangible event within the full context of a social reality. Art, in this context, by a process of virtual transformation of reality, acquires the status of reality within the context of social life. The work of innovators will henceforth be to attempt this type of hybrid transformation between reality and art through a new ethics that can transform reality and art simultaneously.³

IT IS REAL AND ARTISTIC ART
THAT “AUGMENTS” INTO
SIMULTANEOUS MOVEMENT.

(It is four-dimensional art: yes, no, maybe or progressively.)

WORK
ARTIST
PUBLIC
ART SYSTEM
+ SOCIAL SYSTEM



In 1985 the Christos wrapped the historical *Pont neuf* thanks to an ongoing and exemplary ten-year transaction with the Parisian administration and collectors who self-financed this ephemeral and expensive operation.



The artwork-thesis was selected for the 2007 exhibition: *A History of Fine Art Bookbinding in Quebec*, Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec.

A FOUNDING DIPLOMATIC “REALLYMADE”

The most emblematic of the “reallymades” is certainly his own doctoral thesis on environmental sculpture, which was presented in the shape of a volumetric unit in three peripheral dimensions. The author thus used his doctoral defense to experiment the conditions of all “reallymades” that he had discovered and analyzed in his work on Smithson’s *land art*, the *Christos’ wrappings* and the *real context actions of The Notorious Nobody*. The members of the jury (Frank Popper, Daniel Charles and Gilbert Lascault) observed that this doctoral research revealed the Height of the ambitions and the Broadness of the viewpoints and the Depth of the ideas regarding the *volumetric unit of the peripheral Unpower*.

These three peripheral excellence standards were measured in perplexing units called “spiritual centimasters”, or in centimetres of body height of the spiritual master, his alter ego *The Notorious Nobody* himself. Approved by the three illustrious specialists on October 22, 1987, his artwork-thesis increasingly took on the appearance of a response to Marcel Duchamp’s readymade *Fountain*.

If *Fountain* announced the art of ideas, characteristic of contemporary art, the *Thesis-work* literally measured the risk of testing them in society, a particularity of peripheral art. We are simultaneously faced with a written volume that must be approved, a sculptural volume that totally involves the institutional environment and a volumetric standard measure of any artistic or academic unpower.

HEIGHT OF AMBITIONS

17,51 spiritual centimasters

BROADNESS OF VIEWPOINTS

13,61 spiritual centimasters

DEPTH OF IDEAS

4,62 spiritual centimasters



The Notorious Nobody wearing the Coat of the Great Protocol
The Notorious Nobody wearing the coat of the small protocol (next page)

THE NOTORIOUS NOBODY... A PERIPHERAL “REALLYMADE” OF 14 YEARS

From 1983 to 1997, He created a “seemingly imaginary” character, or “more real than real”, known by the name of *The Notorious Nobody*, who spent 14 consecutive years making “sub-official” trips governed by a singularly offbeat peripheral protocol, at once fusion and inversion of official and diplomatic protocols. By inverting the usual poles of illustriousness, his to-say-the-least astonishing actions were initiated at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and ended up at the peripheral Municipal Realm of L’Anse-Saint-Jean.

These unorthodox visits served to inhumate Her Majesty the History of Metropolitan Art in Paris, save the Arthur-Villeneuve Artwork-Home in Chicoutimi, develop the first cultural incubator project in Canada, the P.O.R.T. project (first international conference of art management, HEC Montreal Business School and University of Waterloo, August 1991), and brought the very first “reallymades” to life. *The Notorious Nobody* went on to promote the monarchic system as a means to achieve Quebec Sovereignty, doing so in front of 1995 Government Commission on the Future of Quebec.

All these back-and-forth movements between the character of *The Notorious Nobody* and its author made it possible to carry out the artistic ideal locally and to idealize the social reality of the moment.



Rescue and integration
at the Pulperie



The film *Coup d'état d'esprit périphérique*, 14 avril 1983 was acquired by the Centre Pompidou in 2017, which has been interested in peripheral since the 1989 *Magiciens de la terre* exhibition.

THE BURIAL OF S M THE METROPOLITAN HISTORY OF ART... A FINAL “REALLYMADE”

Through this action carried out in Paris, at the prestigious Centre Pompidou, one of the largest contemporary art museums in the world, the periphery finally occupies the centre: it symbolically liberates itself from all the metropolises that history had imposed on it: Chicoutimi, Montreal, Paris, London, New York... This base manifestation awards an advanced degree that recognizes the manifestation as a work of art. It is this very decentering that is institutionalized.

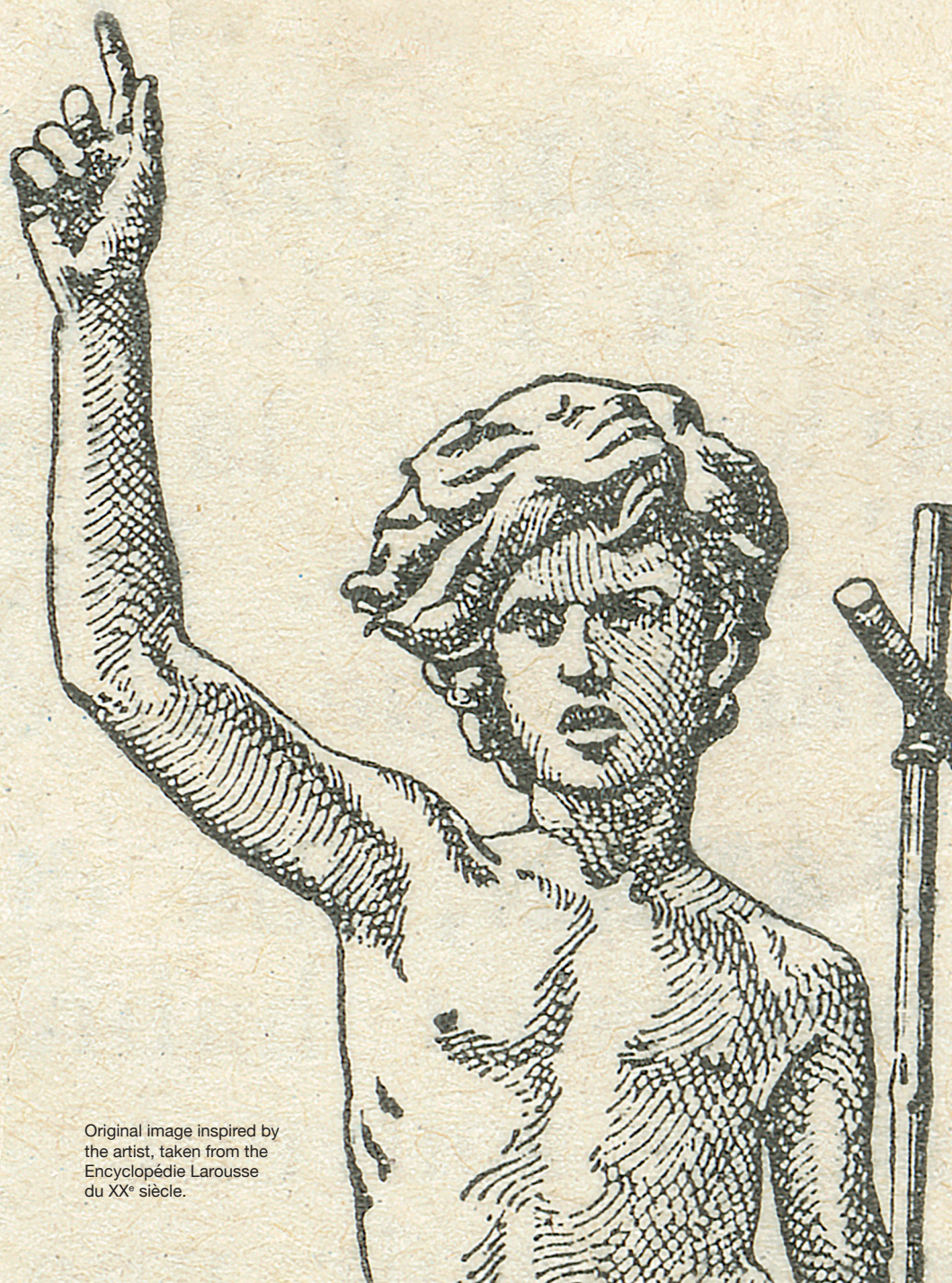
Denys Tremblay produces an unexpected turn which, in his words, becomes a “coup d'état of the mind” the mind that is local and free-thinking. He inaugurates a peripheral history where everyone can finally see themselves recognized symbolically and in the warmest of ironies.



Bernard Carez, Hervé Fischer, *The Notorious* Nobody and Pierre Restany



The Unacceptables,
Galerie Diagonale

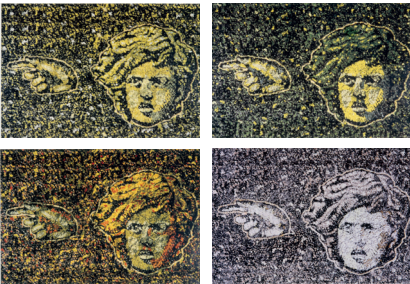


Original image inspired by
the artist, taken from the
Encyclopédie Larousse
du XX^e siècle.

THE PROJECT SAINT-JEAN-DU-MILLÉNAIRE... THE UNFINISHED “REALLYMADE”

As a parallel to the “fusional,” inverted adventure of *The Notorious Nobody*, in 1992, the artist conceptualized a gigantic plant fresco project to revitalize the bucolic Saguenay village of L’Anse-Saint-Jean. The *Saint-Jean-du-Millénaire* project depicted the face of St. John the Baptist and his hand, pointing towards the next millennium. Recall that St. John the Baptist is the patron saint of the Quebecois, peripheral citizens par excellence. Let us also note that the precursor saint is the peripheral alter ego of the man-God at the centre of Western civilization.

The grandiose project required over one square kilometre of selected plants and tree cuttings, the different species creating the shadows and lights of an immense photosensitive tableau of changing colours, from season to season. This is the passage from the photographic era to the “phytographic” era. For the author, the environmental project is a post-capitalist response to the modernist project, non-realized but no less emblematic, of the *Monument to the Third Internationale* by the sculptor Tatline.⁷



Saint Jean-Baptiste
d'après Paul Dubois





JANUARY 21, 1793

In Paris, king Louis 16th is decapitated and the thousand-year-old French monarchy comes to an end.

JANUARY 21, 1793

In Quebec, Parliament decides to take its minutes in both languages and refuses to prioritize English in its legislation.

JANUARY 21, 1823

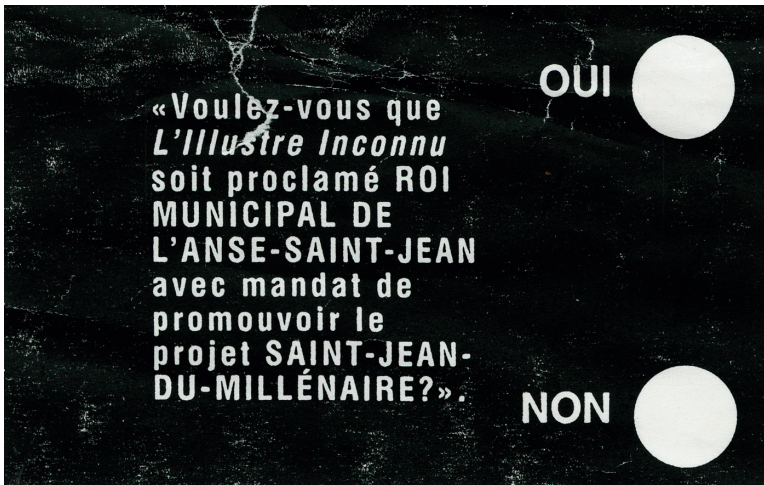
The Parliament's resolutions recommend that the 1791 constitution be upheld and denounces the union project.

JANUARY 21, 1948

Adoption, by way of an order in council, of the French royalist fleur-de-lis design for the province's flag.

JANUARY 21, 1997

Exactly six months after the flood of the 21st of July, 1996 and the 1st referendum for the instauration of a municipal monarchy in the Americas.



The referendum ballot

THE REFERENDARY “REALLYMADE”

The results of the entirely legal referendum were known on **January 21, 1997** to acclaim the transmutation of *The Notorious Nobody* into Denys I of L’Anse. The village priest joined the municipal council and courageously accepted the principle of holding the coronation in the parish church. To everyone’s surprise, L’Anse-Saint-Jean residents voted 73.9% in favour of creating the first municipal monarchy in the Americas, and likely in the world.

“*The Notorious Nobody* is dead! Long live Denys I of L’Anse!” acclaimed the “kingsurgent” citizens. The news circled the globe. Imagine the impossible, that a character like Tintin could be combined with his creator, Hergé, to create a very real hybrid named, let’s say Hertin Tingé... Would our destinies from then on be integrated into the 3D movies of our own lives?

This veritable referendum transmutation allowed *The Notorious Nobody* to come out of the artistic mirror and to royally enter the very real world with its unpredictable developments. Art is no longer a finality but a process, a continuous and exemplary negotiation with life.

Debate on languages: Legislative assembly Lower of Canada session, January 21, 1793, Charles Huot (1913). Is the emblematic synchronism of the two January 21 of the same year too obvious to be seen at the Quebec National Assembly?





The coronation of June 24, 1997 by the parish priest Raymond Larouche

THE CORONATION OF THE KING, AN EXPONENTIAL “REALLYMADE”

The magisterial coronation of the king, on June 24, 1997, is the definite and concrete fusion of art and reality, as desired by artists since futurist times, but never actually achieved before. This majestic and exceptional “reallymade” was the final step in the passage from the imaginary of the arts to the reality of the existential reverse angle. A kingdom of democratic decision-making, the institutions of the referendum and the monarchy combine to open the first chapter in the quiet “royalvolution”. The author considers this project as a “N’étant reçu...” thus extending Marcel Duchamp’s closing work “Étant donnés...”

While Duchamp’s last work obliges the viewer to engage in an imaginative voyeurism, the crowning instead proposes a decisive imaginative participation in a work of art and of life. The ultimate door of the imagination’s entrapment in the work just opened...



Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*, revealed in 1969

THE CROWN OF L'ANSE-SAINT-JEAN
THE GREAT CHAIN OF THE ORDER OF COMPANIONS
OF THE MILLENNIUM
THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE
THE HAND IN THE SKY
THE PEACE SWORD
THE REFERENDUM RING
THE GREAT PROTOCOL ROBE



REAL SOVEREIGNTY THROUGH PERIPHERAL ART

Denys Premier applies himself to enthroning his non-hereditary monarchy and managing his kingdom with modest daring. The first goal is to create the fresco that will make the village renowned around the world. In three years, the “augmented reality” of the new Realm of L’Anse-Saint-Jean adopted a royal flag, a national anthem, commercial currency that is legal tender, created a Royal Museum that is an instant hit with tourists, lend its name to a beer, *The Royale de L’Anse*, which increases the local brewery’s sales, tourism initiatives and media attention. The Quebec Toponymy Commission agrees to do the necessary research and make official the names of the 33 territories that will now divide the Kingdom as duchies, counties and baronies. These titles of a new aristocracy of the heart will contribute to financing the fresco of *Saint-Jean-du-Millénaire*. The seven L’Anse-Saint-Jean crown jewels were even financed by the Canada Council for the Arts. Plans are being drawn up for the royal chateau and the King has created the order of the Companions of the Millennium. He is invited everywhere. Finally, imagination is in power. But for how long?

The website roidelanse.qc.ca was conserved as a form of cyber-heritage of the art of today. It gives a detailed account of a sovereignty that is asserted and fully shared.



A photograph by Bálint Pörnczki taken from Instagram, the Figurak project

TWO CRIMES OF LESE-MAJESTY

The King of L'Anse has become a public figure who has committed two crimes of lese-majesty, the first toward Her Majesty the Art, which should always remain enclosed in the imagination, and the second against Her Majesty the Real, which should always impose itself without imagination.

For the author Hervé Fischer, who dedicated a richly illustrated book to him (*Un roi américain*, éditions VLB, 2009), Denys Tremblay became one of the first thinkers of peripheralism when he proposed an astonishing example of extreme art. He places the wholly committed artist-philosopher on an equal footing with Marcel Duchamp, but with a diametrically opposed vision. For Fischer, “Denys I undeniably created his imaginary Quebec, which will be recorded in real history”.

The author **Jean-Pierre Vidal** believes that he more or less embodied every interrogation and interrogated every practice of his time, and ended up rewriting most so-called postmodern obsessions (everyday life, banality, kitschism, ephemeralism, interventionism, interactivism, etc.) in a work that remains, on the contrary, fundamentally modern. For Vidal, he “took a step beyond” in at least four capital discourses on the way we think art in our times:

Duchamp, his readymades and liquidation/celebration of art;
Baudrillard and his reflections on consumerist society, simulacra and the end of sociality;
Debord and his criticism of the “society of the spectacle”; and,
Debray and the death of the image in the age of apocalyptic proliferation of images.

The cycle of art and its future¹²

The submission to the criteria of one-track thinking **(academism)** degenerates into **institutional despotism**. This leads to the overthrow of academism through an alliance between artists and experts that establishes **modernity**, which itself degenerates into a **commercial and metropolitan oligarchy**, resulting in the disillusion among artists, who reveal the abuses and establish a **decentering of recognition**. This latter aspect degenerates into an **excessive populism** when the majority imposes artistic superficiality, leading to the use of a **new peripheral and structured vision of art** that establishes a new unifying cycle.

The practice of the “reallymade” is but a way to bypass the internationalist motivations, the mercantile logic, the metropolitan history and the self-sufficient pertinence of today’s art. Art must henceforth enter a negotiation with immediate life about a shared and operational sovereignty of meaning that is gained with modern art.

The “reallymade” is an *after the fact* of the computer and its capacity to program reality just as readymade was an after the fact of photography and its capacity to represent it.

TODAY,

**MUST WE BE
TWO-DIMENSIONAL
REVOLUTIONARIES,**

**THREE-DIMENSIONAL
“DEVOLUTIONARIES”**

**OR FOUR-DIMENSIONAL
“KINGSURGENTS”?**

**MUST OUR ART BE
“NOUVEAU,” DIFFERENT OR
RECIPROCAL?**

**TEAR ART TO TEARS!
ARTISTS!
TEAR IT TO TEARS,
AGAIN AND AGAIN!**

NOTES

1

The criteria of academic art were gradually and massively imposed thanks to the games of the official institutions.

*Respect the **hierarchy of genres**:

- 1) **the grand genre**; paintings of religious, mythological or social history with a moral reach
- 2) **genre painting**; scenes of everyday life
- 3) **portraiture**
- 4) **minor genres**; landscape and still-life painting.

*Respect the hierarchy of sizes : large scale size for history paintings, small scale format for still-life painting, large scale format for important figures, smaller format for people of a lower rank

*Respect the hierarchy of know-how :

- 1) affirm the primacy of artistic drawing over natural colour :
- 2) broaden the study of the nude and anatomy; idealize rather than copy nature
- 3) favour studio painting over field painting
- 4) create “finished” works that must have a smooth finish and an invisible “touch”
- 5) draw inspiration from the ancients without copying them.

Too big a format for an everyday life scene, an inconceivable mix of genres, at once too close to landscape and too realistic, a portrait of ordinary people that is too imposing, an unusual nude without any idealism and, above all, a painting that only tells its own story without any moral aim... *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* has all it takes to tear down the conventions of dictatorial academism of its time. Modern art was henceforth to develop according to its own motivations, its own logic, its own history and pertinence. Art was hereafter to pursue the full sovereignty of meaning.

2

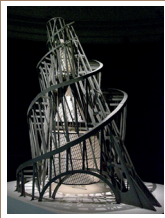
People who are nostalgic for modern art condemn this era of “anything goes” that has gradually and massively emerged in its turn since Duchamp’s *Fountain*. So-called contemporary art baffles many viewers who have drafted a long list of provocative works under the sole categories of the unusual or extreme. Specialists, who are just as doubtful, multiply semantic formulas in an attempt to categorize the impossible.

What remains certain is that contemporary art in all its diversity is no longer appreciated according to set down criteria but according to an immediate experience of the works, a minimal observation of the artists' approaches and a grasping of the meaning of each singular artistic undertaking. Hence the growing importance of an art system that shows, explains and distinguishes contemporary art practices.

Of course the art system shows, explains and distinguishes contemporary art practices, but it paradoxically recreates a new metropolitan hierarchy of decision making centres and display sites. Extensive visibility for so-called international art, reduced visibility of local and potentially universal art, extensive commercial value for delocalized creations, lesser value for the others that remain on the periphery. This new hierarchy of art experts is omnipresent thanks to the interplay of commercial institutions. The rich collector has unseated the prince, the commercial value of works has replaced their meaning, the oligarchy of specialists has taken the place of the viewer to "make" the work and raise its worth, museums have replaced churches to produce the iconic ideal. The importance of the work and artist is consequence of how metropolitan the experts who legitimate the work are.

7

Tatline's Monument to the Third International



- * Grand narrative
- * Verticality
- * Technical know-how from the industrial world
- * New
- * Motorized movements (1 year - 1 month - 1 day)
- * Indoor light – electricity
- * Imposed inner meaning – answer
- * Cut with the past
- * Turned towards the future

Moment from the Peripheral International by Tremblay



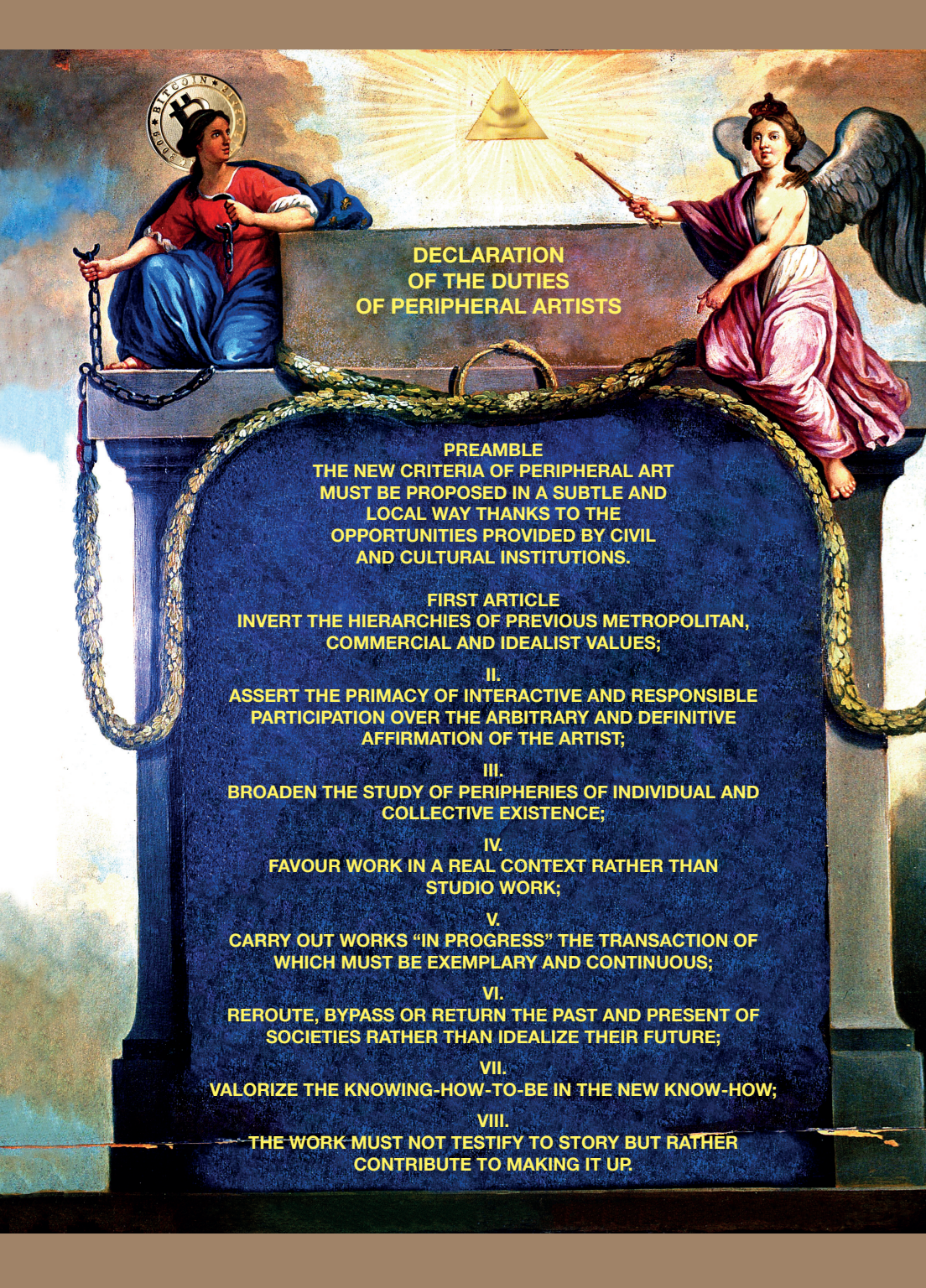
- * Nearby narratives
- * Horizontality
- * Artisanal know-how from the post-industrial world
- * Different
- * Natural movements (the 4 seasons of the year)
- * Outdoor light– natural
- * Proposed external meaning - question
- * Revisited past
- * Turned towards the present

Polybus, this Roman observer who inspired the American constitution, got it right when it came to the evolution of Roman institutions of his time. "According to his cyclical theory of the succession of political regimes, one-person government (monarchy) degenerates into despotism. This leads to the overthrow of the monarchy through an alliance between the people and the powerful who establish an aristocracy that in turn degenerates into an oligarchy and triggers the anger of the people, who punish the abuses and set up a democracy. This regime then degenerates into an *ochlocracy* when the majority has recourse to violence to impose its point of view, bringing about the call for a strong man who establishes a monarchy and a new cycle. According to him, the best regime is the one that combines the characteristics of the three main ones. For Polybus, Roman consuls have a monarchic type of power, the Senate an aristocratic one, and the people, for its part, has a power of the democratic type. (Wikipedia, Polybus). See the explanation of the famous *checks and balances* limiting the power of the US president, senate and house of representatives.

Let us now adapt Polybus' *anacyclosis* to the field of art.

In my view, the best art regime is one that combines and balances the characteristics of the three main cycles. Museum institutions have a royalist power pertaining to a **recognition** that must be enlightening and peripheral, art schools and universities have a **renaissance** aristocratic power that must be enlightening and non conformist to the market and the public, for its part, has a democratic power derived from a lucid **knowledge** of what is current at the periphery.





**DECLARATION
OF THE DUTIES
OF PERIPHERAL ARTISTS**

PREAMBLE

**THE NEW CRITERIA OF PERIPHERAL ART
MUST BE PROPOSED IN A SUBTLE AND
LOCAL WAY THANKS TO THE
OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY CIVIL
AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS.**

FIRST ARTICLE

**INVERT THE HIERARCHIES OF PREVIOUS METROPOLITAN,
COMMERCIAL AND IDEALIST VALUES;**

II.

**ASSERT THE PRIMACY OF INTERACTIVE AND RESPONSIBLE
PARTICIPATION OVER THE ARBITRARY AND DEFINITIVE
AFFIRMATION OF THE ARTIST;**

III.

**BROADEN THE STUDY OF PERIPHERIES OF INDIVIDUAL AND
COLLECTIVE EXISTENCE;**

IV.

**FAVOUR WORK IN A REAL CONTEXT RATHER THAN
STUDIO WORK;**

V.

**CARRY OUT WORKS "IN PROGRESS" THE TRANSACTION OF
WHICH MUST BE EXEMPLARY AND CONTINUOUS;**

VI.

**REROUTE, BYPASS OR RETURN THE PAST AND PRESENT OF
SOCIETIES RATHER THAN IDEALIZE THEIR FUTURE;**

VII.

VALORIZE THE KNOWING-HOW-TO-BE IN THE NEW KNOW-HOW;

VIII.

**THE WORK MUST NOT TESTIFY TO STORY BUT RATHER
CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING IT UP.**

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“From the *Périphérique*, know his stamp and his motto, I am regionalizing, feminizing, which says precious little and at length about his true intentions.”

Excerpt from the film *Coup d'état d'esprit périphérique*, 14 avril 1983, acquired by Centre Pompidou in 2017



UNE
AUTRE
HISTOIRE
DE
L'ART

UN MANIFESTE DU REFUS LOCAL

DENYS TREMBLAY