BAMIYAN BUDDHAS IN CONTEXT



– iconoclasm and closed minds

A thoughtful piece in the New York Times today by Roberta Smith Critic’s Notebook: Why Attack Art? Its Role Is to Be Helpful (Thanks to Tom Seligman for the link)

In 2001 an international outcry met the Taliban’s destruction of two colossal Buddhas at Bamian in Afghanistan. The Buddhas were nearly 1,500 years old, large and revered. Their cultural importance was beyond dispute, and to most people they were visibly about love, forgiveness and spirituality. The Taliban were increasingly viewed as villains intent upon wiping out all signs of the Buddhist faith and culture in their region. It was a no-brainer.

The outcry isn’t nearly as large when one person, acting alone and often on impulse, damages or destroys

a new artwork. But in many ways the violation is the same.

Last Thursday evening Franco de Benetetto, a 42-year-old Italian construction worker, more or less destroyed a temporary public sculpture by the internationally known artist Maurizio Cattelan. The work, unveiled at noon the day before, consisted of three life-size, lifelike sculptures of cherubic barefoot boys hanging by their necks from nooses on a branch of an oak tree in the venerable Piazza XXIV Maggio in Milan …

This vandalism echoed a case in Sweden early this year. While attending an opening at a museum in Stockholm in January, Zvi Mazel, Israel's ambassador to Sweden, damaged an artwork that he felt glorified Palestinian suicide bombers …

Some people are incensed when art appears to make an argument rather than stand in itself as an icon of beauty. But the key archaeological point, implied by the article, is that all artifacts are located within arguments, interests and statements.

They are places to entertain new thoughts and try out opposing viewpoints and to practice tolerance and flexibility. Real life needs all of these things as much as it ever has, if not more.





CNN [Link] Maurizio Cattelan [Link]

Chris (Witmore) made a comment very relevant to this issue the other day on collecting culture [Link]

Here we are straying into what is unique about the archaeological and why it can no longer be subsumed under either anthropology or history. The abililty to articulate connections and links through time irrespective of what came in between and to do so on a deeply intimate and material level brings us closer to Serres' chaotic notion of time. Traces of the past

still connect and have relevance, even though like god moderns some collectors choose to shut the past up behind the glass doors of the cabinet.

Artifacts (past and present, art or mundane, collected or discarded) engage us — another no brainer, I think, to echo the sentiment of the NYT on Bamiyan.