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Notes & Comments

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Art & ethics at Yale

On the Aliza Shvarts affair.

One of the chief lessons of contemporary “avant-garde” art, especially that which pullulates in an academic setting, is that the unutterably tedious can cohabit seamlessly with the repellent. That may seem counterintuitive. After all, wasn’t the main point of “transgressive” art to rescue us from banality, to lift us out of the tedious, taken-for-granted way of looking at things in which all of us philistine, middle-class bourgeois folks have been absorbed since childhood? That’s certainly a large part of the rhetoric. It is curious, though, how rarely that happens. Why?

Once upon a time “academic art” meant boring stuff that might be technically proficient but which lacked any spark of genuine feeling or vital contact with reality. Academic art was rote art, art that merely went through the motions. Its decorousness was not so much mannerly as a species of mannerism: something stale, d ...

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