

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR:
THE NEW YORK CENTER'S
LONG ISLAND PERIPHERY

A. Helen Harrison

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The tendency of the "center" to diminish and even dismiss the creative activity of the "periphery" is not limited to the conflict between dominant Eurocentric thinking and that of non-Western cultures. As a journalistic art critic covering the art museums and galleries of Long Island, a region immediately adjacent to New York City, I have observed the marginalization of art activity that takes place only a few miles from Times Square.

In my experience, the devaluation of art through the marginalization process involves its relegation to lightweight status, while the center assumes the role of heavyweight champion. My work has often evaluated the art produced and exhibited on Long Island by countering the preception of its marginality - by "centering" it, if you will.

In my role as director of the museum in the former home and studio of Jackson Pollock, I have become more deeply involved in investigating the paradoxes and contradictions of marginalization, since Pollock created his most significant works in an environment deliberately isolated from the geographical and intellectual center of the art world.

I want to address the question of geography's role in shaping attitudes toward artistic validity, and to discuss the phenomenon of parochialism at the perceived center. In brief, the issue is whether the marginalization of adjacent activity is merely a defensive strategy by which the center consolidates and protects its position, or whether it is true that art originating outside the center is inherently weaker.