

The function of art in the 21st Century:

An exercise in multiculturalism?

Society is an entity composed of fragments. Up to roughly the middle of the nineteenth century, Western society was still able to present itself as a closed unity. From that time onwards, art does not any longer confirm this model of the society as a closed unity.

Artworks stand as signs of the time – they mirror or reflect the time. So called “modern art” reflects society’s fragmentation by being fragmented itself. Artworks are to be viewed as broken mirrors of the (fragmented) society. This property of modern art has been articulated in contemporary art theories. We find this in the perspective of the triangle artist-artwork-spectator in all five major movements of philosophy of.

With reference to contemporary art and contemporary philosophy of art, one could consider the splintered mirror being caused by the reflection of a broken world. Postmodern art and philosophy have broken the mirror themselves, using its fragments as their basic principle, ruins as their paradigm.

Prof. Dr. Willem Elias
Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Brussels, Belgium