
From: Edward Rød Larsen [REDACTED]
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To: Jeffrey Epstein [jeevacation@gmail.com]
Subject: Essays

Importance: High

Essay 1.

Coming from an international background, and having lived in Oslo, Tel Aviv, New York and London by the age of eighteen, I believe that the international profile of NYU will provide the best environment for my college education, with the added benefit of returning to the place where I've spent most of my childhood and where my mother will be posted as Norwegian Ambassador to the UN in January 2019.

NYU's Art History department appeals to me because of its wide range of courses, from the global art of antiquity to the contemporary. My passion is the Italian Renaissance and the rich history behind it, especially the works of 15th century masters such as Masaccio and Bellini. Some of the courses that NYU offers such as "Early masters of Italian Renaissance painting" and "Florentine Villas: An Interpretation Based on Historical, Social Factors" are, therefore appealing to me. What I find exciting, is not only the visual aesthetics and analysis of these masterpieces, but also the manner in which the Renaissance emphasised scientific and economic innovation, areas of study the Global Liberal Arts programme would offer. NYU's unique campus in Florence would give me a once in lifetime opportunity to spend a year immersing myself in the art, culture and history of Italy. This would be an exciting experience to have while studying for a Bachelor's degree in Art History, and would compliment my main interests in the subject.

As one of the prime cultural centres in the world, NYU's location in NYC is the perfect place to broaden knowledge within contemporary art. I am very much looking forward to visiting the Whitney Biennial this May. In addition the New Museum, which shows a lot of the kind of work I find interesting is a short walk away from campus.

Taking advantage of being based in central London for the past year, I have completed the Chairman's Programme at Christie's, work experience at the Courtauld Gallery and I will be working at Maddox Gallery in the near future. Similarly, I want to take advantage of being based in NYC to gain as much experience as possible. I have chosen to apply Early Decision to NYU as it is the only American university I will be applying to, as there is no better place to obtain experience of the contemporary art world than New York City.

Essay 2.

From the age of extremes to the age of bewilderment

What captivates me more than anything else is the different ideological phases of the 20th century and how art can be used as a tool of advancement and reflection on ideological and political developments.

My fascination began when I read; Eric Hobsbawm's "Age Of Extremes" and has since developed through books such as Benjamin Carter Hett's "The Death Of Democracy" and Yuval Harari "A Brief History Of Tomorrow" and "21 Lessons For The 21st Century".

In the years after the First World War, until the end of the Second World War, three political models for shaping the future of nation states emerged; Fascism, Communism and liberal democracy. These all offered great ideas for the future of the world. Fascism and Communism shared some common features: authoritarian, strong leaders and a belief that their revolutions had to be carried through with violence. This led to the mass murders in the Nazi concentration camps and in the Soviet Gulags.

In the mid war periods, the "Litfass columns" that were originally designed to carry advertising, became the outdoor galleries for the war of ideologies. The political poster was born. High quality posters from every political party in Germany popped up on the columns. Hitler's propaganda chief Goebbels stated that the Nazi election campaign should be run through speeches and posters. The other parties responded in kind. An art form thus became an essential political tool in the battle for votes. The propagandist Art used by the Nazis and communists alike was essential in helping sell their message to the masses.

Indeed, much of the art that was critical of these movements was suppressed or censored and “subversive” artists cowed, in some cases imprisoned or even worse.

The liberal democratic model departed sharply from these authoritarian perspectives by presenting the alternative of free and transparent elections, the rule of law and freedom of speech. In the mid-war period the three narratives were competing to be the conceptual frame for society. After the Second World War fascism was crushed leaving the two competing ideologies of communism and liberal democracy. After the demise of communism in 1989, through to the late 1990's, liberal democracy was victorious in the ideological battlefield. Some historians, like Francis Fukuyama, went so far as to proclaim this period as “the end of history”.

A key piece of art that championed this kind of ideology was Sheppard Fairey's campaign poster for Barack Obama. In this poster, Fairey, a well established graffiti artist uses urban colours and stencilling techniques combined with the message “HOPE” to promote the incoming president's positive values and popularity with the young. It is notable that Fairey's most recent political poster protests the Trump presidency rather than promote it.

With the rise of so called “illiberal democracy”, with strong parties standing for populist ideologies, we have now moved into what can be described as the age of bewilderment. We were not in fact at the “end of history”. Once again the future looks unpredictable and insecure and artists are responding in different ways.

Jeremy Deller, a British Turner prize winning artist created a work which features a car damaged in the bombing of the historic Mutanabbi Street book market, which resulted in the deaths of 38 people. Here, an art work has been used to show the aftermath of an event. This event was the result of the Iraq war, which was seen as a way to spread democracy. Here Art is used as a means by which to explore the effects of ideology rather than promote it, another really interesting area in the study of the intersections between ideology and art.

Exploring how art reflects the historical and ideological contexts of the world around it is fascinating to me and I would love to study these ideas in more depth at undergraduate level.