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ABOUT THE BOOK

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FROM THE FUTURISTS TO THE STUCKISTS

Alex Danchev - Editor

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M71 Claes Oldenburg

I Am for an Art (1961)

Initially composed for the catalogue of the exhibition 'Environments, Situations and Spaces' at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York in May – June 1961; revised for the opening of the large-scale environmental work, *The Store*, in his studio on East Second Street, New York, in December 1961. Published in *Store Days: Documents from The Store* (1961) and *Ray Gun Theater* (1962) (New York, 1967).

CLAES OLDENBURG (born 1929) is a Swedish-American Pop artist and sculptor. From the late 1970s he worked in close collaboration with his second wife, the Dutch-American art historian and sculptor Coosje van Bruggen (1942–2009). They specialized in outsize, absurdist public monuments, at once bizarre and commonplace – prefabricated in Oldenburg's iconic *Lipstick (Ascending)* on *Caterpillar Tracks* (1969), installed at

Yale – such as *Dropped Cone* (2001), an upside-down ice-cream cone, on top of a shopping centre in Cologne.

Oldenburg has made a career of making the ordinary extraordinary. He became a prominent figure in the Happenings of the late 1950s: anarchic, semi-scripted group performances making use of sculptural props and sets – New York versions of the experimental work of the Gutai (M66) – the cast assembled from the artist's friends and relations. These productions were his 'Ray Gun Theater'. In the 1960s he began making larger-than-life-size soft sculptures (*Giant BLT*, *Giant Fagends*). The soft sculptures are his best trick. They meet all the basic needs. Some of them are unmistakably phallic – the food blenders, the toothpaste tubes. Others are based on female forms. *Raisin Bread, Sliced*, on the other hand, was conceived as a sort of Parthenon, and also suggested by a picture he saw of the Madeleine church in Paris turning into a loaf of bread. 'The piece has a lot to do with excrement and sex,' says Oldenburg. 'It also has to do with cutting.'

Oldenburg speaks infrequently and well. 'I am a magician. A magician brings dead things to life.' As per his manifesto, he is an artist who vanishes, an Andy Warhol in reverse, a standing reproach to fifteen minutes of fame. Quietly sophisticated and highly educated, he is a textbook case of the Pop art vision – the Pop art vibe and the Pop art jive. 'All I need is for something to stick in my mind. Like Henry Miller's nose. It has a strange, puffy quality. Then it begins to work within a scheme

of resemblances. The nose metamorphoses into a fi replug; the plug into a coin phone box; the phone into a car.' His manifesto is a glorious fusion of Whitman and Dada.

* * *

I am for an art that is political-erotic-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.

I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all, an art given the chance of having a starting point of zero.

I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap & still comes out on top.

I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary.

I am for all art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself.

I am for an artist who vanishes, turning up in a white cap painting signs or hallways.

I am for art that comes out of a chimney like black hair and scatters in the sky.

I am for art that spills out of an old mans purse when he is bounced off a passing fender.

I am for the art out of a doggy's mouth, falling fi ve stories from the roof.

I am for the art that a kid licks, after peeling away the wrapper.

I am for an art that joggles like everyone's knees, when the bus traverses an excavation.

I am for art that is smoked, like a cigarette, smells, like a pair of shoes.

I am for art that fl aps like a fl ag, or helps blow noses, like a handkerchief.

I am for art that is put on and taken off , like pants, which develops holes, like socks, which is eaten, like a piece of pie, or abandoned with great contempt, like a piece of shit.

I am for art covered with bandages, I am for art that limps and rolls and runs and jumps. I am for art that comes in a can or washes up on the shore.

I am for art that coils and grunts like a wrestler. I am for art that sheds hair.

I am for art you can sit on. I am for art you can pick your nose with or stub your toes on.

I am for art from a pocket, from deep channels of the ear, from the edge of a knife, from the corners of the mouth, stuck in the eye or worn on the wrist.

I am for art under the skirts, and the art of pinching cockroaches.

I am for the art of conversation between the sidewalk and a blind man's metal stick.

I am for the art that grows in a pot, that comes down out of the skies at night, like lightning, that hides in the clouds and growls. I am for art that is fl ipped on and off with a switch.

I am for art that unfolds like a map, that you can squeeze, like your sweetys arm, or kiss, like a pet dog. Which expands and squeaks, like an accordion, which you can spill your dinner on, like an old tablecloth.

I am for an art that you can hammer with, stitch with, sew with, paste with, fi le with.

I am for an art that tells you the time of day, or where such and such a street is.

I am for an art that helps old ladies across the street.

I am for the art of the washing machine. I am for the art of a government check. I am for the art of last wars raincoat.

I am for the art that comes up in fogs from sewer-holes in winter. I

am for the art that splits when you step on a frozen puddle. I am for the worms art inside the apple. I am for the art of sweat that develops

between crossed legs.

I am for the art of neck-hair and caked tea-cups, for the art between the tines of restaurant forks, for the odour of boiling dishwater.

I am for the art of sailing on Sunday, and the art of red and white gasoline pumps.

I am for the art of bright blue factory columns and blinking biscuit signs.

I am for the art of cheap plaster and enamel. I am for the art of worn marble and smashed slate. I am for the art of rolling cobblestones and sliding sand. I am for the art of slag and black coal. I am for the art of dead birds.

I am for the art of scratchings in the asphalt, daubing at the walls. I am for the art of bending and kicking metal and breaking glass, and pulling at things to make them fall down.

I am for the art of punching and skinned knees and sat-on bananas. I am for the art of kids smells. I am for the art of mama-babble.

I am for the art of bar-babble, tooth-picking, beerdrinking, egg-salting, in-sulting. I am for the art of falling off a barstool.

I am for the art of underwear and the art of taxicabs. I am for the art of ice-cream cones dropped on concrete. I am for the majestic art of dog-turds, rising like cathedrals.

I am for the blinking arts, lighting up the night. I am for art falling, splashing, wiggling, jumping, going on and off.

I am for the art of fat truck-tyres and black eyes.

I am for Kool-art, 7-UP art, Pepsi-art, Sunshine art, 39 cents art, 15 cents art, Vatrol art, Dro-bomb art, Vam art, Menthol art, L & M art, Ex-lax art, Venida art, Heaven Hill art, Pamyl art, San-o-med art, Rx art, 9.99 art, Now art, New art, How art, Fire sale art, Last Chance art, Only art, Diamond art, Tomorrow art, Franks art, Ducks art, Meat-o-rama art. I am for the art of bread wet by rain. I am for the rat's dance between floors.

I am for the art of flies walking on a slick pear in the electric light. I

am for the art of soggy onions and firm green shoots. I am for the art of clicking among the nuts when the roaches come and go. I am for the brown sad art of rotting apples.

I am for the art of meowls and clatter of cats and for the art of their dumb electric eyes.

I am for the white art of refrigerators and their muscular openings and closings.

I am for the art of rust and mould. I am for the art of hearts, funeral hearts or sweetheart hearts, full of nougat. I am for the art of worn meathooks and singing barrels of red, white, blue and yellow meat.

I am for the art of things lost or thrown away, coming home from school. I am for the art of cock-and-ball trees and flying cows and the noise of rectangles and squares. I am for the art of crayons and weak grey pencil-lead, and grainy wash and sticky oil paint, and the art of windshield wipers and the art of the finger on a cold window, on dusty steel or in the bubbles on the sides of a bathtub.

I am for the art of teddy-bears and guns and decapitated rabbits, exploded umbrellas, raped beds, chairs with their brown bones broken, burning trees, firecracker ends, chicken bones, pigeon bones and boxes with men sleeping in them.

I am for the art of slightly rotten funeral flowers, hung bloody rabbits and wrinkly yellow chickens, bass drums & tambourines, and plastic phonographs.

I am for the art of abandoned boxes, tied like pharaohs. I am for an art of watertanks and speeding clouds and flapping shades.

I am for US Government Inspected Art, Grade A art, Regular Price art, Yellow Ripe art, Extra Fancy art, Ready-to-eat art, Best-for-less art, Ready-to-cook art, Fully cleaned art, Spend Less art, Eat Better art, Ham art, pork art, chicken art, tomato art, banana art, apple art, turkey art, cake art, cookie art.

add:

I am for an art that is combed down, that is hung from each ear, that is laid on the lips and under the eyes, that is shaved from the legs, that is brushed on the teeth, that is fixed on the thighs, that is slipped on the foot.

square which becomes blobby



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