

Free Idea With Every Work

An exhibition by Edward Wright at Australian Galleries Work on Paper, Sydney. August 2004

The free exchange of ideas has its parallel in the exchange of a material work of art. When a painting is sold, the idea embedded in the image is as much the object of exchange as is the physical piece. The sale of a painting is in this sense the sale of an idea and any reaction it may intend to generate. However the intellectual property of an artist is never what is actually for sale, just a record of it.

The subject matter of these images concerns non-exchange: non-communication, emotional paralysis, and self-awareness. The pictures, as material items, function as mechanisms for the communication of the themes by being objects of exchange offered for sale. But the passage of an idea from creator to viewer cannot be charged for, despite the *raison d'être* of the image being this conveyance. The sale of the physical object must suffice. If art is a conceptual endeavour, is a painting merely a container for an idea? And if a buyer understands art as a conceptual activity are they willingly being cheated by an artist who sells them a container without rights over its content? *Buyers could be victims deserving compensation!* As ownership of a painting does not grant the purchaser any exclusivity on the consumption of the thoughts it contains, providing a separate 'idea' could make amends. Such an 'idea' might be quantifiable, its existence and provenance provable. For the benefit of purchasers of works from the current exhibition by Edward Wright a free 'idea' will be formatted as a limited edition print. It will be provided to all buyers so that it may be sold-on for a profit. In some small way these free 'ideas' might make up for centuries of injustice done to the buyers of works of art.

The paintings in this show do not offer solutions to the relational problems they describe (problems of communication, of exchange). But as saleable items in a trading system that is interested in social critique (i.e. the art world), they both parody its devices and use them to offer something tangible. Works of art in a commercial gallery operate on two levels: as a set of thoughts for contemplation, and as objects available for sale (investment opportunity).

Intellectual Property rights are becoming an important issue in the area of electronic media because ideas can be transmitted so easily. Artists have never charged for their ideas as such. Corporations manipulate the argument of protecting artists' rights. The Internet may speed the process but people can take what they will from a work of art without paying, be it on paper or on a screen.

Ed Wright
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