

No News is Good News. All News is Fake News.

Fake News. No other phrase so succinctly encapsulates the present cultural moment than this infamous characterization of inconvenient fact by the 45th President of the United States. Adopted by despots and dictator worldwide, the term is a rallying cry for those confronted with evidence and ideas that directly contradict a preconceived narrative.

Using examples from Warhol to Koons to Derrida, this presentation will consider the extent to which the postmodern strategies of irony, cynicism and narrative incoherence have contributed to the undermining of commonly accepted fact and truth. I will explore the late 20th century emphasis on relativism in art and cultural criticism to examine if and how these trends have fertilized the soil upon which contemporary populism/nationalism thrives. Further, I will ask if contemporary art criticism grounded in political activism, furthers nationalist agendas by appearing partisan and thus aligned with “the other”.

As an antidote to our present condition, I will argue on behalf of an ethical critical-aesthetic response that prioritizes truth and judges works of art by the veracity of its claim to human experience. Beauty will be discussed as a consequence of creative integrity, not simply a harmonious arrangement of elements or a “politically correct” calculus. The foregrounding of truth and fact offers both our best chance of resistance and a way forward.