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An Open Letter to Dr. Ari Kelman, Interim Dean of the College of Letters and Science at The University of California, Davis

Wally Hedrick Uninfluencer: A Forgotten Generation

A Review of *Wayne Thiebaud Influencer* at Manetti Shrem Museum of Art

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Dear Interim Dean Ari Kelman,

My name is LG Williams, and I am writing regarding the recent exhibition, *Wayne Thiebaud Influencer: A New Generation*, currently on view at the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at the University of California, Davis. The show is curated by Rachel Teagle and Susie Kantor.

I received my MFA from UC Davis and taught in the Art Studio department as a lecturer in the late 90s. I could be wrong, but I suspect you may be unaware of this particular exhibition. That said, I thought it essential to take this opportunity as an alumnus, former lecturer, and artist to write to you with my observations. Perhaps they might persuade you to regard this public art exhibition with disdain and dread.

Who am I to assert such an outlandish claim? Good question, given the current sad state of the faculty in Art Studio—and its grim output over the past few decades.

Despite my counter-cultural inclinations, my artworks have occasionally appeared with the so-called popular artists in sought after national and international exhibition venues and art fairs. These engagements, in turn, might have inspired renowned authorities such as Professor Donald Preziosi (Emeritus Professor of Art History, UCLA; Slade Professorship of Fine Arts, Oxford University) to include me in their publications.

As an academic, I have taught in many institutions, including a stint as a lecturer at UC Davis with Distinguished Professor Wayne Thiebaud. I also enrolled the Art Studio and Art History Department's largest classes during this period. I even had the unique privilege to spend a year alongside UC Davis Art Professor David Hollowell—albeit pro-bono.

As a wannabe art historian with no scholarly bent, talent, education, knowledge, or training, I remain convinced that I have key insights that unlock the two most elusive and mysterious artworks in the Western Art canon. Specifically, I'm speaking of the *Mona Lisa* (Leonardo, c. 1503-1506) and *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Caravaggio, 2nd version, c. 1600-01)—as well as half a dozen other masterpieces of equal complexity and artistic ingenuity.

The editors at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco were the first literati to accept, embrace, encourage, and sell my numerous published volumes, including eight poetry books. The store's support is my most prized achievement.

As for my contribution to art pedagogy, Cengage Publishing published my workbook, *Drawing Upon Art* (Wadsworth / Cengage Learning, 2009, ISBN: 0495572365) with its hugely influential introductory Art History textbook, *Art Through the Ages*. A similar volume for Gombrich's *Story of Art* (PCP Press, 1996, ISBN: 1523700742) is available on Amazon.

As an art and cultural critic, the opening sentence from my clandestine introductory essay, written under a pseudonym, for *E Pluribus Venom: The Art of Shepard Fairey* (Ginkgo Press, 2008, ISBN: 1584232951), was explicitly praised, and Steven Heller selected the book to be amongst 2008's Top 10 Art Books of the Year for *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*.

Additionally, *The Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) recently reviewed two of my recent publications, *Wasted Words* (PCP Press, 2016, ISBN: 1517287103) and *Dust Bunnies* (PCP Press, 2016 ISBN: 152327266X) with the art critic and MacArthur

Award recipient Dave Hickey. The UCLA Hammer Museum, SITE Santa Fe, The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA), and The Las Vegas Contemporary Art Center (CAC) hosted live events and appearances for these publications. Coincidentally, a copy of *Wasted Words* recently appeared on a bookshelf in Netflix's *Velvet Buzzsaw* (2019), the art-horror film (with gawdawful horrible art) set in Los Angeles.

These accomplishments and more were achieved by self-sacrifice, no institutional support, and working under the harshest conditions of Nomadland.

Dean Kelman, I learned on Google about your long association with the highly regarded *The Times Literary Supplement*. Indeed, you know that something is extraordinary about the TLS. Your Wikipedia page even describes you as "a regular contributor to *The Times Literary Supplement*." Respect.

Interesting sidebar: the person who edited one of my TLS reviewed books has University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Brown University degrees, too. Imagine that? But, umm, I don't suppose that you have an undisclosed enabler working on your behalf? A graduate from the University of Oxford (also a regular TLS contributor, too, I might add) is ghost-writing this editor's alleged "sole contributions" before submitting them to unaware editors or journals. This editor went as far as sending ghost written materials directly to the 100-year-old UC Davis Emeritus Professor Wayne Thiebaud! More about this some other time, ok? Because I'd love to hear your thoughts on this truly bizarre story.

Clearly, by all appearances, College of Letters and Science Dean Kelman, you're no slouch—unlike the recent and present artistic hacks currently employed in the Art Studio Department, all presumably "working" under your leadership. And one of your former predecessors was no slouch either.

I had the pleasant misfortune of meeting this predecessor UC Davis L & S dean at the beginning of my second year of graduate school. This dean was required to discover why an ignorant art student from the Ozarks had refused to attend classes (back then ranked #1 Art Studio department in the USA) with two newly employed Art Studio instructors?

"They suck," I told the then dean.

Instantly, this astute administrator knew this statement to be true. After all, the dean himself approved of these hires.

"Better to eat you, my dear," was the reason I realized much later.

As a result of our mutual understanding, this experienced and savvy administrator simply reassigned me back to study under the renowned artist-teacher and oracle Robert Arneson. Crisis averted.

Looking back upon that day I refused to take any classes from two new incompetent Art Studio professors, I realize that this instance definitively marked the end of the once-

renowned Art Studio Department.

Every Art Studio search committee has selected one incompetent applicant after another from that time forth. Interestingly, too, not long after these artistic hacks get their first paycheck, they usually get rewarded with titles like "The Distinguished Professor of Art Robert Arneson Endowed Chair"—or simply "Department Chair."

The ideology which brought lousy "artists" to rule Art Studio in the first place—via their smooth inexplicable tenured trajectory simply by default—is understandably the norm today in most artist-academic's rise to salaried irrelevancy.

Artistic mediocrities teaching art to unaware students year after year after year is wrong. You might want to put an end to such practices in Art Studio. But, umm, I know that can't happen.

Most students don't know better. As a result, few have the instinct or courage, as I inexplicably had, to reject the path to artistic mediocrity, which the recent past and current UC Davis Art Studio faculty fully embraces, embodies, and encourages. I'll be happy that I won't be around to see the "series of love letters" (as UC Davis curator Teagle described it to *The Sacramento Bee*) the Art Studio department will get in a few decades. OMG.

I simply cannot understand how any UC Davis art student can stomach the vacuous black-hole art or (dare I say) "art instruction" from "Professors" Robin Hill, Hearne Pardee, Gina Werfel, etc. These notions defy any artistic or imaginative credulity. But here we are.

True, your Art Studio department isn't alone. Thousands of artist academic delinquents fill this "academic discipline." They populate and pollute every art institution across the nation. It always has been this way, and it always will. But, given our discussion, former UC Davis Art Studio alumni, Professors Eve Aschheim (M.F.A, '87) at Princeton University and Amy Podmore (M.F.A, '87) at Williams College, deserve special praise off the top of my head. Each has trekked to institutional success—all the while being unwaveringly committed to artistic mediocrity.

The Princeton University and Williams College senior leadership know as little about Art Studio as the UC Davis senior leadership. This fact might give you some consolation. This all makes perfect sense in *The Age of University, Inc.*, right? Art under these conditions is, after all, irrelevant. And these two examples are living proof.

The apparent lack of talent shared amongst these two UC Davis Art Studio alums was in plain sight the first week of graduate school. Even more so, on that hilarious weekend, when the lonely and pathetic "art critic" John Yau appeared on campus and got taken (literally and figuratively) for the ride of his life by a grifter. What a schmuck.

Art ass-lickers today are prolific. They are numerous and debased, they'll stop at nothing to achieve personal gain and career advancement, even if it means usurping all standard

social media conventions. For instance, one recently photo-bombed America's most privileged students completing the banalest drawing exercises known to Art Studio pedagogy while sitting on their arses (<https://archive.is/DnQIN>).

There must be a way to prevent the further corruption of higher education by these talentless Art Studio apparatchiks? Perhaps "Saturn Devouring His Children" should become official policy in the UC Davis Art Studio department given such egregious instances of systemic failure? These two artistic hacks are simply perpetuating artistic ineptitude and institutional malfeasance. The never-ending cycle of artistic decrepitude in your own Art Studio department (teacher/student; student/teacher; repeat) brings me back to the subject of this letter.

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The current Art exhibition at the Manetti Shrem Museum, "*Wayne Thiebaud Influencer: A New Generation*," deserves your attention. This exhibition originates out of halfhearted fairy-tale premises, which, in turn, quickly transition to a full-blown nightmare—for all involved.

Allow me to share my candid observations with you.

This year, UC Davis Professor and master painter Thiebaud is 100 years old, and this exhibition will be a celebratory, landmark showcase and an excellent opportunity to explore his many achievements as a painter and teacher.

The curators chose two distinct sets of artists to exhibit alongside the great master. The first group supposedly consists of blue-chip "contemporary artists." The second group definitely consists of Thiebaud's "former students."

Pay careful attention to what is being presented here.

The curators draw a clear and bold distinction between "contemporary artists" and "former students." This significant distinction highlights and articulates a great artistic divide. This divide, in turn, reveals a brutal cultural reality or artistic truth. Such honest distinctions are never evoked in polite art institutional literature anywhere.

Please let me explain. The "contemporary artists" are supposedly an elite and nationally recognized gathering of celebrity artists. These "art superstars" are supposed to be almost as famous or accomplished as Thiebaud himself. As the story goes, these artists were so inspired by Thiebaud's "personal journey to find meaning and reinvention" in art that they too were able to achieve their own national and international renown.

As for the "former students" of Thiebaud, these poor souls unfortunately never achieved anything approaching "contemporary artists" status—even after studying directly under Thiebaud for many years.

Though no further explanation is given, this second group was, apparently, so inspired by Thiebaud's "personal journey to find meaning and reinvention" in painting they presumably went on to

receive...umm...a passing grade at the end of his course. That's some consolation, I guess?

As far as exhibition literature goes, this statement stands as one of the rarest instances of curatorial honesty I've ever read in all my life.

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Circling back for a closer inspection, long after the effects of art-stargazing has left our thoughts, let's try to discover the shared qualities amongst the group of distinguished "contemporary artists."

Unfortunately, off the top of my head, I can't think of any shared qualities—apart from, say, the group's tireless commitment, day after day, to make art for money's sake. Frankly, the exhibition curators couldn't discover any related qualities either, other than presumably, the price tags.

An apparent lack of vision inside any ivy tower art exhibition indicates, to a seasoned observer, a great void or opportunity. Naturally, such an opportunity has to be filled with something. For instance, this void can become a platform for uninspired curators to float some unrelated but "quantifiable" statistical measurements to justify the expense of the event or selection of the artists—data which rarely appears anywhere in great artists or artworks.

And, that is just what we discover here in this exhibition. The "contemporary artists" are simply signs, opportunistic bits of data (e.g., female/male, black/white, young/old, citizens/non-citizens, etc.) gathered by curators on the make to share with their supervisors, exhibition benefactors, and LinkedIn network.

Predictably, this exhibition's curators chose to fill this curatorial void with conventional virtue-signaling. Unfortunately, virtue-signaling is a poor substitute for inviting cogent artistic talents and imaginations that might have recognized and responded to Thiebaud's outstanding accomplishments. I admit this would have given the curators a significant challenge given the tiny pool of artists to draw from. This effort would have required some thought and imagination from their "starting salary of \$185,000 annually."

In this instance, because of the exhibition's central theme (i.e., Wayne Thiebaud) and the museum's remote location (i.e., California Central Valley), the curator's heavy-handed application of virtue-signaling does appear even more exaggerated and pernicious than usual.

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These curators must have known that virtue-signaling was a poor sentiment to evoke and hang alongside Thiebaud. After all, virtue-signaling is anathema to Thiebaud and his painting practice.

Check for yourself, Dean Kelman: can you find one POC after googling "Wayne Thiebaud + figure paintings" and then click "Images?"

No. Not one.

Virtue-signaling was never part of Thiebaud's public persona or discourse.

However, there was a perfect opportunity to genuinely present diversity and merit alongside Thiebaud for this exhibition since there is just such an artist/student. The curators could have invited a former Thiebaud painting student who achieved significant artistic accomplishments as a famous contemporary artist. But, as it happened, this renowned contemporary artist / former student was presumably "overlooked" by the curators.

If these professional curators would have consulted either New Mexico-based artist Bruce Nauman or me, a more complex and authentic artist would have emerged from selecting "contemporary artists" or Thiebaud's "former students." This particular artist can no longer be found in Sacramento or Northern California. Instead, a curator would have to travel to Southwest Art's headquarters in Santa Fe to discover him—the famous Native American painter Fritz Scholder.

Fritz Scholder (1937–2005) is the lone Thiebaud painting student to become a significant artistic influence in the art world during Thiebaud's 30-plus years teaching. Scholder's public reception, renown, and achievements dwarf all the other former Thiebaud painting students in this exhibition combined by a country mile.

Why wasn't Fritz Scholder included in this crucial exhibition? Something is wrong here.

In 1957, Scholder moved with his family to Sacramento, California, where he studied with Thiebaud. Thiebaud subsequently invited Scholder to join him, along with artists Greg Kondos and Peter Vandenberg, in creating a cooperative gallery in Sacramento. Scholder went on to achieve national and international distinction as a Native American artist. His works appear in museum collections worldwide, including The Crocker Art Museum, only 25 minutes from the UC Davis Art Museum.

Thiebaud's impact upon Scholder is immediately apparent. Just look at his style and technique. Scholder skillfully assimilated Thiebaud's painterly conventions in his quest to depict Native Americans and the Southwest—just as Thiebaud would transition the formula away from the candy store and baked goods to figures, cityscapes, and landscapes.

Scholder's absence from this landmark Thiebaud survey is inexplicable and raises many troubling concerns and questions. Namely, why is Scholder's art absent when everyone in the art world knows he became the only famous painter Thiebaud taught during his long career?

One thing is clear about Scholder's absence from this exhibition: if one is truly on a quest to determine Thiebaud's lasting teaching legacy, then don't visit this exhibition.

Thiebaud's lasting teaching legacy will only be found living and naturally evolving where Scholder's influence spread—across the Southwest, in the lands of the Native American and Southwest artists who admire him. Scholder's admirers are making and

selling art respectfully because they never drank the Kool-Aid, and they never became full-blown artistic sycophants.

In other words, you won't find Thiebaud's direct impact or legacy in the rarefied blue-chip art world-at-large—despite the bold false claims made by the exhibition organizers.

I suspect the simple reason for Scholder's absence is that this revelation would be politically and artistically explosive. Nobody at UC Davis, Acquavella Galleries (principally Philippe de Montebello), Sotheby's, Christie's, or The Paul Thiebaud Gallery—let alone the other "former students"—would want to publicly and honestly acknowledge the Thiebaud-Scholder Art legacy.

As a self-described specialist in Native American and Western History, Dean Kelman—not to mention the "Politics of Memory"—I would suspect you might find this omission quite problematic, too?

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Thiebaud, the man, and artist were essentially mute throughout his career on past and current historical events. This restraint must have taken quite a lot of effort given all the United States went through during his career—leading up to the apparent coup d'état or storming of the United States Capitol in 2021—a watershed event nearly fifty years in the making.

As you might imagine, two new recent aspirants have recently entered the Thiebaud-sphere with an unnecessary solution to this invented "problem" or "career oversight." They lured and convinced the 100-year-old Thiebaud into exhibiting some cloistered "self-commentary art"—horrid depictions of self-loathing, detrimentally rendered by the aged master himself—the so-called "Clown" series. This from the very same Thiebaud who for over sixty or more years avoided the messy depths of human events or emotions—aside from depicting a heart on a store-bought cake now and then. And this from the very same Thiebaud who once could remember that UC Davis's own Robert Arneson, Bruce Nauman, and William Wiley had already put their definitive masterful stamp on clowning-around artworks while in their prime—to great national acclaim decades ago.

Thiebaud recently and regrettably hurled out and exhibited a few ill-advised private cartoon-themed paintings and drawings of "circus" figures for those not in the know. These images depict carnies trying to stroke some keys of remorse, apology, consolation, and self-pity shortly before and after Thiebaud's painting *Pinball Machines* (1962) sold for \$19,135,000 in Christie's *ONE* sale on July 10, 2020, setting a new world record for the artist at auction.

Indeed the old painter has plenty to feel sorry for. Like, umm, the decade he spent unable to rise to the occasion to act the bit-part of an "authentic" painter—i.e., a drunken, emotionally unhinged, and debauched abstract expressionist. Or, the time shortly afterward when Thiebaud allowed *Pinball Machines* (1962) out of the studio in the first place in its current state?

Given Thiebaud's advanced age, these unpleasant memories and images don't come as a surprise. As people move to the later stages, memories of childhood or from long ago are easier to access since the person has had longer to process and remember these specific events.

Yet someone needs to take away the keys from Thiebaud's gatekeepers. The second decade of the 21st century is definitely not the time to ask American audiences to pity the poor millionaires—even in Orange County. But, clearly, nobody will tell the 100-year-old famous painter that his demented private-pity-paintings and old fart drawings aren't funny, and they suck. There are just too many bags of money to be had and fraudulent reputations in need.

To put this into a larger context for the gatekeepers: If Thiebaud couldn't act or paint like the drunken and reckless William DeKooning (1904–1997) when he was young and physically able to perform this easy bit part, just how in the fucking world is Thiebaud now going to pull off the grace, subtlety, and nuance of Marcel Marceau when he is 100 freaking years old? Thiebaud can't come close to pulling something off that delicate and unique at this distanced age. And, sadly, it shows.

Why not simply pass the time painting another 100 or 200 ice cream cones for Christ's sakes? Or bingo cards?

See here, the "idea" behind this series really isn't about creating hype for some dismal, pity-Wayne in his late-late-late art period. No, that time is long gone. Nor is this about launching an in-studio, care-taker savings reserve. No, Thiebaud's been a member of the wealthy, artistic elite for quite some time—I'm sure his nest egg is quite adequate. Nor was this caper an assignment designed by a geriatric psychiatrist to allow old Thiebaud to get in touch with his distant inner-child—to resolve some pressing early childhood traumas and miseries.

No, in the end, this cartooned caper is just another instance of opportunistic "organizers" gaslighting their own uneventful and unrewarding late careers. Disenfranchised vampires have latched themselves to the senile centenarian artist who is clearly out of his depths—if not out of his mind.

Show the guy some mercy and dignity. These "last-last-last period commentary artworks" should never see the light of day—no matter what bullshit really desperate people with a host of lonely ghostwriters can write about it (i.e., "How to Prove Absolutely Anything").

Lastly, and most importantly, this orchestrated miscue makes a laughingstock mockery of the masters who actually came to some true reckonings and breathtaking insights late in life. Some of these extraordinary artists were, for example, Goya, Manet, Monet, Munch, Picasso, Mondrian, Duchamp, Bacon, and especially Hopper. Not Wayne Thiebaud—he never had those balls.

About Hopper's breathtaking last masterpiece, Colton Klein wrote, "*Two Comedians* from 1966 is an existential tour de force that represents the culmination of Edward Hopper's career. His

final painting is a seminal and poignant work that embodies the most important and defining themes of his art."

After seeing Thiebaud's so-called "Clown Series," all these great late artists will turn their backs on Thiebaud in embarrassment once he gets shot out of the canon.

This disastrous epilogue to Thiebaud's end times is simply another unmistakable stain on his finely pressed collared career.

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Overall, Thiebaud's staid and unsullied career (before the clowns) does appear to have been guided by members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in comparison to his equally distinguished teaching colleagues and contemporaries, namely, Robert Arneson. Arneson, by the way, single-handedly created entirely new opportunities to pursue contemporary ceramics after Peter Volkous. A remarkable global achievement. One of Arneson's most famous and controversial works is a large bust of George Moscone, the mayor of San Francisco who was assassinated in 1978.

The aloof, public attitude of Thiebaud was just what President Richard Nixon (and others that followed his lead) hoped for after all. Such detachment meant that any civic, artistic representations or actions would only be as complicated as choosing between cakes or pies—which Thiebaud was unrivaled at representing. This disinterestedness left unseen special interests free to wreak havoc with little to no opposition wherever and whenever they wanted.

A life-long cartoonist and illustrator, Thiebaud's portrayal of puritanical commercialism and mass-produced innocence never dutifully departed from the dominant script or surface. It's as if his compositions were constructed by a chaste apologist contextually indifferent or blindered—following minimal art's standard practices at the time. "Painting cakes in order to live." Quite the opposite representations, curious and fully-engaged, revealing inconspicuous realities and hidden truths, can be found in Thiebaud's near-artistic contemporaries and fellow Sacramento natives Joan Didion and Herb Caen.

Thiebaud's deep-rooted, unwavering proselytizing sense might also explain his preference for white. A white considerably different than Didion's white, that's for sure.

There is white proclaiming the power and glory of goods. There is white as a blank slate. There is white as context. Indeed, white generally remains the only context in a Thiebaud painting.

Thiebaud-White triggers elevated associations of "a friendly universe," pristine evocations of the "fullness of joy," and, most importantly, "never-ending progression." Thiebaud, after all, was raised Mormon. His father was a bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when Thiebaud was a teenager.

Thiebaud, I would speculate, used more heavenly white paint than all the other contemporary painters combined—with the possible exception of Agnes Martin and Robert Ryman. If this insight were to hit the art tabloids, and it won't, Thiebaud would be immediately canceled in our current cancel-culture craze.

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However, the selection of “contemporary artist” Andrea Bowers for this exhibition is alarming as it is gratefully appreciated. Bowers's entry will hopefully soothe and prevent the Gorilla Girls from sending some loud hairy scary protesters east along the I-80 or north up the I-5 to picket outside Thiebaud’s regularly scheduled tennis court reservations. Nobody wants that.

In the end, any blue-chip artist could have been chosen for this exhibition and put into the “contemporary artist” category. All any curator had to do was attend a famous art fair and select any 5-figure artists at random and display them in this exhibition. The desired click-bait results would have remained the same. Don’t we already have enough examples of this curatorial pandering and bootlicking to go around in Northern California with all the “art professionals” at The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art?

As a former visitor to the local UC Davis-Sacramento Art scene, I believe that the second group of selected artists in this exhibition, these so-called "former students," were chosen with the same dull instrument as the first. Except for one striking feature.

The second group of artists was chosen because they are devoted sycophants or missionaries from The Cult of Thiebaud. Meaning, no serious aspirational curator with ambitions beyond Davis, California, would want to hook up with this selection of “former students”—ever again. Never. No way.

As Thiebaud groupies go, this cult is just as devout and holy as any other cult on a mission from art. Moreover, suppose we wanted to be academically and artistically precise. In that case, this group should have been divided once again into two smaller groups: The Grand Order of The Thiebaud Sycophancy or The Grand Quorum of The Thiebaud Toadies.

This characterization is not flippant. As my experience can attest, these very nice, respectable, and righteous Thiebaud sycophants and toadies deserve praise. For years, I've known many in one capacity or another, professionally or socially. Many were my classmates or thereabout. A few were even my students. I even wish a few were polygamous.

The members in this group of “former students” have always been aspirational Grand General Officers of the Cult of Thiebaud. Their membership has been commonly acknowledged in our little community from the get-go. Their life-long dream now has come to life. Hail Thiebaud!

What is more, these high-ranking cult members have taken vows to remain devoted Thiebaud idolaters for the rest of their lives. Let’s wish them all well. As faithful Thiebaud followers go, this group deserves particular praise—just not here in this celebratory public Art exhibition. After all, their groupie status was only partly their fault. Thiebaud idolatry was never expressly discouraged—which I shall discuss shortly.

Let’s be clear here: systemic sycophancy is not art; it is not artistic reinvention, nor is it art instruction. Instead, student sycophancy is artistic annihilation. Heads up: a sycophant's art production is

now generally documented in a social media selfie with the object of affection. These ghastly coupled images generally remind an acute observer of Dr. Frankenstein alongside his monster.

My familiarity with these “former students” also modestly extends to the world-renowned artist Bruce Nauman (MFA '67). Certainly, Nauman was never a Wayne Thiebaud groupie or toady—given his age, ambitions, and talent. Thiebaud groupies first appeared long after Nauman left the West Coast.

Incidentally, my stepfather was riding around horseback with "Bruce The Rancher," as he was called by the local cowboys and hunters in rural New Mexico—even before I suggested to him that he go visit Bruce Nauman's ranch. They both lived in the very same rural backcountry town.

Nauman briefly evokes the story of their shared cowboy pursuits during the Art21 video excerpt featuring Nauman now posted on the museum exhibition website. As a result of this uncanny coincidence, I was invited twice to visit Nauman's art studio. Curiously, Nauman mentioned many artists during these extended studio visits that I knew more or less, including some California artists, but he never said Wayne Thiebaud. This omission makes perfect sense given that the inept UC Davis Art Studio department administration, the whole time that I was around, never once mentioned Bruce Nauman either. Go figure?

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Another curious throwaway from the Manetti Shrem Museum exhibition literature caught my eye. The website states that Thiebaud was a "profoundly dedicated teacher."

In fact, this claim can be found everywhere on the Internet. Surely then, if this statement is found all over the Internet, this statement must be true!

Just who will argue with a platitude like a "profoundly dedicated teacher" pasted on the back of a tired old man? Nobody. Because today, every teacher is getting a bad rap. Therefore, I suppose the curators felt they didn’t need to support this lofty cliché anywhere in the exhibition literature.

Yet, the exhibition, by default, puts all the startling visual evidence in plain sight. Every viewer can see for themselves just what kind of teacher Thiebaud actually was. Also, every viewer can see the type and quality of students Thiebaud preferred to produce as a teacher all these years.

I suspect, though, the answer might not be what the curators or museum benefactors had in mind.

In this exhibition, we can clearly see for ourselves that Thiebaud The Teacher preferred, encouraged, and trained artists that became mostly Thiebaud groupies or sycophants over the years.

Given these results, I must admit that I’m wholly perplexed why this assertion was issued in the exhibition in the first place? Why invite trouble? Perhaps the curators imagine every visitor is ignorant, blind, or a subservient Thiebaud cult member, too?

Do the curators even realize they've inadvertently opened up another can of worms? Because we must also ask ourselves: just what does it mean to be a "profoundly dedicated" art teacher today?

Is the formal pronouncement "dedicated teacher" based on Thiebaud's day-to-day, regular appearances to his classroom at UC Davis? I don't think so. Every artist-teacher that I've worked with, without exception, either good or bad, rich or poor, success or failure, has carried an entire classroom and never missed regularly scheduled classes.

Does this elevated pronouncement highlight Thiebaud's extensive knowledge or understanding of art? Honestly, I doubt it. For the most part, all of the colleagues that I've worked with were as knowledgeable as Thiebaud so far as they could convey the required course materials—to a greater or lesser degree.

Moreover, Thiebaud's colleagues at UC Davis during its heyday, namely Professors Manuel Neri, David Hollowell, Mike Henderson, William Wiley, Roy DeForrest, and Robert Arneson, were just as knowledgeable about art as Thiebaud. This high standard of visual literacy is the very reason why the UC Davis Studio Art program was once so highly regarded in the first place.

Is this elevated dedication supposed to highlight Thiebaud's length of service? Well, yes, Thiebaud did teach for quite a long time. Indeed, I have discussed the tragedy of this contemporary phenomenon—"the never-ending artist instructors"—elsewhere (read: "LG Williams Responds To The Forever Art Professors," by Laurie Fendrich, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 14, 2014).

As anyone might expect, members of UC Davis's senior leadership must have regretted seeing the nationally recognized artist-teacher Thiebaud retire. Thiebaud's national celebrity brought much acclaim to the then-failed and fully-compromised Art Studio department. But does Thiebaud's over-extended service period mean that his close colleague, Professor David Hollowell, who was chosen to teach Art Studio courses alongside Thiebaud, was not a distinguished teacher? Simply because Hollowell decided to retire as quickly as possible because the Art Studio was (by that time) a veritable joke?

No, I don't think so.

Let's be frank: this "profoundly dedicated teacher" claim is an unnecessary and purposefully misleading platitude.

With this platitude, the exhibition curators are trying to equate a "profoundly dedicated teacher" with another teacher who "makes paintings that sell for lots of money." These are two entirely different and separate categories. Here, the curators have opportunistically conflated teachers' distinct qualities into one to gaslight Thiebaud, themselves, this exhibition, and the museum.

Still, the crucial point that I would like to make here doesn't concern Thiebaud's dedication to teaching. Not at all. Instead, I would like to point out just how in the world any "dedicated" Art Studio instructor today can be considered a success of any sort

when the failure rates of graduates taught by Art Studio professors across the nation is at or near 99.9%.

Until this dire outcome is finally remedied, no Art Studio professor can claim to be a distinguished teacher. So, declaring Thiebaud a "profoundly dedicated teacher" is simply another instance of curatorial and rhetorical flatulence. It's absurd.

Let's retake a look at this platitude from across the academic divide. Just imagine a United States medical school or institution graduating a hundred medical students at the end of a year. Ok? Though shortly after graduation, not one graduate could pass the United States Medical Licensing Examination to legally practice medicine. In the end, what action would you expect from the institutional leadership against these faculty members?

Would the professors who taught these ill-prepared medical students or deadly almost-doctors be heralded and championed as "distinguished professors" to the general public? Heck no. I don't think so. Instead, shit would hit the fan. The medical school would probably sack all the medical professors from their teaching positions.

This type of responsible leadership does not appear in Art Studio departments across this nation. No, failure-artist-professors who rubber-stamp untalented art studio graduates become either department chairs or "distinguished teachers" or are given some other trumped-up entitlement to put on their university email signatures.

By the way, the only hint at shit wafting around the now fully compromised UC Davis Art Studio department comes from next door—UC Davis's top-tier veterinary school. Go figure?

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Our discussion of this exhibition originating from a major teaching university has revealed some subtle, disturbing features.

"Contemporary artists" have been randomly chosen to offer art museum visitors and Thiebaud enthusiasts an arbitrary opportunity for art stargazing. "Former students" give visitors a once-in-a-lifetime invitation to gaze upon a pity-party for Thiebaud idolaters. Lastly, it confirms that a "distinguished Art Studio teacher" sells paintings to the public at the highest prices while producing sycophants-students in his own image, year after year, for decades.

Just what in the heck is the purpose of this important exhibition?

Through my stint as a student in Thiebaud's various classrooms, I was so impressed by his lectures that I published a book, *Wayne Thiebaud Lectures on Art and Drawing* (PCP Press, 2018, ISBN: 198865432). This book is a compilation of my in-class notes that I recorded as a Thiebaud student, as well as those collected over the years from other "former students," most notably, "former student" Kathleen Frumkin.

This volume was gleefully compiled over many years under considerable personal duress at my own expense while tumbling all across Nomadland. This volume is not comprehensive by any

means, given its author's "damaged life." But it is a starting point and a sincere account of part of Thiebaud's distinguished teaching legacy. As such, it is only one personal collection of many experiences shared across many different Thiebaud's classrooms. Today, it remains my favorite contribution among many to the History of Art / Art Studio pedagogy.

Many topics are discussed in my Thiebaud publication. But if I were to broadly summarize Thiebaud's class investigations and pursuits of these lectures, I would say this: Thiebaud's lessons were oriented around the examination and fascination with artistic excellence; what is painterly excellence; how to identify painterly excellence; and to strive for painterly excellence.

On the other hand, nowhere in this collected volume does Thiebaud advocate for constructing an artistic constellation indiscriminately, without discernment, or from accidental attributes (i.e., gender, age, race, nationality, etc.) and becoming an artistic slave or sycophant to whichever artist you choose.

Unfortunately, these last two topics, which in no way characterize Thiebaud's artistic legacy or teachings, come to dominate and poison this "landmark" Thiebaud exhibition.

If Thiebaud was a "profoundly dedicated teacher" (and he most certainly was), then this curatorially inept selection of "former students"—these groupies or toadies—appear as either a revelation or a charade. A revelation because Thiebaud's profound and lengthy teaching career created mostly Thiebaud groupies. These poor spellbound former students simply could not parse or separate the idol from the messages. A charade because this exhibition is no place for any young students or future art historians to estimate Wayne Thiebaud's teaching legacy—aka "[The] *New Generation*."

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In this exhibition, Thiebaud's teaching legacy ends up looking like a big waste of time. How or why did this happen?

For Chinese artists, it has long been accepted practice, in fact encouraged, to paint in the style of a master or many. Traditional Chinese artistic training was briefly explained to me back in the early 1990s by the legendary artist C.C. Wang (1907–2003), the Chinese-born artist and Art collector based in New York City. Indeed, as he summarized, "copying" one master or another was understood as essential training for every Chinese student. It was considered part of the accepted Chinese artistic training program and indicated deep respect and reverence.

However, in the West, we have taken the opposite or modernist approach. Modernists don't look back; they prefer to look forward. Modernists don't emulate or imitate; they look for the shock of the new as an indicator of originality. Since becoming hooked on novelty, past practices in the West were despised and avoided at all costs. Only recently has this bedrock principle been challenged by young artists as a system of oppression.

Over a long teaching career producing painters or visual artists, any unsuspecting influential artist-teacher like Thiebaud can,

despite the best of intentions, inadvertently stymie generations of aspiring artists like the "former students" we see here in this exhibition. But these dead souls didn't just simply arrive at this unfortunate destination on their own accord. No. Not at all. As I mentioned earlier, we need to keep in mind that they were encouraged to become sycophants.

Every artistic sycophant or toady was once a young, fun-loving undergraduate filled with artistic promise. They did the best they could with all the skill and imagination they could muster. Similarly, they were encouraged by Art Studio instructors, semester after semester, to enroll in successions of Art Studio courses. These students, in turn, continued to do as they were told. All the while, for most of the students, artistic talent rarely appears.

At some point instructors need to embrace honesty, take these students aside and tell them to reconsider full-time Art Studio work—that art likely will be a part-time hobby moving forward. There is little harm in this honest acknowledgment. Painting as a hobby worked out just fine for Winston Churchill, after all.

Share this insight with students when they are young. They'll bounce back. In fact, it is imperative. A great deal of harm can result from not sharing this insight early on. Just look at today's art market: unaware victims pack it like a tin of sardines.

"Art curators," too, must play a role in this process—now that they've fully weaseled their way into the Art Industrial Complex. Willfully curating misleading "authoritative" exhibitions that appear "legitimate" to unsuspecting students and future artists at major universities only perpetuates and compounds the future's artistic carnage. Curators should stop the spread of marred artistic lives and bad art. "Bad art drives out the good art" is how I formulated it a decade ago (See: LG Williams, "The Gresham-Williams Law," 2011).

This exhibition is misleading your current students. They are being led to believe that they are now witnessing an exhibition by the most "dedicated" and "famous" painter from UC Davis. When, in fact, what they are experiencing is an art-horror show: a randomly curated charade of suspect superstars and wannabe, insignificant Thiebaud groupies. Just what were these curators thinking? And are these the messages you, too, want to promote as the Dean responsible for the museum, the curators, and the large group of impressionable Art Studio students? I don't think so.

The self-proclaimed "*New Generation*" exhibition at UC Davis is insufferable on so many levels.

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As I've mentioned, one of Modernism's central tenants, originality, was invented and adopted by struggling artists in the late 1800s. The "technique of originality" was an individualistically based artistic stratagem partly created to hedge against the first great wave of highly realistic, mechanically reproduced images ever to appear. In fact, during the 1860's or thereabout every 2nd and 3rd-rate painter was transitioning over to

photography en mass full-time for perfectly sensible reasons: their paintings sucked.

Henceforth, any artistic devotee subscribing to this technique or theory understood that secondhand cultural mimicry or imitation in the imaginative visual arts must be ruthlessly avoided at all costs—even if it means one's creative death. Thiebaud knows this.

Indeed, I first heard the famous lines by Wallace Stevens as a graduate student when Thiebaud read them out loud to our large class: “If it is a world without genius / It is most happily contrived.”

Once Thiebaud's artistic reputation began to rise, extending into its second, third, and fourth decade, he must have recognized that the canvased-carcasses of his “former students” were starting to pile up in the garbage bin of history.

How did his students' widespread and consistent rejections by the marketplace affect Thiebaud, the “dedicated teacher?” What was his reaction? Did he try to stop the carnage going forward? What changes did he make to his pedagogy to prevent the next batch of students from piling up again in the garbage bin, too?

Honestly, I don't think the thought ever crossed Thiebaud's mind.

Over the almost two decades that I frequented the UC Davis campus, Thiebaud's classes appeared to remain the same. And, new Thiebaud groupies just kept popping up.

Sure, I understand that your average art instructor needs a teaching job to make a modest living. I see no problem here at all. And as a consequence, these fortunate, lucky instructors with Art Studio teaching jobs must keep the conveyor belt of graduates moving through the system from one semester to the next. Otherwise, there will be no future paychecks for anyone. No pay means no rent payment. No rent payment, no house. No house, no...whatever. Welcome to Nomadland.

For the lucky few faux artisan-teachers that are gainfully employed but didn't make it into the Major Art Leagues, they too can stop the carnage. Every abandoned yet salaried Art Studio professor eventually has one lengthy grace period or opportunity to prevent young Art Studio students from piling up on the garbage bin year after year.

This grace period is called academic tenure.

Tenure allows self-aware, respectable, and obsolete Art Studio professors the dignity and opportunity to finally speak freely and openly about the true—statistically overwhelming—future plight of their students without reprisal or retaliation. All the while, their regular paychecks can keep rolling into their bank and retirement accounts.

More importantly, doesn't it make sense for a tenured and empathetic Art Studio instructor to try and prevent as early as possible all underperforming students from a disappointing life in art after graduation?

The commercially successful artist-teacher Wayne Thiebaud, though, had tenure and more. A quick search of Thiebaud art sales

on the Artnet Auction Results website lists 580 artworks sold from the 1960s; 668 sold from the 70s; 454 sold from the 80s; etc. Even though auction sales do not reflect actual direct payments to respective artists, they can indicate if an artist has a significant patron and collector base.

Thiebaud's popular success plus academic tenure would have certainly insulated him from administrative reprisals or retaliation were he to suddenly decide to change course to prevent sycophants from spreading throughout his classrooms semester after semester.

Yet, Thiebaud remained silent and said nothing. And all the while, his paintings' prices went ever higher and higher.

Sure, Thiebaud presumably encouraged his son Paul Thiebaud to allow one or two of his groupies to exhibit at The Paul Thiebaud Gallery in San Francisco occasionally for the sheer hell of it. This nod was a sweet gesture but essentially a gratuitous gesture given the vast number of members in the Thiebaud cult. No other significant galleries were interested in supporting or selling the Thiebaud knockoff-wares made by “former students.”

Was Thiebaud just not “paying attention”—to use Bruce Nauman's phrase from Art21?

Why didn't Thiebaud speak up loudly about this disturbing situation? After all, he had the career security and platform. People would have listened to Thiebaud.

It is easy to overlook the elder Thiebaud's complicity. Sure, what can he do now? But what about the mature Thiebaud—back when he was at the height of his powers?

If he was as generous, kind, and concerned for his students as the widespread reports, qualities most other instructors share too, why didn't Thiebaud protect his students from this sad fate? Perhaps this is just his Achilles heel.

It is always challenging to second guess. How could Thiebaud, The Distinguished Teacher, remain steadfastly calm and silent about his students' poor reception during his long teaching career? How could this exhibition promote click-bait and sycophants as the “*New Generation*” to the next generations? It's a sad spectacle to behold.

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The paradox becomes more confounding and problematic when considering his tolerance and preference for groupies contradicts Thiebaud's own artistic journey. Indeed, Thiebaud's own harrowing and courageous artistic journey from failure to success was based upon an honest acknowledgment and awareness of his present reality. Specifically, his early artistic shortcomings.

In a last-ditch effort to change his own dire artistic situation c.1960, Thiebaud undertook a radical reconceptualization of his entire artistic practice. One likes to imagine Bill DeKooning sitting Thiebaud down at the Cedar Bar to give him a straight-talking to late one night. Honestly, Thiebaud didn't have what it

took to be an Abstract Expressionist. However, this problematic acknowledgment forced Thiebaud to undertake risky artistic adventures that broke new artistic terrain. Shortly afterward, these artistic experiments captivated New York art gallerist Alan Stone (1932-2006) and, eventually, the art world.

Luckily for Thiebaud and us, everything worked out just fine. Most contemporary artists or painters, though, are not so lucky.

Pursuing art is a ruthless pursuit. There is no consolation prize. Beautiful dead bodies never cease to pile high upon the Tower of Art. Thiebaud himself once remarked, "Failure is one's constant companion when pursuing art." I know this story well, too. Maybe that's why Thiebaud is as risk-averse as Jasper Johns—the most risk-averse contemporary living artist today, according to Lawrence Weiner.

Did these painful memories prevent Thiebaud from speaking up candidly and honestly to his students? His inexplicable acceptance of groupies year after year only guaranteed that his "former students" would remain in a permanent state of artistic retardation. Then again, perhaps Thiebaud simply assumed that they would soon find out for themselves that they are on the wrong path; and they will need to make radical re-adjustments in their current poor-performing art practice to achieve their own artistic success—as he had once done. In other words, they will have to discover that genuine artistic self-understanding under delusional conditions is unspannable.

Clearly, though, Thiebaud's "former students" haven't found this out for themselves. They remained groupies.

Thiebaud indeed received his share of rough treatment from other artists. Most likely, his gentle nature preferred to forget these troubling experiences—or at least overlook them. Who wants to revisit trying times, again and again? One suspects that these groupies experienced the same ridicule and condescension as young Thiebaud had experienced. Especially from their fellow students pursuing art while trying to make individual original, artistic contributions. When I was on campus, I overheard many such complaints.

Furthermore, I heard many humiliating accounts of Thiebaud's treatment between the 1950s and 1960s when he shifted his attention from commercial to fine art. Many reports came directly from the legendary, maverick California artist and former UC Davis Art Studio lecturer Wally Hedrick. According to art critic Bill Berkson (1939—2016), Hedrick was "at the unofficial center of the small San Francisco art world between 1955–65."

Wally Hedrick told me Thiebaud's art during this period was widely despised by the most popular and critically acclaimed artists in the small artistic community in Northern California. Even mentioning the name "Thiebaud" during this time, according to Hedrick, brought any conversation to sudden howls, laughter, and ridicule. Overhearing these responses must have been a miserable experience for Thiebaud.

"I never went to art school," Thiebaud loves to repeat. This alibi is Thiebaud's candid acknowledgment and authoritative disclaimer—for everything.

Thiebaud offers this trigger warning immediately so as not to disappoint—anybody. As a result, this mantra incessantly disarms and deflects all criticism. He especially likes to share this disclaimer with those artists, historians, or critics urging him to paint the "next generation" artistic invention. Maybe 60+ years of making risk-averse art (i.e., painting the same subjects, with the same consistent and pat nuances with the occasional subject matter shift) has become too tiresome, familiar, and stale in times filled with constant streams of innovative contemporary artistic practices.

Despite all the applause from the auction houses, the last three or four decades have seen Thiebaud's artist practice fall into a repetitive, rote, and performative painting trap. Thiebaud Inc. has pushed the limits and patience of many keen admirers. Perhaps it's time to repurpose his painting studio as a branch of the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing, given the product's sheer predictability?

"I never went to art school" can be simply translated by someone who attended art school to someone unfamiliar with art school as, "I have nothing more," or "There will be nothing more." This confession is understandable considering that no one would want Thiebaud to revisit his terrible years from the 50s and '60s again. No. Not that again.

My own experience at the Kansas City Art Institute was nasty, brutish, and too short. Art school is no place for snowflakes. At the time, every art-school student understood and abided by the same unwritten code 24-7: it was art against art. There was no B.S., no place to hide, and no stupid fucking art curators or collectors. Artists in art schools controlled the local macro and microenvironments—i.e., artistic reputations, hierarchy, and renown. When lame art instructors or administrators occasionally entered the art scene, they predictably fucked things up. In short, art school is fantastic.

I know what Thiebaud missed, and so does Thiebaud. Art school gives one the awareness, confidence, and ability for conscious liberation—to be transformed and manifested almost literally overnight from death-dealing beliefs.

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Having grown up admiring and educated by cartoon panels, Thiebaud had the self-respect, self-awareness, and honest conviction never to claim to be an "artist." This, too, is another self-effacing alibi. Great artists are, after all, a rare and different breed—marvels to behold. To be an artist means culture, ideas, awareness, and experience. Instead, Thiebaud was a painter.

A painter, in this regard, paints. Painting, for Thiebaud, meant a practical, matter-of-fact activity, getting a fair rate of return for representations that appear to stay within the lines. You'll never see Thiebaud straying far beyond his principal representational

premise—paint hitting the surface while informing an object. For this dedicated service, Thiebaud Inc. has been handsomely rewarded.

Thiebaud is a twice-born successful painter. These are painters who've endured early traumatic criticisms to go on to achieve success. Twice-born painters who live far from the major art centers generally become permanently fixated on their achievement once it arrives. For instance, Grant Wood (1891-1942) and Wayne Thiebaud share this in common.

It follows, therefore, that for 30+ years, Thiebaud never discontinued his practice of teaching first-year or introductory students just how to paint. In his case, though, it remained: how to paint as Thiebaud, day after day, class after class, and semester after semester. Never mind that it is no longer 1960, 1970, 1980, or even 1990; they are not little Wayne Thiebauds; and there isn't any potential market for thousands of extra Thiebaudesque artists anywhere in the world.

As a multi-institutional and transient Nomadland lecturer, I preferred teaching art and art appreciation to first-year or introductory students, too. But for very different reasons. Given my terribly low pay (averaging just \$3000 for 250 students per class, per quarter), teaching in "Beginning" or "Introductory" environments solved the moral and ethical obligation of preventing advanced Art Studio students from an almost certain future as artistic failures. Right?

Honestly, I never could understand why marketless but self-respecting "Art Studio professors" would insist on teaching advanced students just moments before they went off to graduate into the real world with few, if any, job skills or prospects? This egregious request alone by senior Art Studio professors demanding to teach "Advanced" courses makes the failed artist-academic's inflated ego appear at its most ridiculous, delusional, and dangerous. Why assume this responsibility and guilt when you're an artist-failure, and it's wholly unnecessary? This imperative evokes the perverse "Stockholm Syndrome," wouldn't you say?

I would suspect that Thiebaud's kind nature, national stature, and lengthy teaching service have led to more devoted student followers or groupies than any other painting instructor across the nation. He definitely knew how to put on a show for his students: The How To Make A Thiebaud Show. His staged performances were quite a sight to behold—an academic administrator's and a recruiter's dream come true. Here, Thiebaud knew how to rule the center court and dominate the baseline.

After watching his classroom performances, one would be hard-pressed to find just one naïve art student not wishing to become a lifelong, transfixed Thiebaud devotee—watching a chocolate doughnut appear from nowhere in just minutes. Doughnut! And it's precisely this mimicry that assumes the dominant takeaway from this exhibition—Thiebaud's "former students" generally ended up painting like him explicitly or implicitly.

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Aside from promoting art stars, Thiebaud groupies, and fake distinguished teachers, this exhibition didn't deliver on two other assertions: evidence of a great art "influencer" or the appearance of an artist who took Thiebaud's legacy and "forecasted the future of painting" just as he has done.

True, there is plenty of "just as he had done" in this exhibition. Way too much. On the other hand, there is not one shred of evidence for either an "influencer" or "the future of art."

Given the absence of a bona fide "influencer" or peek into "the future of art," I would like to present you with real-life examples of both.

I'd like to propose that an art "influencer" is someone who (1) painted an American flag three years before Jasper Johns; (2) became the very face of "The San Francisco North Beach Beatnik Scene," which lured tens of thousands of cultural tourists from all over the country to (3-5) visit, see, and experience a brand new (6-8) alternative artistic reality, art form, and lifestyle; (9) created the modest clandestine institution; (10) held a landmark event, attended by 250 people, that instantly announced (11) "The San Francisco Literary Renaissance" which, in turn, (12) launched the international movement and (13-15) careers of Alan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Michael McClure et al—and which eventually (16) put publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti in a U.S. superior court on obscenity charges, wherein (17) nine literary experts testified on one book's behalf to decide its "redeeming social importance"; (18) established the house (live/work) which became the unofficial epicenter of the small but influential Northern California art world between '55 and '62; (19) supported artists; (20) bought eight years' worth of materials for one artist so she could make a masterwork that stands over 10 and a half feet high and weighs more than one ton—which the Whitney Museum of American Art eventually conserved and acquired for its permanent collection; (21-30) mentored the creative and intellectual accents of real students and artists like Jerry Garcia, William Wiley, Mike Henderson, Robert Arneson, William Allen, Robert Hudson, Roy DeForest, Ruby Neri—not to mention today's greatest living artist, Paul McCarthy; and (31) made many of the first artistic masterpieces against America's illegal wars across the globe which motivated (32) hundreds of students from the San Francisco Art Institute to take-to-the-streets in protest. This action resulted in the artist's immediate dismissal (firing) from the SFAI—leading to hundreds if not thousands of students unable to attend "influential" art lectures forever.

I imagine this is what a real "art influencer's" influence is supposed to look like. Remarkably, all of these influences and many more belong to one man—Wally Hedrick (1928-2003).

Hedrick's art "influence" doesn't stop there.

Early in his career, Hedrick was keenly aware of the unruly powers of influence and influence-peddling in art—and upon one's artistic practice. These encroaching foreign forces were just beginning to overwhelm art. As it did others during the postwar counter-cultural art scene, these forces repelled Hedrick. His repulsion never diminished.

For example, Hedrick was particularly interested in preventing the rise of money and the media's growing dominant influence in art. In particular, money's negative impact was three-fold. Money confused and distorted actual accomplishments, lured artists into exchanging artistic freedom for artistic slavery (i.e., turning oneself into a commodity that is bought and sold), and created artist-celebrities out of the blue for its own purposes.

Hedrick took up arms against what he saw as this sea of troubling influences, and he actively sought to oppose them head-on. As a direct assault upon "influence," Hedrick decided, in his unique way, to turn it on its head—and by doing so, bring it under control or put an end to it.

For example, Hedrick's artistic productions varied considerably in content and form (as had Marcel Duchamp—an artist Hedrick greatly admired). Hedrick made paintings, drawings, prints, psychedelic light art, mechanical kinetic sculpture, junk/assemblage sculpture, pop art, (California) funk art, happenings, conceptual art, bad painting, Neo-Expressionism, and image appropriation.

This dynamic flexibility was a conscious strategy. This art-making approach allowed Hedrick to engage his expansive artistic imagination fully. Simultaneously, the radical shifts in his artistic output, one diverging from the next, disengaged his work from the standardized impulse that the local, national, and international markets required (i.e., repetition, serialization, etc.). This stratagem protected his artist's soul.

Hedrick also used an ancient removal stratagem, *Damnatio Memoriae*, to exclude or erase himself and his cultural productions from the art world he came to despise. This "un-influencing" had rarely appeared, if ever on the American art landscape—certainly never on the scale that Hedrick devised.

Perhaps taking a page from the more recent political purges of the Soviet Union, which employed visual censorship in political contexts to vanquish, cancel, or erase real or imagined enemies in photographs and films et al., Hedrick here turned these devices upon...um...himself.

Hedrick made artworks that destroyed themselves years before Tingley. He painted dozens of historic, iconic paintings—all black—and killed many other artworks outright. Frequently, he lambasted the art establishment. Refused (time and again) to enter his tiny studio (if you could call it that?) to make art. After all this, he finally exited the art world penniless and drifted to Nomadland.

Most famously, Hedrick refused to fly to New York City to attend The Museum of Modern Art's "*Sixteen Americans*" exhibition opening on December 16, 1959. Organized by Dorothy C. Miller, this remarkably curated show launched the careers of so many artists we know today: Jasper Johns, Jay DeFeo, Ellsworth Kelly, Alfred Leslie, Louise Nevelson, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella, among others.

Only a confident and committed artist, who also had complete disregard for commercial success, would suddenly pivot one's

rising career trajectory or influence and reverse its course back in the opposite direction.

But Hedrick did precisely that.

Additionally, Hedrick was publicly "uninfluenced" or "un-invited" by others. As a direct result of his artistic courage and commitment, he was prevented from participating in many significant group exhibitions. Many of these exhibitions were organized around artistic movements that he played a central role in creating, promoting, and advancing.

Instances of this sort of retribution, public shaming, and cancellation at the hands of others include *The Art of Assemblage*, October 4 - November 12, 1961, at The Museum of Modern Art and curated by William Seitz; *Funk*, April 18 - May 29, 1967, at the University Art Museum at the University of California, Berkeley, and curated by Peter Selz.

These public shuntings or cancellations were blatant, personal assaults upon Hedrick's career to brow-beat the artist into towing-the-line just like the others. These attempts obviously failed. But the painful memories of these shameful actions were still fresh in many minds decades afterward by the guilt-ridden curators.

"I regret making this wrong decision," Selz himself confessed to me and another witness at a birthday party for distinguished UC Berkeley Professor George Lakoff back in 2012.

All these documented instances should compel art curators and historians to regard Wally Hedrick as both an infamous OG "influencer" and "un-influencer" at the same time. Hedrick's "un-influencing" or "self-cancellation" proved to be another stroke of his artistic genius. He's probably still tickled pink.

In the end, Hedrick's artistic convictions led to his tragic early death at the hands of deprivation and poverty. His passing was largely forgotten by the new upstart doyens living in the San Francisco art world in the early 2000s—the very art world he helped usher in and create.

The lasting effects of Hedrick's artistic courage, "un-influencing," or "self-cancellation" are significant: Hedrick is all but gone from today's art world. This absence is maddening and incalculable. We are left artistically and imaginatively defeated. I get sick in the stomach every time I think about it.

What remains from Hedrick's failed attempt we must now esteem and revere: fully compromised artists powerfully promoted and backed by uncontested forces fueled by impunity alone. Highly ambitious, resourceful, and calculating artists and institutions with aspirations, values, and objectives that Hedrick abhorred. We have a diminished understanding of ourselves and the unimpeded potentials of art, past, and present. We are devoid of an essential visual artist stronger than influence, money, and celebrity.

One can only imagine Hedrick's fits of laughter if he learned of the widespread, go-to strategies that fleckless Art Studio professors all across the nation now regularly use to inflate the renown of their mediocrity. For example, getting friendly art

collectors to “gift” artworks for inflated tax write-offs to compromised museum officials—at, say, The Metropolitan Museum of Art or The Museum of Modern Art. Armed with such fraudulent art-ammo-antics, bottom-feeding artists can mislead and deceive any unaware administrator’s line-by-line scrutiny. This sort of racketeering becomes the justification for all kinds of shit.

"I kind of bullied people to do things because I had a good resume," is how art critic Dave Hickey put it.

Still, we can thank Hedrick for NOT giving us what we live with today. The art world's rulers don't have an unassailable authority pointing out their corrupt agendas and practices. Famous artists don't have an art authority constantly calling them out as “collabos.” And Hedrick isn't part of a corrupt art world filled with deplorable "artistes" that he despised. In the end, this all worked out fine for all parties.

Fortunately, there is one internationally recognized wunderkind-artist who single-handedly deserves our great thanks and appreciation for protecting Hedrick’s remarkable legacy: the internationally recognized Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy.

According to the *New York Times*, McCarthy "has spent his career cultivating a visual language of depravity and scathing critique." His legendary video, *Painter* (1995), depicts McCarthy makeup-faced and costumed, performing bits to the shock and horror of audiences as a pigment-splattering clown-painter or painting-fool (i.e., William DeKooning). The 50-minute video concludes with a scene where a group of art collectors line-up to see Painter-Clown-McCarthy's bare bottom as if assessing it as an artwork. This is the definitive contemporary artwork that portrays painters as clowns—another important historical art fact that has escaped the aged Thiebaud and his highly motivated sales force.

McCarthy attended the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) from 1968–1969 when Hedrick was on the SFAI Art Studio faculty. McCarthy quickly understood and admired Hedrick’s radical and vital importance. McCarthy’s subsequent renown provided him with the resources and power to act upon the global art stage to champion Hedrick’s legacy and try to put things right.

McCarthy is so appreciative of Hedrick's “influence” he’s purchased over a dozen significant works by the artist. This generosity serves both as blessing and vindication. His purchases include the legendary *Flag* (1953) and the epic *War Room* (c.1967). *War Room* was recently exhibited in a major survey, “*Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975*”, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. By the way, I was fortunate to exhibit *War Room* at The San Francisco International Art Fair in 2002, after the artwork was lying exposed to the elements in a sheep barn in Bodega, California for 30 years (See: *Envisioning The Dark Millennium: Wally Hedrick's Black Paintings: 1953 - 2003*, PCP Press, 2016, ISBN: 1530215048).

Paul McCarthy, America’s greatest living artist, also happens to be America’s top art historian—just as Picasso was in his day. He is on a mission to recover many lost and over-looked art histories in this role. There could be no more extraordinary proof that Hedrick was an “influencer” than this lone endorsement.

McCarthy's unprecedented generosity and visionary understanding ensure that Hedrick's expansive artistry and imagination will continue to influence culture long after misguided exhibitions like the one we are discussing fade from our memory.

For your information, back in the late 90s, there was a time when Hedrick was in poor physical condition and in desperate need of a teaching gig to pay for rent, bread, board, and art supplies. I begged most of the "highly ranked professors," some serving on the UC Davis Art Studio department hiring committee, to consider rehiring Hedrick once again to teach as a part-time lecturer. Not surprisingly, not one apparatchik in the Art Studio department was interested in lifting a finger to assist this legendary artist and “influencer”—including Wayne Thiebaud.

* * * * *

Lastly, just what would an actual “artist working under Thiebaud’s influence today and forecasting the future of art” presumably look like?

It just so happens that there is one former Thiebaud student, an artist now living in Nomadland, who has been devotedly and tirelessly examining this exact question, and also the concerns I have just raised—for quite a long time. This artist explored this specific thesis long before this exhibition was ever imagined.

In fact, this Nomadland artist spent six years (!) researching, planning, and executing two monumental artworks devoted solely to this question in this context.

The artist began this Hail-Mary or Last Hurrah artistic initiative by reconfiguring Thiebaud's now-canonical compositions of Sacramento Valley landscapes, San Francisco cityscapes, and assorted goods. Next, the artist proceeded to take this synthesis to its logical conclusion or endgame. What appears is a place where Thiebaud could not go and would not go: our future wasteland—past the tipping point in the climate system, biodiversity loss, and the economic, social, and ecological collapse. The future Thiebaud would have been repelled and terrorized by—and the brutal future that Thiebaud's art lured us to ignore.

These two artworks give us a glimpse into a future art where Thiebaud could never imagine. Logos crumbling.

These unequaled contemporary representations—ones that the exhibition curators were hoping to put on display in this exhibition—certainly provide instances from which to examine ourselves and our origins—while considering our artistic past and future. Namely, the dark end-times of the last remaining, partially functional buildings populated by sequestered succubi and incubi, shadows of sentient beings, assorted Frankenstein monsters, vampires, cocksuckers, bootlickers, gold diggers, fucking assholes, etc.—essentially, all the characters and themes that we have discussed here and many more.

Black is the dominant theme in these images. Indeed, black is the lone hue or value used to create and inform these vast and epic colorless worlds. Black intentionally underscores a textual

reading: an affirmed alliance with Michelangelo concerning the supremacy of form; history, visual language, and culture dominate; the rejection of Thiebaud-White, the mourning of Hedrick-Black; our recent histories of never-ending wars and destruction layered upon America's dark Antebellum history; and, most importantly, the looming dominance of the Far East—and its remarkable tradition of ink brush painting that continues to be dismissed outright by obstinate, post-modern, western artists.

These lone two artworks were also expressly conceived as private tributes and expressions of gratitude. They provide physical memorials to Wally Hedrick and David Hollowell's outstanding artistic accomplishments and courage—while also giving a big nod to Stephen Kaltenbach's *Portrait of My Father* (1972–79)—which has coincidentally been on view at the Manetti Shrem Museum.

I'd love to share a photograph of these two forward-looking masterpieces with you, but since they were expressly made to be epic and comprehensive, they are oversized and filled with thousands of poignant tiny details. Therefore, they cannot be viewed or understood by photography, Internet, or Instagram. They can only be considered appropriately face-to-face.

As some consolation, I am happy to report that the first museum director to see these monumental artworks finished in person instantly exhibited them, triumphantly and center-stage, in The Laguna Art Museum—next to a Wayne Thiebaud painting.

Anyway, this is what I believe a true representative of Thiebaud's important teaching and artistic legacy can bring to the future of art. I strongly urge you to contact your university's museum benefactors and quickly purchase one of these unprecedented works for your museum as soon as possible. I'd be happy to share the contact information with their purchasing agent.

Thank you for taking the time to read my message. I hope I have persuaded you to regard this public art exhibition under your leadership with a newfound sense of disdain and dread.

And, good luck with your impressive academic and administrative pursuits in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of connected, wavy, vertical strokes that form the letters 'L', 'G', and 'W' in a stylized, cursive manner.

LG Williams