

Assignment Question

Look at Allan McCollum's work Plaster Surrogates shown at the beginning of this chapter and explain its relationship to Modernist art and theory.

Picasso

It's better like that, if you want to kill a picture all you have to do is hang it beautifully on a nail and soon you will see nothing of it but the frame." in Picasso: His Life Work (Sir Roland Penrose, 1958)

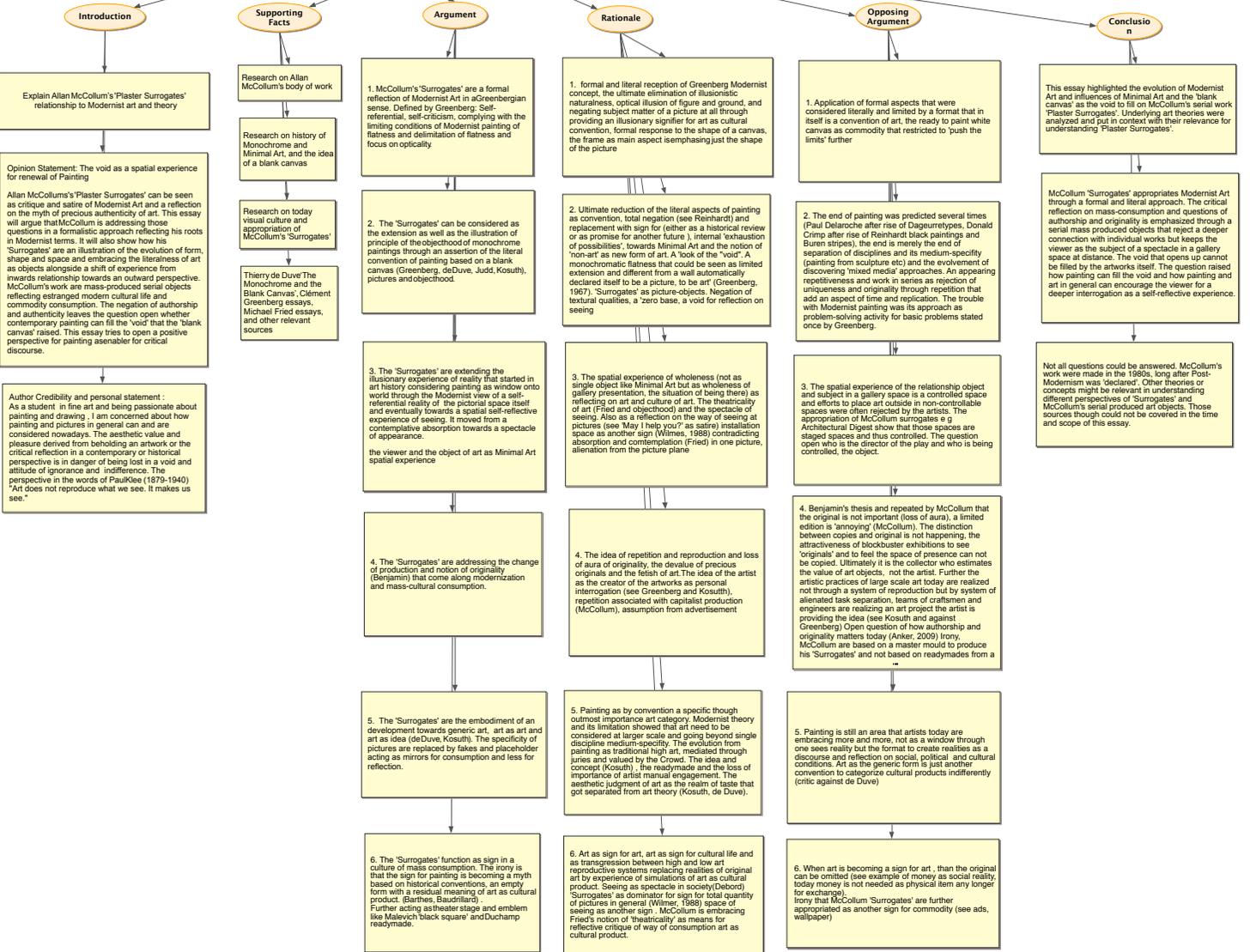
Malevich

"I have covered all of you with a square and without the you will not get out of it." (in Tupitsyn, 2017)

Stefan J Schaffeld - #513593
Undertanding Visual Culture

Assignment 2 -
Developing Argumentation

Essay Assignment 2: Explain the
relationship of Allan McCollum's
'Plaster Surrogates' to Modernist art
and theory



Introduction
Explain Allan McCollum's 'Plaster Surrogates' relationship to Modernist art and theory
Opinion Statement: The void as a spatial experience for renewal of Painting
Allan McCollum's 'Plaster Surrogates' can be seen as critique and satire of Modernist Art and a reflection on the myth of precious authenticity of art. This essay will argue that McCollum is addressing those questions in a formalistic approach reflecting his roots in Modernist terms. It will also show how his 'Surrogates' are an illustration of the evolution of form, shape and space and embracing the literalness of art as objects alongside a shift of experience from inwards relationship towards an outward perspective. McCollum's work are mass-produced serial objects reflecting estranged modern cultural life and commodity consumption. The negation of authorship and authenticity leaves the question open whether contemporary painting can fill the 'void' that the 'blank canvas' raised. This essay tries to open a positive perspective for painting asenabler for critical discourse.

Author Credibility and personal statement :
As a student in fine art and being passionate about painting and drawing , I am concerned about how painting and pictures in general can and are considered nowadays. The aesthetic value and pleasure derived from beholding an artwork or the critical reflection in a contemporary or historical perspective is in danger of being lost in a void and attitude of ignorance and indifference. The perspective in the words of Paul Klee (1879-1940) "Art does not reproduce what we see. It makes us see."

Supporting Facts
Research on Allan McCollum's body of work
Research on history of Monochrome and Minimal Art, and the idea of a blank canvas
Research on today visual culture and appropriation of McCollum's 'Surrogates'
Thierry de Duve 'The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas', Clément Greenberg essays, Michael Fried essays, and other relevant sources

Argument
1. McCollum's 'Surrogates' are a formal reflection of Modernist Art in a Greenbergian sense. Defined by Greenberg: Self-referential, self-criticism, complying with the limiting conditions of Modernist painting of flatness and delimitation of flatness and focus on opticality.
2. The 'Surrogates' can be considered as the extension as well as the illustration of principle of the objecthood of monochrome paintings through an assertion of the literal convention of painting based on a blank canvas (Greenberg, de Duve, Judd, Kosuth), pictures and objecthood.
3. The 'Surrogates' are extending the illusory experience of reality that started in art history considering painting as window onto world through the Modernist view of a self-referential reality of the pictorial space itself and eventually towards a spatial self-reflective experience of seeing. It moved from a contemplative absorption towards a spectacle of appearance.
4. The 'Surrogates' are addressing the change of production and notion of originality (Benjamin) that come along modernization and mass-cultural consumption.
5. The 'Surrogates' are the embodiment of an development towards generic art , art as art and art as idea (de Duve, Kosuth). The specificity of pictures are replaced by fakes and placeholder acting as mirrors for reflection and less for reflection.
6. The 'Surrogates' function as sign in a culture of mass consumption. The irony is that the sign for painting is becoming a myth based on historical conventions, an empty form with a residual meaning of art as cultural product. (Barthes, Baudrillard). Further acting as theater stage and emblem like Malevich 'black square' and Duchamp ready-made.

Rationale
1. formal and literal recaptation of Greenberg Modernist concept, the ultimate elimination of illusionistic naturalness, optical illusion of figure and ground, and neglecting subject matter of a picture at all through providing an illusory signifier for art as cultural convention, formal response to the shape of a canvas, the frame as main aspect isemphasizing just the shape of the picture
2. Ultimate reduction of the literal aspects of painting and replacement with sign for (either as a historical review or as promise for another future ), internal 'exhaustion of possibilities' towards Minimal Art and the notion of 'non-art as new form of art. A 'look of the 'void'. A monochromatic flatness that could be seen as limited extension and different from a wall automatically declared itself to be a picture, to be art (Greenberg, 1967). 'Surrogates' as picture-objects. Negation of textural qualities, a 'zero base, a void for reflection on seeing
3. The spatial experience of wholeness (not as single object like Minimal Art but as wholeness of gallery presentation, the situation of being there) as reflecting on art and culture of art. The theatricality of art (Fried and objecthood) and the spectacle of seeing. Also as a reflection on the way of seeing at pictures (see May 'I help you' as satire) installation space as another sign (Wilmes, 1988) contradicting absorption and contemplation (Fried) in one picture, alienation from the picture plane
4. The idea of repetition and reproduction and loss of aura of originality, the devalue of precious originals and the fetish of art. The idea of the artist as the creator of the artworks as personal interrogation (see Greenberg and Kosuth), repetition associated with capitalist production (McCollum), assumption from advertisement
5. Painting as by convention a specific though utmost importance art category. Modernist theory and its limitation showed that art need to be considered at larger scale and going beyond single discipline medium-specificity. The evolution from painting as traditional high art, mediated through jurys and valued by the Crowd. The idea and concept (Kosuth), the ready-made and the loss of importance of artist manual engagement. The aesthetic judgment of art as the realm of taste that got separated from art theory (Kosuth, de Duve).
6. Art as sign for art, art as sign for cultural life and as transgression between high and low art reproductive systems replacing realities of original art by experience or simulations of art as cultural product. Seeing as spectacle in society (Debord). 'Surrogates' as dominator for sign for total quantity of pictures in general (Winer, 1986) space of seeing as another sign . McCollum is embracing Fried's notion of 'theatricality as means for reflective critique of way of consumption as cultural product.

Opposing Argument
1. Application of formal aspects that were considered literally and limited by a formal that in itself is a convention of art, the ready to paint white canvas as commodity that restricted to 'push the limits' further
2. The end of painting was predicted several times (Paul Delarchoe after rise of Daguerrtypes, Donald Crimp after rise of Reinhardt black paintings and Susan Sontag), the end is merely the end of separation of disciplines and its medium-specificity (painting from sculpture etc) and the evolvment of discovering 'mixed media' approaches. An appearing repetitiveness and work in series as rejection of uniqueness and originality through repetition that add an aspect of time and replication. The trouble with Modernist painting was its approach as problem-solving activity for basic problems stated once by Greenberg
3. The spatial experience of the relationship object and subject in a gallery space is a controlled space and efforts to place art outside in non-controllable spaces were often rejected by the artists. The appropriation of McCollum surrogates e.g Architectural Digest show that those spaces are staged spaces and thus controlled. The question open who is the director of the play and who is being controlled, the object.
4. Benjamin's thesis and repeated by McCollum that the original is not important (loss of aura), a limited edition is 'annoying' (McCollum). The distinction between copies and original is not happening, the attractiveness of blockbuster exhibitions to see 'originals' and to feel the space of presence can not be copied. Ultimately it is the collector who estimates the value of art objects, not the artist. Further the artistic practices of large scale art today are realized not through a system of reproduction but by system of alienated task separation, teams of craftsmen and engineers are realizing an art project the artist is providing the idea (see Kosuth and against Greenberg) Open question of how authorship and originality matters today (Anker, 2009) Irony, McCollum are based on a master mould to produce his 'Surrogates' and not based on readymades from a
5. Painting is still an area that artists today are embracing more and more, not as a window through one sees reality but the format to create realities as a discourse and reflection on social, political and cultural conditions. Art as the generic form is just another convention to categorize cultural products indifferently (critic against de Duve)
6. When art is becoming a sign for art , than the original can be omitted (see example of money as social reality today money is not needed as physical item any longer for exchange). Irony that McCollum 'Surrogates' are further appropriated as another sign for commodity (see ads, wallpaper)

Conclusion
This essay highlighted the evolution of Modernist Art and influences of Minimal Art and the blank canvas' as the void to fill on McCollum's serial work 'Plaster Surrogates'. Underlying art theories were analyzed and put in context with their relevance for understanding 'Plaster Surrogates'.
McCollum 'Surrogates' appropriates Modernist Art through a formal and literal approach. The critical reflection on mass-consumption and questions of authorship and originality is emphasized through a serial mass produced objects that reject a deeper connection with individual works but keeps the viewer as the subject of a spectacle in a gallery space at distance. The void that opens up cannot be filled by the artworks itself. The question raised how painting can fill the void and how painting and art in general can encourage the viewer for a deeper estrangement as a self-reflective experience.
Not all questions could be answered. McCollum's work were made in the 1980s, long after Post-Modernism was declared. Other theories or concepts might be relevant in understanding different perspectives of 'Surrogates' and McCollum's serial produced art objects. Those sources though could not be covered in the time and scope of this essay.