



R.B. KITAJ

Response to the Presentation of the Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts Degree

Commencement - Saturday, May 13, 1995

Paramount Theater, Oakland

I won't be long. Thank you all for this great honor, but also for stimulating my very real homesickness. I've lingered in Europe since the Fifties, and, in the immortal words of Sam Goldwin, I've passed a lot of water since then. So, that's why I've come all this way to be here, because I'm looking around at my own country again, too many years after I first slipped out of New York harbor as a teenage sailor boy. Also, my radiant wife just died, too young and too soon for us to return together.

It fascinates me that you wish to honor the most controversial painter I seem to be. It must mean that the teaching and learning of that big thing called art has not withered here into stale conformity as it has elsewhere in these last years of this century of heroic and dissident modernism. You have made me a Doctor for the third time and since I am so over-qualified, the least I can do is offer you, I mean the young artists among you who are just entering the vale of tears called art, this prescription, this art lesson. To the old injunction 'To thine own self be true', I would add, 'Because you are the only person in the whole world who can be yourself.'

But beware of my example. Because I failed to heed the advice of H.L. Menken, who said, 'Be nice to everyone on your way up because you're going to need 'em on your way down.'

Some people think I've made a fairly radical art. True to one's self. And so here is a last fairly radical personal message, also true to myself. There's a whole lot more to a person than meets the eye. Now we all know that. But I also like to think that there's a whole lot more to a painting, or a drawing, than meets the eye. Not a very popular idea.

Thank you all.