

Michael Sandle

Foreword

Alexander Adams has written an extremely timely book and I am very pleased that I have been asked to write the foreword for it. I became first aware of Alexander Adams at a webinar organised by the Public Statues and Sculpture Association, of which I am currently the Patron. The webinar was about the fashion for toppling statues in the present climate of historical—or maybe that should read “hysterical”—revisionism. I noticed that many of the non-speaking participants wanted the moderator to stop him saying his piece because they did not—amongst other things—want to hear themselves described as “the Managerial Class”, which in many cases they were. I don’t think there were many forklift drivers present. Adams will make more enemies with this, his third book, because he always has had the moral courage to say exactly what he thinks in the present culture of real or perceived politically correct and woke issues, which often savagely repress any contrary view.

I am happy to praise *Artivism: The Battle for Museums in the Era of Postmodernism* for several reasons. We live in dangerous and, I believe, decadent times when freedom of speech and opinion is under threat and language is being constantly traduced from its real meaning. Adams uses language consistently correctly because he is exceptionally erudite and his research is far reaching and scholarly—no tortured or incomprehensible sentences, thank God! His arguments are laid down with exemplary clarity throughout this book. You do not have to accept every one of

his views but he relentlessly hones in on to his main target—“artivism”—with ice-cold precision. He doesn’t take prisoners.

All “artivism” is not necessarily bad. In this book there is a very moving account of two women artists—Claude Cahun and Suzanne Malherbe, who during the 1930s were both involved in Surrealist and anti-fascism movements. The latter they were able to physically act out during the Nazi occupation of Jersey, at great risk to themselves, and were in fact sentenced to death; fortunately, as the war was drawing to a close, it wasn’t carried out. But—and this is the point that the author makes so abundantly clear—much of “artivism” is indeed malevolent. The so-called “deep state” is often involved and if anyone thinks that is just a conspiracy theory, they will have forgotten the CIA and MI6 infiltration of *Encounter* magazine. If anyone thinks that the notion of the deep state is just a fantasy, they should look up Operation Gladio.

It is a melancholy fact that “real” (or what could be described as “high”) art is under threat by “artivism”, for reasons which Adams is able to lay bare with forensic accuracy. The current art world is more corrupt than ever, with museums and actors like the Frieze Fair acting as “tastemakers” and exercising far too much control. Our once great institutions bear some responsibility for this malaise, as Adams points out beyond controversy. I am possibly not free from bias when I write that this book hits very many nails firmly on the head, because I now have the mindset of a taxi driver—no disparagement meant to taxi drivers—but when I look at so much of contemporary art now, I can’t help thinking: “Do you call this rubbish art? My two-year-old daughter could do better!” I mean it too. Art today has become an inflated and politicised industry instead of the vocation it was when I started my career. As Winston Churchill could have said: “Never, in the history of Western civilisation, has so little art been achieved by so many!”

Michael Sandle, October 2021