

to be heard – how art makes a difference in society

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We are living in interesting times. The recent political happenings – names do not have to be named – are causing everyone to think about society's current situation. Even I as someone who is not particularly inclined to letting politics affect their life, have never spoken as much about politics as in these days. Issues like these can feel overwhelming and numbing, and leave many of us wondering what we can do, and how we can actively create a healthy present and future.

As an artist, my contemplations are particularly circling around the question what role the arts play in this context. There has to be a point in our daily grind as artists that goes beyond making ourselves (and potentially other people) happy. More than ever I am realizing how much power and responsibility art(ists) can have in influencing our collective existence on this planet.

This realization has been a gradual process. Growing up, I often felt that artistic minds are being dismissed as “dreamers”, living in a fantasy world far away from what the broad mass believes the “real society” to be. Probably because in school, subjects like politics and history were usually very much separated from music or art. In school, you were obligated to decide for one or the other: head (= science) or heart (= arts). This division is one reason for what I believe creates a lot of the problems in our current society. I am going to elaborate this thought in a minute.

Coupled with some good old teenage angst, it is only understandable that I as an artist used to feel like an alien, and at that age, schoolmates never fail to make you feel like a weirdo.

But as I grew older and into a more mature and observing mindset, I started realizing what art can do to people – consciously and subconsciously.

Art is what channels peoples' feelings. A political interview or a news report may certainly cause reactions in people – but the art that reflects the zeitgeist provides a much stronger expression, and it has the capability to touch people on a much deeper level. In contrast to the very literal and direct realm of politics, art is often more abstract; it can imply so many different layers of the same thing. Even if a piece of art is based off of a very concrete event, the perception and interpretation is a choice that each individual person is free to make. The interpretation can be projected on society in general, or an individual story, or personal emotions, or something completely different. This makes art timeless. You do not necessarily have to know the political or societal background of the artwork in order to let it touch you. The political happenings might be new, but the atmosphere and the emotions that they evoke are universally applicable. This gives the creator as well as the consumer a healthy objectivity towards socio-political issues without ignoring them, and it makes you realize that the emotions you feel and the problems you (imagine to) have have been felt and had by others before.

Earlier on, I was mentioning the impact of school education on personal development, and how the separation of science and arts can be problematic. What I mean by this is that more often than not, school suggests a fairly confined way of thinking. The way it teaches students is very definite – grades are based off of whether something is good or bad, there is no neutral state of something to just be; the curriculum predetermines what we learn about a certain topic; and students are being put into boxes – the shy one, the perky one, the artistic one, the aggressive one, the nerd. It ignores the fact that different things can exist at the same time without interfering with each other or diminishing each others' importance. That everything is connected; that I am a part of you, and you are a part of me, and we all are a part of everyone and everything. Now if the school system would encourage this way of thinking more, society would develop in a different way.

I believe that the root cause for violence, discrimination, racism, inequality, war, and all the other issues of our modern world

lies in people who are not happy with themselves and their lives. People who experienced hardships in their childhood that have never been resolved and thus develop into toxic behavior. People who are ruled by fear, which means being ruled by their ego. People who do not love themselves and suffer from deep insecurities about their own existence. People who are afraid of their real self and therefore project all the negativity they hold within onto the outward world. Nobody is inherently evil. Destructive behavior is just the result of unawareness.

That being said, the thing that I think would greatly benefit world peace is to engage each and every person to practice self-improvement. That might be in the form of psychotherapy, meditation, or mindfulness. Because everybody has issues with themselves. It's a part of human existence. If these issues were addressed early on, the risk of developing serious mental and emotional problems would be diminished. If everyone would love and accept themselves more, be more conscious and intentional, and had the ability to distinguish between their ego (= fear, anger, violence) and their real selves (= love and peace), the world would be a better place. We cannot attempt to solve society's problems by focusing on the whole. Because it is too big, and cannot be brought under control. The only thing we can control is ourselves - our thoughts, actions, and reactions; however we can only control ourselves when we know and have a loving relationship to ourselves. If each person worked on themselves in this capacity, we could transform society individually together.

Now it would be very cost- and work-intensive to enforce personal coaching for everyone.

So what other ways are there to make humans better? Art is the answer.

Art provides a unique kind of education. It is not about drilling knowledge into your brain, it is about educating the heart, about emotional and personal growth. And this is the kind of education that schools need more of.

As I said before, art has the ability to touch people on a very deep level. It makes us vulnerable and get more in touch with ourselves. The more we are in touch and in peace with ourselves, the easier it is for us to acknowledge everything around us and maintain a loving, gentle, and peaceful attitude towards everything and everyone around us. Fear is what separates us. Love is what brings us together, realizing we are all more alike than we are different.

Furthermore, consuming or practicing art makes us think and approach the world in a different way. Art requires us to be open, to be willing to learn new things, to be in touch with our true self, and to share the love. Art is a universal language, and it does not care about nationality, gender, skin color, or all the other pigeon holes we made up. If this way of thinking would be adopted by the broad society, much more positive energy would be put out.

As scary and uncertain the current socio-political situation is, it might be a cathartic experience. It's the natural flow of life: conflicts rumbling in the underground for a long time will erupt sooner or later. When all the negativity has come to the surface, we know what the deal is. The slate is clean, and the truth is unveiled. With this honesty, we can resolve the conflict and transform the negative into positive energy. It is important to be aware of the dark side, because then we are not as afraid of it. What we accept loses control over us. Awareness gives us the power to change our situation for the better. Art makes us aware, and awareness creates an artistic experience. What I mean by this is that art makes us perceive the world in a more present way. No matter if we just watch or listen, or if we are making art ourselves, we can dive into another form of consciousness for a little while. Maintaining an artistic mindset of openness, positivity, acceptance, and love can help transform negativity into positivity. Being artistic does not necessarily mean that you entertain a job in the arts. Working as an artist and being artistic does not have to be the same. There can be professional artists who actually are not thinking in an artistic way. On the other hand, you can be an engineer or a nurse or a waiter and still approach what you do with an artistic mindset. It is for everyone. Once we have experienced how art can transform us for the better, once we have found access to this realm of higher consciousness, I believe there is hope for society.

Love trumps hate. Art trumps the ego.