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## **Artistic Imagination: Transforming Sorrow into Beauty Truth and Art**

Artistic imagination transforms sorrow into beauty, truth and art by making the invisible visible. Imaginative creativity expresses inner emotions and what it means to be a human being in the world. Imagination in the arts makes public both personal and collective innerness, and invites the viewer to share the artist's journey of self discovery. To share and partially experience the joy of artistic discovery requires the viewer's imaginative and emotional response.

Beauty gives us pleasure and a deep sense of satisfaction. As we engage in the experience of beauty, truth is revealed. By 'truth' I mean the honest and sincere recognition of being in harmony with the experience of our human existence in the world. Truth exposes inner emotions and archetypal images that may hold value for the artist, as well as the viewer. These images seem to have a mythic origin that connects to universal truth transcending our cultural differences. It is the wisdom that resides in the intuitive and sensuous body that guides the artistic process, if only we stop and listen to the inner voice of our imagination.

Plato (1974) in *The Republic* written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., points out that it was more important to educate the mind over the body, and he seems to have been the precursor of the Cartesian mind-body split of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. With the

advent of the industrial revolution, our connection to nature and intuitive body-knowing became increasingly suppressed. Body-knowing is our sensuous and emotional connection to our inner nature as well as the natural environment in which we live. As we lost our connection to nature and the land that sustains us, body-knowing became a separate and distinct type of knowledge from the rationality of the ego mind. Plato banished the poets because he feared the wisdom of the sensuous body, and over time, the artists and poets became the keepers of this hidden knowledge and made it visible in their works of art.

Kant (1797) describes the imagination as a natural function that lies at the basis of all perception. It provides the fundamental structure to what we experience, and what we experience is pre-determined by the imagination. Kieran Egan (1992) notes that “the imagination can generate in us ideas that cannot be expressed or represented in any other form...fill[ing] us with complex emotions involving wonder and the sense of the sublime” (p.21).

Our imaginative faculties connect us to the source of our being, which is embedded in our bodily experiences. From the day we are born, we use our imaginations to create meaning from our environment, and to visualize our place in both the landscape and the culture. The innate ability to creatively balance between reality and memory allows a child to learn through the sensuous and emotional body wisdom, which is inspired by fantasy and play.

Freud (1976) felt that “we ought surely to look in the child for the first traces of imaginative activity...the child’s best loved and most absorbing occupation is play. Perhaps we may say that every child at play behaves like a imaginative [artist] in that he creates a world of his own, or more truly, he rearranges the things of his world and orders it in a new way that pleases him better” (p.197). Some artists have retained their childlike sense of play and wonder. It requires childlike faith to believe that the creative process has the possibility of redemption and that the sorrow of the world contains truth and beauty that is the object of the artistic pursuit.

The artist as transformer will be capable of flexibility and imaginative free play with the artistic medium, yet have a strong basis in reality. For me, the work of art makes visible valuable knowledge that I cannot access in any other way except through the artistic creative process. It seems to me that when the artist is able to relinquish ego control for the time being, it is possible to access a deep inner wisdom that lies waiting to be heard. The body naturally knows what needs to be expressed and imagination will guide the artist through the creative process.

This body-knowing transcends the sorrow of our feeling of alienation and separateness that we experience in our individual bodies. In my own work, the images often carry deep intuitive body-knowing that gives insight into knowledge I didn’t have previously. Often there is a sense of humour that gently comes

through the images that develop during the creative process. The paint is the medium that can illuminate the dark shadow memories that emerge in the beauty of colour and form. By making inwardness open to evaluation and interpretation, the work of art does the work of exposing truth of being in the world with a subtle and profound wisdom.

Csikszentmihayi (1996) points out that “research on the notion of the creative process and the imagination has found that the imagination is a necessary part of the creative process, and that somewhere between the imagination and the reality principle, the mind can play on a infinite measure of continuum between these binary opposites. Both imagination and rationality are necessary in order that separation from the here and now may occur without a complete severing with the past” (p. 63).

Heidegger (1971) notes that “art lets truth originate” by a “founding leap” (p.78) that connects us to the source of inner knowledge. Young (2001) concurs that the leap to the source provides a fundamental insight that all is as it should be, as “the foundation of truth consists in a coming-out-of-oblivion” (p.23). In my own work, the experience of this ‘founding leap’ happens when I connect to the images that have emerged in a meaningful way. It seems to be the moment when the intellect and the wisdom of the body are in harmony and have been reconciled, if only temporarily. This ‘leap’ is a feeling that things are exactly as they are supposed to be, as if the pieces of a puzzle have finally fallen into place.

For me, the feeling of this 'leap' is an indescribable inner satisfaction that makes everything good.

Barrow (1988) notes that the imagination "must be cultivated indirectly...and grows only as a consequence of our efforts in imparting understanding...and it [requires that] it be taught in an imaginative way, so that much that cannot be taught may be caught (p. 90). Arts education is invaluable in facilitating students' imagination and by aiding them to explore their inner worlds, they will discover to their surprise, a spontaneity that opens up a place where the search for their deepest inner knowing is rewarded by a larger view of what it means to be human. This process of discovery can begin the journey to the Self, informed by Being and being in the world and the special gifts that wait to be discovered and given form. With the pleasure and delight of discovery and the development of skills, the artist begins to understand that all life is cyclical and without sorrow there is no beauty, truth or art.

Art works show what cannot be expressed in any other way. It seems to me that artistic expression of the essence of existence is difficult to articulate in any other language than the arts. In my experience it can only be found in the act of creating form that comes from going inside the wisdom of the body. What is being revealed is genuine emotion that contains profound meaning both the artist and the culture. Naturally, rules and skills of the particular artistic medium play a large part in how successful the artist is in doing this. And I don't mean to imply

that the artist creates in a vacuum either because works of art are always influenced by time and place.

Artistic creativity is not subject to the will and can seem illusive unless one is willing to forfeit ego control for a time and really listen and enter in a dialogue with the medium. This requires trust in the creative process as the artist enters into a different state of being. It is that place where intuition guides the dialogue and a collaborative relationship is established with the art medium allowing the forms and figures to enter into the visible realm.

As these *Gestalt* images come in and out of form, the artist's ability to trust her body's emotional responses may illuminate the patterns that deepen the meaning inherent in the work. The artist must be willing to follow where these images lead, deep into the unconscious personal and collective memory. As we learn to listen and respond to our emotional body-knowing and develop the ability to improvise, the artist develops the skills that allow the manifestation of the invisible. It is in the *Gestalt* of the figures and forms that actual life experience is revealed. The imagination will then help the artist create meaning from these sometimes complex forms in order that the essential message contained in the art work may be grasped by the intellect.

Harding (1967) notes that the imagination is the guide that the artist must follow to truly see with the mind's inner eye. She calls it "that intellectual lens through

the medium of which the poetical observer sees the object of his observation, modified both in form and colour” (p. 29). The artist that follows the guidance of the imagination into the realm of unconscious form creates from a uniquely personal perspective. As the ‘I-Eye’, the artist makes visible their original perception of the world. Each human being has their own voice and has something unique to say, but one has to be true to oneself and have the freedom to create. This unique potentiality that each of us has underlies all ideas of authenticity.

The artist must strive to find her inner and authentic voice first. It is through the individual eye and hear that universal truth can be manifested. However, the artist builds on a cultural and historical background of past achievements in their search for truth and authenticity rests on the foundations of what has come before.

Eagleton (2000) argues that it is our imagination that enables us to empathize with others. He notes that it is the artistic imagination that may facilitate the ability to empathize on a universal and global scale. Artists know that their works of art are not only a personal search for meaning but are also cultural in nature. Social themes have often been used in the arts to critique and comment on social aspects of a culture. Cultural interpretations convey meaning on our bodily existence that expands our experience of the world. If we are not born cultural beings, then culture must be socialized in us. We can learn much from the arts

of different cultures in explaining and illuminating the differences that make unique human beings. In the sharing of our culture, we create community and appreciate the values of others as well as celebrate our own. Wendy Steiner (2001) concurs that aesthetic socialization exposes us to the experience of beauty and shared values of the culture.

Throughout human history artists have created works of art that have left a moving emotional testament of the cultures that have come before. Since the caves of Lascaux were painted, works of art have provided meaning and truth about Being that is shared from one generation to the next through myths, rituals and the arts. It requires the emotional participation of the people in the culture to preserve and pass on the meaning and memories of experience.

The arts touch the hearts of people and speak a language that resonates in the emotional body imparting the lessons that an individual needs to know to live a humane life in harmony with the world, society and their environment. Oral 'primitive' societies still know this truth, but it has been suppressed in western society for hundreds of years. Contemporary western society still lives with the Cartesian separation of mind from the body, and the rejection of the emotional, sensuous, intuitive inner wisdom of the body, in favour of intellectual rationalism.

Kant (1899) described the imagination as the synthesis between intuition, and what I would call inner body-knowing, and perception, or intellectual rationality

(p. vii). The artist still knows that intellectual rationality must be balanced by valuing intuition and the sensuous and emotional wisdom of the body. It is through the creative process that the artist constantly reconnects to the affective part of Being, and bring back artifacts, works of art that bear witness to the artist's inner journey.

It is in participation with the arts that we rediscover the joy of being alive that comes from within and that informs our relationships to the world. The arts are a celebration of lived experience and transform sorrow into joy. The inner response to the illumination of Being is immediate and intuitive and all other knowledge springs from it. We recognize it and feel it in the body as rapture and inspiration. The arts connect our inner emotional body to the outer cognitive world and the awareness of the sensuous body grounds the individual within their culture.

This has great significance for education as it is the social institution that teaches culture to the next generation. Socialization in a democratic society recognizes the equal status of all cultures and genders and honours a universal and shared human dignity. Contemporary culture must learn to respect the differences between cultures and genders and the diversity of all living being in the world and celebrate our shared human values. It is through engaging the student's imagination that appreciation for diversity of other cultures can be taught. It is the function of all the arts to manifest Being and being human in the world and

we can learn to understand each other through sharing our arts. Education in the arts can facilitate a dialogue between cultures as we learn to appreciate the beauty and truth that is inherent in all the arts across cultures.

Arts Education can affirm our connection to the wisdom of the body as students use their imagination to emotionally engage with the arts. The creative process teaches students to respond intuitively to the art medium in order to express their inner emotions. The pleasure encountered by engaging the inner world and the discovery of truth and beauty facilitates emotional and intellectual growth. The arts can facilitate a notion of culture that is rooted in the sensuous and emotional responses to beauty and inner body wisdom.

As Charles Taylor (1991) points out, we need to rediscover the ideal of the notion of authenticity in order that each person can be true to themselves while being connected to a more communal “horizon of significance” (p.39). Students who are encouraged to express themselves creatively and search for self fulfillment are more likely to grant that others have the right to do the same. In this way the individual who seeks enlightenment and self expression within the artistic medium may also express valuable knowledge that reflects their community. The arts act as a mirror on the world and reveal inner emotional and sensuous experience that cannot be communicated in any other way.

Artist and the works of art they left behind throughout time have made visible the invisible world of inner emotional wisdom, both for personal and cultural insight. Experience of this inner emotional and sensuous reality, tempered by the intellect is the source of all creative artistic expression.

Arts Education teaches the imaginative skills and rules required to express and appreciate aesthetic knowledge that lies deep in the body. Participation in the arts is a necessary part in the education of the next generation. Imaginative participation in the arts facilitates appreciation of the differences as well as the universality of being human. The arts across time and place reveal and share the timeless beauty and truth of all cultures, and may facilitate understanding and empathy for ourselves and others.

The arts are the foundation of all learning and are a vital part of the educational curriculum because artistic imagination makes visible the transformation of sorrow into beauty, truth and art.

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