

Art and the Transformation of Humanity

By Van James

"Art transforms the sense-perceptual world in a 'speaking' manner, creating new meaning. In this sense it is an epilogue to ancient sacred life, where *everything* was meaningful. And thus art is perhaps a *prelude* to a new epoch of mankind, where the human being is *giving* meaning to existence." *Georg K hlewind*

At one time art was a sacred teaching and a spiritual practice that confirmed truths about the universe and about the human being. Owen Barfield referred to this time as one of "original participation," where a direct, instinctive-intuitive relationship existed between humanity and Nature. "The essence of original participation is that there stands behind the phenomena, and on the other side of them from me, a represented, which is of the same nature as me. Whether it is called 'mana,' or by the names of many gods and demons, or God the Father, or the spirit world, it is of the same nature as the perceiving self, inasmuch as it is not mechanical or accidental, but psychic and voluntary." Barfield also spoke of "final participation," where what has been lost through self-conscious ego development -- a falling away from oneness with the divine, characterized in the imagination of the "fall from paradise" -- may be rediscovered by humanity on a new level of spiritual experience and co-creative inner initiative. "Original participation fires the heart from a source outside itself; the images enliven the heart. But in final participation...the heart is fired from within...and it is for the heart to enliven the images."



Artwork by: Van James

Such a path of development is what Richard Tarnas calls "...the deepest passion of the Western mind..." that is, "...to reunite with the ground of its being." And what is clearly needed for this reuniting are new mysteries founded in part on an awakening to a middle path between inner and outer world, between innocence and experience, masculine and feminine, science and religion, between what the poet Schiller described as *form* and *substance*. Here equanimity is required, for only in balancing these polarities is the art of freedom truly found.

Carl Jung despaired that "Our Western mind lacking all culture in this respect, has never yet devised a concept, not even a name, for the union of opposites through the middle path, that most fundamental item of inward experience which could respectably be set against the Chinese concept of Tao."

However, in his discussion of aesthetics, James Joyce describes something that begins to characterize this direction. He describes two orders of art. He calls them proper and improper art. Improper art has two sides to it: that which excites desire for the object depicted, and that which inspires loathing or fear of it. The first form of improper art Joyce called "pornographic," not because it necessarily has anything to do with sexuality, but because it seduces us and pulls us towards it. It is sweet and beautiful but not true. The second kind of improper art he referred to as "didactic" for it tries to teach us a lesson and thrusts itself upon us. This type of improper art is true yet anything but beautiful. However, a third form of art, proper art, has nothing to do with exciting or with controlling, with pushing or with pulling us. As Joseph Campbell describes it: "Proper art does not move one either to desire or to loathing, either toward the object or away from it. One is held, on the contrary, in aesthetic arrest, a moment of sensational (aesthetic) contemplation, as before a recognized revelation, or in Joyce's language, an *epiphany*." Proper art leaves one free and is both beautiful and true at the same time.

cont. on pg 11

A real artist may
create his picture in
a lonely desert...
gods look over his
shoulder; he creates
in their company.
What does he care
whether or not
anybody admires
his picture?

Rudolf Steiner

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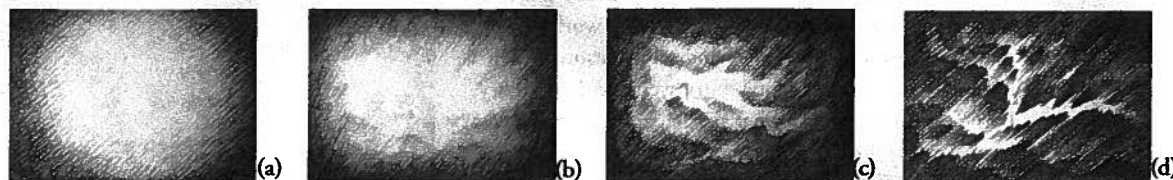
cont. from pg 1

IMPROPER ART	PROPER ART	IMPROPER ART
Pomographic	Freedom	Didactic
Desire	Epiphany	Loathing
Pulling towards	Aesthetic arrest	Pushing away

Similarly, Rudolf Steiner described two sources of art: that which arises as visionary inner imagination and that which is drawn out of or intuited from the outer world of experience. The one source he describes as expressionism and the other as impressionism—not to be confused with the two

historical art styles. These two sources must not be taken to their extremes, as can be and is often done in art, but must be married in such a way that a middle or higher path is achieved. This middle path of proper art is the language of the interior nature of the universe and a revelation of the spirit. It can be seen as a Christian-Rosicrucian path, in the sense of Steiner's Anthroposophy or Spiritual Science.

A drawing exercise that might be explored as a way to experience this *middle path* in art is the following: take a white sheet of paper and a black pencil, crayon, or piece of charcoal, and shade the outer area of the page (a) to create a radiating light in the center of the page. You draw only darkness but you create a glowing light by virtue of the negative space that arises. The goal is that the darkness does not impinge upon the light but actually enhances its shine as much as possible. Blending comes in handy here. Then take a second sheet of paper and begin in the same way, but now, consciously go too far with the darkness and put a visible pressure on the light (b). Then, as a third exercise, go yet again further with contracting the light (c) by putting even more tension on it, limiting the glow of light. In a fourth sketch, put so much pressure on the light that it becomes like lightning (d). These four exercises may be done all at once, on one sheet of paper, but by beginning each one anew you preserve a record of the overall experience, an exercise in expansion (a) and contraction (d).



The Greek philosopher Aristotle, in accordance with a middle path practice, said: "Virtue is the human capacity, aided by skill and reason, to determine between the too little and the too much." The above mentioned drawing exercise is an example of how one can develop the inner organ or soul-spiritual muscle Aristotle called *virtue*. If approached in the *proper* way, all art can be a medium for moral-ethical development. Proper art is a virtuous activity!

Josef Beuys, the late German avant garde performance-installation artist and professor of sculpture, declared that: "Every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and condition our lives." This points to a very broad understanding of the meaning of art, for it suggests that the greatest work of art, the one we are constantly engaged in perfecting, is *ourselves*.

However we attempt to define it, art has the inherent characteristic of demonstrating the human condition, expressing and diagnosing what is present as the given human reality, and just as significantly, influencing and working on transforming that condition. Art brings healing and dispenses further motives into the inner life of the soul, whereby it works into the future forming of our humanity. "The basis of artistic creation is not what is," said Steiner, "but what might be; not the real but the possible." Art is truly one of the greatest gifts at our disposal for it builds and fashions our actual humanity. It is a moral force, for good and for ill. It is a doorway through which the spiritual gains access and is made visible in the physical, material world - by raising matter to the spiritual, base materials are turned to gold. It is the Philosopher's Stone that creates enjoyment and pleasure, as well as instigates catharsis and metamorphosis. In this way, spirit and art are inseparable just as the images we survey from the history of art are inseparable from human development and the transformation of human consciousness. Art literally and visually provides us with a record of our evolving and transforming humanity.

-So What's Your Experience?-

Wrestling with the Demon of Reaction (Issue 14)

The article that stuck with me the most is *Wrestling with the Demon of Reaction*. This is something I always struggle with; reacting to things. *Dennis Kloczek* is right, a lot of times those responses are automatic, and those automatic responses begin to own you. I have found something knowledgeable in all the newsletters. *Artic, Grady, AR*

Sleep, Dreams and How to Develop Them (Issue 16)

The article by *Dr. Lipson* confirmed for me lucid dreaming, for whatever reason, I am always aware of my dream state. I could go into much greater detail but suffice it to say I enjoyed that short article. *Paul, Huntsville, TX*

True North: The Compass of the Heart (Issue 17)

I enjoyed reading the main article by *William Bento*, called *True North, The Compass of the Heart*. It was enlightening to read because that is exactly where my focus is in anthroposophy and astrophysics. Learning the zodiacal relations with human beings' existence. I know that the light within us is the part of God that seeks to grow, seeks to absorb the elements of the (sun) as do the plants through photosynthesis; to receive that true energy. We meditate to reach deep within to tap that light; the "I" bringing it to the surface. By doing so, we awaken a divine gift, true consciousness. The impressions will be abundant, as vast as is the universe. I agree with Mr. Bento as he states "alignment of our 'I' with the grand lawfulness of the cosmos" is the True North, for I believe that once at the cross roads of the after-life it will be needed. *Maurice, Cumberland, MD*

And thus noble
humankind
works mightily
For century after century
on its own kind,
For what good people
can accomplish
Is not accomplished in
the narrow space
of life.
That is why we live on
after death,
No less effective there
than once we were
in life.
The good deed and the
lovely word
Strive on immortally as
we strove mortally.
Thus too, the artist lives
through time
unmeasured.
Enjoy your immortality!
—Goethe,
The Artist's Apotheosis