

Art For Healing

Using art to express our reality and effect change

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Art as identity...

When one thinks of the various aspects of art in today's world we tend to leave it in the realm of the decorator or the fine artist. Decorators use art to add color and mood to a space, creating a sense of style. Museums, galleries and collectors buy art to advocate and record the cultural identities of our society. The audience that views art in these settings receives a vision of the artist's perception of the world. There is a wonderful connection that happens when we can identify with another's experience of the world. But what do we actually gain from another's experience? Possibly the ability to recognize our own experience as valid.

Art as expression....

When we begin to realize that our own experience is valid we need to express it on our own terms. This becomes difficult in the face of observing art that is produced by trained professionals. Before western civilization transformed art into a commodity, its purpose was for honoring the spirits of the universe and for healing the body and soul. Art moved us beyond our fears of the unknown, allowing us to integrate life's experiences in order to live fully and in harmony with the earth. Today we are not so unlike our ancestors. Stress over our fears disconnects us from our source - the bottomless well of inspiration that only the imagination can tap. Too difficult to define, we leave the imagination to those few who seem to be "born" with it, when in actuality it resides in the youngest of children and the oldest of our elders. In fact, our creativity, our true nature, exists beyond the mind-body experience of this world.

Art as catalyst....

When inner conflict arises between our emotions and our reality it causes stress. The images produced through art have the ability to resolve these conflicts on a metaphorical level. The body responds to imagery and imagination much in the same way that it does in reality - processing either as real. Studies of stress on the immune system also clearly demonstrate that the use of imagery in visualization and art making is an effective tool for reducing stress and releasing negative thoughts and emotions. Barbara Ganim in *Art and Healing* states that "split-brain research ... reveals that we think and process our experiences, feelings and emotions as images first and words second ... while our verbal memories are held in the left side of the brain, our imagistic associations of all the emotions we've experienced are stored in the right side of the brain ... imagery rather than words would be the most direct route to get in touch with these painful emotions. and then to release the images of these feelings and emotions through art."

In Candace B. Pert's *Molecules of Emotion*, with ground-breaking research on neuropeptides and their receptors, she notes a two-way system of communication at work. "There is good evidence that the flow of peptides change the physiologic responses, which then create the feelings we experience ... and that the chemical release of endorphins cause the feeling of pain relief ... conversely we can bring about the release of endorphins through our state of mind...". A subtle energy exchange happens as the artistic process changes the external responses to the material world and opens the gateway to the world of the imagination causing a reduction in stress and conversely bringing new information from the nonphysical world to manifest a new reality.

Art as a healing tool...

We don't have to be artists to access the images that lie within waiting to heal our lives. Only the willingness to remain open to the process and suspend judgment is required. Many times the body can be healed through these connections of the mind-body-spirit. But it is not the goal of expressive art to solely focus on the corporal. The body is but a transient aspect of our existence and the mind but a mirror of our consciousness and ego. However the unconscious realm of the spirit lives beyond this world and universe in a stream of energy that is eternal. There is where our true nature lies and how art is able to express the miracle of who we are.

Benefits of creating art include...

- relaxation and stress reduction
- expression to connect with feelings
- using the imagination to transform pain
- a heightened sense of empowerment and well-being
- processing grief and trauma
- a focus to provide a sense of purpose
- documenting our experience

