The Role of Artistic Creativity in Shaping Humanity's Future

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Nebula by Van James

It should be rather obvious that artistic creativity has been a major influence in shaping human civilization over time. Architectural, sculptural, painted, musical, poetic-dramatic, and artistically moved-dance evidence from the past makes this abundantly clear. It is only in the last couple of century's or so that doubt in the benefits and purpose of artistic creation have crossed the collective mind, the ever-intensely focused intellect of humanity; is art just subjective self-expression, is it redundant reproduction, is it a playful luxury and just an investment possibility? Is art at all useful or meaningful?

Therefore, many studies have been undertaken attempting to quantify and justify art's continued existence in our technological age. One such study in the US was sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislators asking whether art had any measurable significance in the education of young people. The governors of the fifty United States paid for experts from various fields to research this question. Their empirical findings were published under the title *Reinventing the Wheel: A Design for Student Achievement in the 21st Century*, (1992). With many statistics, graphs and charts, this study came to some rather enlightening conclusions, namely:

Art excites learners and keeps them curious to learn more.
Art stimulates creative problem-solving, decision making skills, and critical thinking.
Art promotes developmentally informed perception.
Art helps promote self-discipline, self-esteem, and self-awareness.
Art provides the possibility for alternative ways of assessing students.
Art builds cooperative learning and develops multicultural understanding.
Art can integrate all subject areas in a school.

Many other independent studies have added to this list of benefits provided by artistic creativity in education and other fields. And yet politicians, administrators, teachers and parents still cut funding for art, strike opportunities for access to art, and dissuade young people from pursuing careers in art.

In considering humanity's future it is of interest that Rudolf Steiner said, "Art must become the lifeblood of the soul," (*The Younger Generation*, lecture 12) and he clearly pointed to the need for all human vocations to develop "artistic feeling"; as in the art of education (Waldorf), the art of healing (anthroposophically extended medicine), the art of agriculture (biodynamic farming), etc.

It is with this present situation in mind that the Visual Art Section at the Goetheanum has recently taken-up the question, "The Creative in the Artistic Process and its Meaning for the Human Being and Social Processes." Conversations amongst artists have already taken place on this topic and will be pursed as a research project into the future through further conferences and gatherings.

In the same vein, the Visual Art Section of North America has committed to an extended research project into "The Importance of Artistic Creativity for the Future Development of Humanity." It has organized on-line groups in Canada and California to take-up this question with more groups envisioned in the coming months.

In addition, more than a hundred participants gathered recently on the Nurturer'Studio online platform in Asia to address the question "The Role of Artistic Creativity in Shaping Humanity's Future". Valuable experiences were shared

and recorded by the participants from twenty countries and a follow-up session is planned for the autumn with questions such as: what characterizes the beginnings of artistic creativity, what is the nature of being in the process of a creative activity, being in "the zone", and what defines the conclusion of a creative process—when does one know an artwork is finished?

Because of the nature of these questions—however one wishes to formulate *the significance of art*—it suggests cross disciplinary collaboration with educators, health practitioners, social scientists, and others. For instance, an online conversation on this topic is planned with Waldorf alum (the field of youth work and education overlap here with the visual and performing arts). Tremendous potential gestates in the question underlying *artistic creativity*!

In Rudolf Steiner's words: "The artistic must not be allowed to exist in civilization as a pleasant luxury next to serious life, a luxury we consider an indulgence, even though we may have a spiritual approach to life in other ways. The artistic element must be made to permeate the world and the human being as a harmonious divine spiritual law." (*Essentials of Education*, lecture 3)

An important step in this Visual Art Section project is not just the gathering of previous research studies concerning the importance of art in the workplace, papers on the importance of art and creativity in education, medicine, therapies, commerce, politics and social life, but to question even deeper into what exactly is being tapped into, transformed and fashioned toward the future in the human being when artistic creativity is engaged in. And in this regard, how do we go about making art into *the lifeblood of the soul*?