

THE ARTIST AND THE ARTWORK:  
ADORNING THE MIND, THE WORLD

The writing of literature is a maverick endeavor, a gamble – as is all art. But we who create do so because we have to, because we cannot bear to live in a world bereft of imagination. Anaïs Nin, in *THE NOVEL OF THE FUTURE* (a fine treatise on creativity – far more engaging and to the point than many of her other works), expressed it better than I when she wrote: *“I could not live in any of the worlds offered to me: the world of my parents ... or the world of wars. I had to create a world of my own, like a climate, a country, an atmosphere in which I could breathe, reign, and recreate myself when destroyed by living. That, I believe, is the reason for every work of art.... When you make a world tol-*

*erable for yourself you make a world tolerable for others.... We write to taste life twice, in the moment, and in retrospection. We write, like Proust, to render all of it eternal, and to persuade ourselves that it is eternal. We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it.”*

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To be creative – to write, to paint, to sculpt, to make furniture, make films, to make song, to dance, to dream, to *make believe* – provides us with a more stimulating place in which we can better live and love and think.<sup>1</sup>

When we look at things, even blind, we ‘see’ through metaphor, and the outer world we ‘see’ is a reflection of our own inner worlds. In his book of essays *THE NECESSARY ANGEL*, Wallace Stevens says, “*The world about us would be desolate except for the world within us.*” The man-made cosmos is – as is much of our future – a subjective creation, an incarnation of our inner-mind. In a sense, our imaginations define the realities we experience by adorning the world with the mental ornaments we have collected along the way, like a crow gathering strands of tinsel and stray baubles to adorn its nest.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless, of course, we only want from life to be entertained, to be preoccupied until we fizzle out. Do we really crave to be computer-gamed to death? – to be televisedly held captive until our time is up? – or would we prefer to be carried aloft – to be borne away, not like wriggling prey in the gnarled talons of some gryphon, but spirited upward on wings of our own? Often that which makes us soar, with or without wings, might not be full-on art – maybe only a dream – but these uplifting experiences provide a connectedness, a heightened awareness that I seek to impart through my creations, most of which fall far short of being ‘art.’ Even in my preparation of food and drink I make certain attempts to elevate the senses. But I’ve opted to forego all recipes/menus in this volume – not because they are base or hedonistic, but because they did not quite fit in the same way my photography, my songs/lyrics, my scripts, my letters, or my sketches do *not* fit. No cartoons or comedy routines either, grimly enough.

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We do so to enrich our minds with what appeals aesthetically. And so, art should exist not only to better our lives, but to foster a future to which we can look forward. Carl Jung said that “*all art intuitively apprehends coming changes in the collective unconsciousness.*” I prefer to believe that art gives rise to these changes. There are artists known and unknown who perpetuate mankind’s future through their gift, through their creations.<sup>2</sup>

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To nurture the individual artist – rather than the mass production of so-called ‘art’ – is probably what Duchamp meant when he said that he didn’t care about art – it’s the artist that matters. The artist and the artwork should ideally never be separated.<sup>3</sup> The artwork when divorced from the artist has the propensity to become a graven image. Taken out of the life of the artist, the artwork loses its spirit, the very reason the artist created it.<sup>4</sup>

Is it unusual that without the artist’s or author’s signature, a work isn’t as ‘valuable’? To me, a work of art achieves higher significance when kept in some sort of referential context to the



<sup>2</sup> Still, we must be savvy enough not to latch on to inferior visions via hypsters (WARNING: ALL MODERN ARTISTS POSSESS THIS PROPENSITY e.g.: the elder Andy Warhol, who either foresaw how vapid our anti-culture would become – or else, he created it.)

<sup>3</sup> Taking a stance against the New Criticism that pays little regard to biographical or historical information, I’m also opposed to the academic predilection to pigeonhole literature and the arts – or for that matter, any field or occupation – never for over-specialization if it makes us imbeciles in other arenas because we have under-compensated as a result.

<sup>4</sup> Unless it was created *only* to make money, which renders it null and void in my ledger. *Value* goes far beyond what a piece can bring on the open market.

artist's life. Van Gogh's collected letters come to mind because they reveal facets of his artistic being, motives as to why he strove to create what he did.

The contemplative mind propagates culture, fragrance, insight, taste, *art* ... and much more, namely, it is the contemplative mind that provides the loam from which sprouts a deeper awareness. Consciousness often withers and dies when transplanted into a pressurized reality. And thus, the same is true of the collective imagination. To allow the collective imagination to be dragged down to the lowest common denominator is to allow for mass production (which can better our lives in many instances) to become nothing more than a money-making endeavor with the money-makers in control of our collective dreams. But how do we 'see' beyond this? And how do we live as artists if we do not sell our work? We do something else for money. Perhaps it's best to make art for fun but still remain serious about it.

What is more problematic than existence and how to continue merely existing is: How do we remain inspired? I like what Annie Dillard said about drying up if she didn't maintain the sense of "*willfully goofing off*" – or "*by digging a hole sideways*" as Francis Bacon the painter phrased it. Yes, frivolity is necessary. But I remain of the opinion that to be focused makes one great. On the other hand, distraction, when timely, allows us a greater form of focus.

So consciousness cannot spring from an infertile delta. Consciousness flourishes when it is seeded in the contemplative mind, a playful mind not preoccupied with the making of money. This consciousness can be cultivated into a finely designed short story, poem, or painting. These, in turn, channel that higher awareness from which they sprang, often in the form of a subjective truth.

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✧ Picasso said, “*Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.*” Although impossible to say it more precisely, I’d like to add: Art is a subjective truth that teaches us as much (if not more) than any objective fact or scientific theorem.

M I S S I O N  
A good comparison pertaining to the making of a fine wine can be applied to art as well. It is said that if you add a jot of garbage to a vat of the very best wine, you have a vat of garbage. And so it is with art. But garbage, like art, is subjective. And the subjective is always relative. You either like it or you don’t. Or, you might find it stimulating or even fascinating one day, and the next ... but on the third or fourth day a certain *ennui* might set in, robbing it of its initial impact. For this reason, I find my work going through many revisions, sometimes to the point of wiping out the very thing that originally inspired me. And then I have to start all over.

I O N  
To create is like dreaming out loud. The way it usually happens is that with my initial vision, I find it necessary to be awake and attentive, but then the supraliminal must be balanced by its opposite. Only after ‘sleeping,’ after giving myself an objective distance from what I have created, only then can I return for the *re-vision*. By doing so again and again, I strive to convey – in words or paint or clay, or whatever medium seems most appropriate or accessible – a feeling of exaltation, first, in myself, and hopefully in others, for without an audience, art is lonely.

So once again, thanks for being there.