PROMOTING PEACE THROUGH THE ARTS: THE ROLE OF ANTI-WAR AND PEACE ART IN BUILDING CULTURES OF PEACE

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Introduction

The power of the arts to promote peace lies in their emotive nature; the arts can help people feel the pathos and waste of war and help to instill a desire and commitment to end war and work for peace. All of the arts have a contribution to make - music, drama, literature, poetry, dance, film – and the *visual* arts, such as paintings, prints, posters, sculptures, and photography. This paper will focus on the visual arts.

This paper also explores the intersection between 'peace history' and 'art history' – in doing research for this paper; I have seen some of the history of war resistance through the eyes of artists. My involvement in peace museums internationally has also brought me into contact with anti-war and peace art and at the end of the paper I will give some examples of peace museums around the world and what they contain.

Anti-war and peace art

Anti-war imagery shows the destruction, horror and trauma of war while what I am calling 'peace art' is imagery and symbols of peace in a positive sense. In Peace Studies we talk about 'negative peace' as that which is defined by the absence of war, and 'positive peace' as all the conditions that contribute to a sustainable peace. In parallel to that we have anti-war art (negative imagery) and 'peace art' (positive imagery).

Before examining some of this imagery it is appropriate to first discuss the function of art in society. Herbert Read in his essay 'Art & society' (Read: 1969) said: *"society as a viable organic entity, is somehow dependent on art as a binding, fusing, energizing force."* He also notes that it is largely through surviving works of art that we have knowledge of early civilizations such as Sumer and Egypt. What does art today say about our society?

Artists emerge from their historical and political contexts. Some artists *respond* to the events of their time through art and by doing so can influence or help shape their societies by the imagery (and other arts) they produce. In other words, art reflects society but can also help to change it. Anti-war and peace art can express: testimony or witness to war's destruction; resistance to war; and/or transformation, inspiration and vision.

Art as testimony and witness

Historically art has been dominated by society's rulers, whose patronage supported artistic creation which glorified war. We are all familiar with 'heroic' battle scenes with kings on horseback and patriotic images of noble soldiers. One of the first artists to break with that tradition was Jacques Callot, who produced two series of etchings on 'The Miseries of War' depicting the horrors of the Thirty Years War which devastated central Europe in the 17th century.

Two hundred years later Francisco Goya responded to the Napoleonic Wars in Spain (1808-1814) with his series of etchings, The Disasters of War showing the maiming and killing of Spanish peasants who had risen up against the occupying French army. Goya was influenced in his work by Callot, and in turn Goya's work influenced many later artists, including Picasso. Considered anti-clerical and unpatriotic in their time, Goya's anti-war prints were banned for thirty years after his death (Jones: 2003). Likewise from that war, we have Goya's iconic painting which depicts the execution of Spanish insurgents by firing squad. This painting was

ground-breaking because it showed the brutality of war from the victims' point of view. (Von Simson: 1963) The central figure has his arms flung out in a Christ-like pose.

For another one hundred years, until the First World War, there was little or no anti-war art (Moyneux: 2006). The First World War generated a plethora of anti-war reactions in the visual arts as well as other arts such as literature and poetry. Artists, writers and poets conscripted into the war powerfully and graphically captured the senseless slaughter which took the lives of millions.

Art as a premonition of War

Prior to First World War, some artists sensed the chaos and destruction that was about to be unleashed on the world, and expressed it in their art. Some artists were 'sensors' of what was to come, for example, the Expressionist artists Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and August Macke. Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian émigré living in Munich before the war, was a founder of the German Expressionist Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) circle of artists along with Franz Marc. He produced a series of paintings, *Compositions and Improvisations,* which were apocalyptic in nature, with visions of inundation and conflict. He believed that a spiritual rebirth was at hand but he was also increasingly drawn into the tumult of the times. (Cork: 1994)

The German artist, Franz Marc was conscripted and killed in the war - at Verdun in 1915. Like Kandinsky, Marc's paintings were a prophecy of what was to come. Sent a postcard reproduction of his painting *The Fate of the Animals* in 1915 he said "It is like a premonition of this war, at once horrible and stirring. I can hardly believe that I painted it.". August Macke, another German artist of this school, was also killed early in the war. The painting, *Farewell*, portrays the many departures to the battlefront taking place throughout Germany in August 1914. It was also a reminder of how many lives were lost, including of the lives of artists, writers, and poets. (Cork: 1994)

Censorship of Anti-War Art

During the war, over 90 artists were commissioned by the British government to record it. Rather than allowing their art to be used as propaganda, many of these artists resisted and produced antiwar imagery. John Singer Sargent was asked to produce a painting depicting cooperation between British and American troops, but instead painted *Gassed* showing a group of soldiers suffering from the effects of poison gas. (Harries: 1983)

Censorship of anti-war art was rife. The war artist Paul Nash painted desolate landscapes destroyed by war and said: "I am not allowed to put dead men into my pictures because apparently they don't exist" He wrote in a letter to his wife in November 1917: *I am no longer an artist. I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on forever. Feeble, inarticulate will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls.* (Cork: 1994).

Christopher Nevinson's ironically entitled painting 'Paths of Glory' (1917) showing a dead soldier was considered unacceptable at the time and was not exhibited until after the armistice. Toward the end of the war, William Orpen was asked to paint portraits of leaders such as Field Marshall Douglas Haig, but he refused and instead painted a flag draped coffin with skeletal soldiers beside it. The image was later altered, and the skeletal figures were painted out. (Cork: 1994).

German Anti-War Art of WWI

A number of **German** artists also produced very powerful anti-war imagery during and after the war. Kathe Kollwitz, whose own son was killed in the early days of the First World War, produced prints of anti-war imagery that are still familiar to us today and have been adopted by

peace movement groups. Some of her works depict mothers sheltering and protecting their children, which she, sadly, was unable to do for her son. She became passionately opposed to war, as expressed in her graphic image of a youth with upraised fist crying 'no to war.' In the German cemetery in Belgium where her son is buried there is a very moving memorial sculpture by Kathe Kollwitz that stands beside the graves of German soldiers; it is of two grieving parents, herself and her husband. (Prelinger: 1992).

The German artist Otto Dix survived active duty in both world wars. He was a machine gunner in the First World War and much of his art depicted in a visceral way the pain, terror and revulsion he experienced. His painting 'Flanders' was painted in 1934 as a reminder of the horrors of war. It was only exhibited once before being confiscated by the Nazis, as was much of his earlier anti-war art. In 1939 he was conscripted into the German army, captured and held prisoner of war until 1946. He returned to his home city of Dresden to find it obliterated by Allied bombing. (Cork: 1994).

The Dada Movement

Anti-war art was produced both during and immediately after the war by artists in the Dada movement. The Dada 'movement' was founded in Zurich in 1916 by immigrant artists, writers and poets from other European countries who fled to neutral Switzerland. Dada was a revolt against war. As described by Jean Arp, an Alsatian Dadaist artist: "Losing interest in the slaughterhouse of the world war, we turned to the Fine Arts…We searched for an elementary art that would, we thought, save mankind from the furious folly of these times." (Jordan and Weedon: 1995)

Often using collage and photomontage, Dada art expressed the chaos of the times. The term 'dada' was a nonsense word the meaning of which the Dadaists deliberately obscured. The movement was 'anti-art' as they were against the established order which they saw as morally bankrupt, of which the art World was a part. Dada continued into the inter-war years spreading to other cities, including Berlin, New York and finally Paris where it died out in 1924, when surrealism was born. Its aim had been to stop the war machine, but in that it was of course unsuccessful. (Lipard: 1971).

Picasso's Guernica

Perhaps the most famous anti-war painting of all, is Picasso's Guernica, which he painted in reaction to the 1937 bombing of that Basque town by the Nazis, in support of Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Living in Paris at the time, Picasso was appalled and enraged by the images of destruction of Guernica that he saw in the newspapers. He drew on those images as well as Goya's imagery from the *Disasters of War* to produce his iconic work showing the savagery and cruelty of war.

The power of the imagery in Picasso's *Guernica* again became apparent in 2003 when a tapestry of the painting hanging at the entrance to the UN Security Council was covered with a cloth while Colin Powell made a speech justifying the invasion of Iraq. Clearly that was an attempt to obscure any parallels people might make between the Iraq war and previous wars.

Anti-War Art during and after WWII

The Second World War produced little anti-war art. There was no artistic freedom in Nazi occupied Europe and many leading European artists fled to the U.S. Under the Nazi regime virtually all modern art was considered 'degenerate' and the work of such 'degenerate artists was confiscated – the artists were dismissed from their teaching positions and forbidden to produce art. Anti war art such as that of Otto Dix, Kathe Kollwitz, Franz Marc and many others was confiscated and destroyed. There was also an exhibition in Munich in 1937 organized by the Nazi regime in which confiscated 'degenerate art' was put on display with disparaging

commentary and denunciation of 'Jewish art'. In Britain and the U.S., most artists supported the war. (Ferguson: 1980).

After 1945 the tradition of anti war art was revived. Picasso's involvement with the communist led peace movement led him to produce a series of peace images using the symbol of the dove, which are still used by peace movement groups today.

Art was also produced in reaction to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For example, the Japanese artists Iris and Toshi Maruki produced a series of prints entitled 'the Hiroshima Panels'. In August 1945 they searched the ruins of Hiroshima for their Messing relatives and were traumatized by the experience, but eventually managed to express their sorrow through their art. Later they also took on other themes, making statements about Auschwitz, the Nanjing massacre and environmental themes. (Young: 2000).

There is also a whole body of work produced in reaction to the Holocaust, by survivors and other artists, some in the form of memorials. Naomi Blake, a survivor of Auschwitz, produced public sculpture which can be found throughout Britain, much of it depicting the sheltering of human beings.

War Photography

Photography has had a significant impact on how societies have 'seen' war and reacted either in favor of it or against it. A classic example is the WWII photograph by Joe Rosenthal of U.S. marines raising the American flag on Mount Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima. It was meant to express heroism and the triumph of the Allies in the battles against the Japanese in the Pacific. Actually the original photograph was rejected as the American flag appeared too small, so the photograph was re-staged in the composition that has become so famous. (Jeffrey: 1997). The recent film directed by Clint Eastwood, Flags of our Fathers, tells the story of this photo, how it was used to promote the war, and the impact it had on the lives of those featured in the photo.

Photography has been used since the 19th century (Crimean War) to document war and has also been used to manipulate public opinion in favor of war. But photography can be more than just documentation. Certain photos shift from being a 'document' to an iconic image that enters the culture and has an effect on the way people see the world. An example of that is the photo taken from the city hall tower in Dresden, the day after the bombing of the city in 1945. It has come to represent the targeting of civilian populations in war.

Another iconic photograph was that taken by Nick Ut in 1972 entitled 'Accidental Napalm' It became one of the most reproduced images of that time, and had an enormous impact on American opinion. It increased the revulsion and opposition to the war that was already widespread in American society. (Sontag: 1977).

In contrast to war photography, an example of photography being used to affirm a common humanity was the 1955 exhibition *The Family of Man* organized by Edward Steichen in New York, in which over 500 photographs from around the world were divided into categories of human experience: creation; birth; love; work; death; justice; democracy; peace, and so on. The aim of the exhibition was to express the essential oneness of humankind (Steichen: 1955).

Art as resistance: the poster

Thus far we have been considering famous works of art or 'high art.' We now turn to popular art and the poster as a form of resistance. The poster is the dominant art form for expressing protest and the examples of anti-war posters over the generations are too numerous to adequately represent here.

One example is the classic peace poster depicting the phrase: '*War is not healthy for children and other living things'*. It was produced in 1967 by California artist Lorraine Schneider, originally as a small (4 inch square etching. She donated the etching to the organization 'Another Mother for Peace' and the image has since become internationally known as an anti-war graphic. (Bickhart and Benn: 2004)

Most recently the war in Iraq, which has cost so much human life, has generated a great deal of 'art of resistance' in the form of posters. These posters speak for themselves.

Peace Imagery

The most well-known image of peace is the dove, which comes from the biblical story of Noah's Ark. The dove, with olive branch, symbolizes new life after destruction. Likewise the rainbow symbolizes a new beginning. Images of the earth and nature can symbolize peace, including peace *with* nature – much needed, as we know. In some nineteenth century British art, 'peace' was portrayed as a woman, often carrying the fruits of a harvest and therefore symbolizing the prosperity that comes with peace. (Glover: 2002).

Another symbol of peace which also refers to abolition of weaponry is the 'swords into ploughshares' image, which comes from the biblical reference "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." A Russian sculpture of this image stands at the United Nations building in New York. The 'Ploughshares' name has been adopted by a peace organization which seeks the abolition of nuclear weapons, including by civil disobedience that entails the actual disabling or destruction of weaponry.

What is known as 'the peace symbol' in many parts of the world, originated in Britain in the 1950s as the 'nuclear disarmament symbol.' In 1958, Gerald Holtom, a member of the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War sketched a symbol that represented himself in despair, with arms stretched downwards, palms out. This evolved into a line drawing which also represented the semaphore symbols for N and D, standing for nuclear disarmament (Rigby: 1997). CND did not trademark the symbol but instead encouraged its widespread use. Soon after it was created, the symbol traveled to the U.S. via Bayard Rustin, a friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., and it came to be used in civil rights marches and later in anti-Vietnam war protests. Since then it has appeared in campaigns for peace and justice around the world. http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/~lcush/PeaceSymbolArticle.htm).

A lesser known peace symbol was that produced by the Russian artist Nicholas Roerich in the 1930s. The three spheres represented art, religion and science, or the past, present and future achievements of humanity, guarded within the circle of eternity. In his travels throughout Europe and Asia, Roerich discovered many examples of the use of this configuration, for example in India and China. He proposed that this symbol appear on 'Banners of Peace' that would represent the protection of the cultural achievements of humanity. He proposed a peace pact, in which countries would agree to fly peace banners with this symbol on them, to protect cultural sites in times of war. The peace pact was signed in 1935 and received the support of President Roosevelt and many world leaders, but little action was taken to act on it and it remained merely symbolic. Although the symbol did not catch on, it is interesting to note that it was an attempt to symbolize what could be called 'positive peace' rather than the opposition to war and weaponry. (Decter: 1989).

Peace Museums around the world

Peace museums portray peace history and contemporary efforts to promote peace. They also display anti-war and peace art. There are over 100 peace museums worldwide in at least fifteen countries, and the International Network of Museums for Peace (www.musuemsforpeace.org) is growing. Here are a few examples:

Anti-war museum Berlin – This museum was founded in Berlin in 1925 by Ernst Friedrich. It displayed shocking photographs of war injuries and other horrors from the battlefields of the First World War. It was destroyed by the Nazis in 1933 and Friedrich went into exile. It was reopened in 1982 by his grandson, Tommy Spree, and now also contains a 'peace gallery' of artwork along with the historical exhibitions.

Hiroshima peace memorial and park - This is a very large and well established museum dedicated to the abolition of nuclear weapons. A sculpture of Sadako stands in the grounds of the memorial. The young girl, Sadako, was two years old when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. According to Japanese legend if you fold 1000 paper cranes, the gods will grant your wish; she wished to live – and began work on the cranes, but died of leukemia at the age of twelve. In front of the sculpture are piles of paper cranes, that have themselves become symbols of peace. The memorial museum also contains children's artwork dedicated to peace.

The Peace Museum UK has a small gallery in Bradford, in the north of England, and has created a number of traveling exhibitions that have gone around the world. In the near future the Peace Museum plans to move to a larger centre at the George Mitchell Centre for Conflict Resolution at Leeds Metropolitan University.

Gandhi museum, Madurai In India there are a number of museums dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, including in Madurai.

Guernica Peace Museum - The Guernica Peace Museum recounts the history of the bombing of that town in 1937, highlights aspects of the Basque country, and represents a range of peace themes, including reconciliation.

Conclusion

There is more anti-war art than peace art, perhaps because 'peace art' is illusive in terms of definition. What is not war and violence is peace – peace is life. The American artist, William Kelly, who now lives in Australia, has created what he calls an 'archive of humanist art' to which artists from around the world have contributed. His definition of 'humanist art' is what I would consider to be the definition of 'peace art.' According to William Kelly, humanist art is '*art that is sensitive and responsive to the human condition, and born of a deep and abiding commitment to humankind and the planet we share.*'

Art can contribute to social change through the imagery it gives us and the ways it can be used to communicate our deepest feelings and needs. To create a culture of peace, we must first imagine it, and the arts can help us do that, for ourselves and future generations.

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