

## **Art As The Voice Of The Soul: The Art of Making Life Special**

By Fiona Adamson

As I think about writing for this new magazine *Artesian*, I am aware that as its first issue is being prepared, a network of people who draw, paint, make things and write, is forming and growing to create something special to them. The energy and excitement that has been released by this venture is palpable.

The impulse to create and to connect with others is strong in us all. We are born with these impulses and spend much of our lives living by them. The image of the artesian well is then a very apt one to describe the creative process in its natural, creative and energetic form. The well holds something dynamic and flowing, a gift from mother earth. In all traditions wells are endowed with a sacred character. They are symbols of plenty and sources of life. We find soul when we drop beneath the surface of life and tap into this well.

In his discussion on how to preserve the soul in corporate life, David Whyte says: "Like water flowing from an underground spring, human creativity is the wellspring of greening the desert of toil and effort."

If we use language from psychology we could say that we have an unconscious part of our mind from which springs image and metaphor, the voice of the soul, or the bridge between our inner and our outer life. Art is the expression of this soul work. It is innate and universal and expresses something very basic about human behaviour.

Ellen Dissanayake, in her book "Homo Aestheticus", argues that throughout history human societies have always shown some form of behaviour that could be called "art" and that this behaviour has an evolutionary and a biological purpose. She argues that this behaviour is communal, and integral to daily life. By taking a broad historical and anthropological perspective she invites us to consider art as behaviour that embellishes and enlarges life, that it is fundamentally about making things and activities special.

She includes the everyday things like taking the time to arrange a bunch of wildflowers that you have collected on your walk in the country, as well as being moved to mark a particular occasion by writing a poem or paint a picture from a dream. Each event is important to the person and they find a way to make of it something special. In industrial societies we are driven by deadlines so much that we have few opportunities to mark special moments. But such times are so important as they allow us to dip into that well of creativity that helps us preserve our souls.

Thomas Moore in his discussion of art and its place in life said, "Our lives are fashioned, not by our intentions, but by responding to those invitations that come from fate, and from other people and events, mysteriously. And I think that what art can do that reason can't do is provide us with images that help us contemplate those mysteries"

In traditional societies each person has the opportunity to contribute in an artistic way to the growth of their society through a variety of forms, many of which have a ritual element. I see this happening more and more in our society as we seek the meaning of events which touch our lives.

For example, few of us were unaffected by the sudden death of Diana, Princess of Wales. When I looked at some of the many collections of floral tributes that grew in mounds all over the country at that time, I noticed amongst them many drawings and poems by both children and adults. For a brief moment a spontaneous and collective ritual held some of the grief that was evoked by this event. Places were marked out and made sacred for a short time to honour both the real human being that had died, and also gave an expression to what she had come to mean for people. This grief was expressed in a variety of artistic forms. Some said that this gave an opportunity to grieve for loved ones lost some time ago, grief which had not found expression in a society that has few public rituals left to mark major life events.

Rituals are also being developed by ecologists all over the world to mark events that concern people about the state of mother earth, doing something that makes her special. For example, in a collective ritual set up by Dominique Maizeaud named "The Great Cleansing of The Rio Grande River", we see an opportunity for people to express their collective concern through action. They make the river special and work to rid it of its pollution .

In another example nearer to home, the eco-warriors who build beautiful as well as functional temporary homes in woodlands are expressing this impulse to create and to make special a place on earth that has become threatened by developers. In such projects art connects with ecology and has already moved out from individual protest to become a participatory and a communal event.

Perhaps a more obvious expression of creativity can be seen in the many carnivals and festivals that are held all over the world to celebrate and to mark special times and places. In some, people are given opportunities to be somebody different for a day, perhaps a man to become a woman, or a whole community to reverse roles of all kinds.

Here art is used in mask making , costume making, music and dance, to create a ritual that allows people to live out some unexpressed part of themselves. This is

a time and a place that sanctions such behaviour, and therefore has an important function, to allow for the widening of experience, to hold the tension of the opposites that lie within each of us.

I believe that we are in the midst of a shift in our conception of art, a movement to broaden this conception is expressed already in the notion of outsider or visionary art. The idea of artists as people with a particular training whose work can be sold in the marketplace is widened to include others who have no formal training. Here I would like to suggest that we leave behind the categories altogether and see art as art for life's sake. In this conception of art we open ourselves to that way of being in the world which honours the mysteries of life, which marks out and gives time and space for the movement of the soul. I think we are now beginning to see the broadening of the concept of art and the artist in the sense that Dissanayake describes as that activity which is about making something special. I see Artesian as an expression of part of this shift in our conception of art.

While we remain wedded to the idea of art for the "artists" per se, we lose that potential that art has to build community and give expression to those deeper human longings in us all. Through art we can all express the fullness of who we are, we can experience our connection with one another and with the earth we live on, and we can make sense of the world we live in.

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Fiona Adamson. October, 1999.

