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WHY ART? WHY NOT?

by Karl Anderson

In aftermath of the attacks of September 11th, I have heard people question the validity of making art in a time of crisis. Various government officials quickly stressed the need to get back to "normal" as a way of not succumbing to a terrorized mindset. If the stockbroker, store-owner and garbage collector are supposed to be productive again, why shouldn't the artists do what they do? This notion of why art now stems from an overarching view, in the US, that art is superfluous and immature. 'Art-as-product' is indeed superfluous and immature. However, the process of art-making is a healing act. We are all artful in our daily lives. Daydreaming, doodling on a notepad, dancing at a club, solving a problem, or noticing something out of the ordinary are all creative moments. When we take that extra leap and see art, a separation occurs. We become a viewer as opposed to a doer. Due to the effects of career-oriented producers and an extreme lack of funding, submerged art exists in every corner of our society. New York City is filled with artists. Tens of thousands of us are making stuff every day and if one is willing to research a bit and bypass all the prepackaged art, one will find a whole new world of odd, thought-provoking, interesting art.

Artists, for the most part, see the world with a more critical eye. Art and artists can be reviled by this society, though, because they are a threat to the status quo. Right now the government and the media are working hand in glove so that we can feel morally good about the "justice" that we will soon inflict. Now is the time for those of us who see things differently to speak out against the brainwashing. Activists, independent thinkers, artists and those with a global sense of history must do what they do with more fervor than ever. Why do so many people in so many countries hate the United States of America? How has the lone economic and military superpower been treating the rest of the world? How does globalism actually function and who are its victims? Now is the time to turn off the television and throw away the New York Times. Now is the time to start reading alternative publications and listen to the alternative radio stations. Now is the time to call your representatives, read those dry non-aligned history books, attend peace rallies, see art, do art. What these attackers have done is immoral and disgusting; however these events did not appear magically from thin air. Although I disagree with their tactics I empathize with their cause. By killing ordinary civilians and not the people most responsible for their misery, the attackers have lost the moral high ground. The US government is directly responsible for tens of thousands of murders each year. Our government has used terrorism against the have-nots of the globe and now they are retaliating in kind. Our uninformed citizenry is now in a patriotic fervor because they don't know what our government does and they don't want to know. I suspect that a lot of artists see through this illusion of good vs. evil that we are being force-fed.

What should I, an artist, do? Make art and communicate with others. What should our politicians do? Look beyond their short-term power interests and find their own collective humanity. Here are a few long-term actions that could lead to a more peaceful world:

- 1 The US should pay its overdue dues to the United Nations. We owe over a billion dollars. This is a blatant blackmail technique.
- 2 The US should negotiate its way back onto the UN Human Rights Commission by offering to behave in a humane fashion.
- 3 The US should back out of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank since both of these organizations seek to control targeted countries by either stabilizing or destabilizing their organizational structures.
- 4 The US should announce a sincere willingness to participate in another round of the Kyoto accords and the Global Conference on Racism.
- 5 The US should abandon our unilateral "Star Wars" mission and greatly reduce this emphasis on militarism.
- 6 The US should hold the Central Intelligence Agency accountable for all of the murderous acts that have been committed on behalf of "free trade" and "democracy."
- 7 Companies such as Microsoft, Exxon, Reebok, Starbucks, etc. should be held accountable for their vicious marketing strategies (monopoly, oilpolitik, third-world labor, squeezing out mom-and-pop businesses).
- 8 The US should open a dialogue with the "terrorists" of the world so that our government could make amends, pay reparations, and seek parity.
In short, the US government could stop being top-dog and become a part of the global community.

We like all of our objects. We don't seem to care how much pollution, misery, or subjugation results from our excesses. But here's the rub: our behavior has made billions of people all over the world have a less than adequate existence. Many people are afraid of the US. Many people hate the US. Their fear is becoming smaller than their hatred. They will become more and more willing to strike back. The recent attacks are merely the beginning. They are mad as hell. It is easier for us to change our ways and show a new compassion than it is for them to trust us. Do we have enough courage to start being fair? I predict that artists will respond with works of insight and love. I think that most artists, because they tend to exist outside of the mainstream mindset, will seek understanding and dialogue. I fear that "our" politicians will not.

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