

IT'S TIME FOR THE ARTS TO FLOURISH WITH FESTIVALS LEADING THE WAY

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The greatness of a culture can be found in its festivals
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The arts are one of the most distinct, diverse, and distinguished activities in the world and have experienced periods of incredible exuberance as well as tremendous hardship over the centuries as some of the oldest forms of human experience and expression of all.

In prehistoric times, drawings and paintings were created on the sides and ceilings of caves in Spain, Indonesia, and France, flutes were used to make music in Germany and Slovenia, string instruments in India, and drums in many parts of the world. In Greek, Roman, and Medieval times, the arts played a prominent role in the development of communities, societies, festivals, religious institutions, and liturgical practices.

Then came the Renaissance. It is deemed by many to be the crowning achievement in the development of the arts and one of the greatest periods in human history. Commencing in Italy and then spreading rapidly to other European countries and the rest of the world, it resulted in an explosive period in artistic and creative activity, as well as a crucial transformation in perceptions and perspectives that changed the world. Not long after this, the Romantic era from 1800 to 1850 reacted strongly to the Enlightenment and its preoccupation with reason, science, and order and placed much more emphasis on the arts, imagination, the beauty and power of nature, and the sublime.

These developments and many others reveal and reflect responses to needs and concerns that were dominant in the world at specific times and places. This raises a very interesting and important question. What is needed in the world at present and going forward into the future with respect to the development of the arts and how this can be realized? In order to achieve this, it is necessary to assess the state of the world at the present time and prospects for the future.

The State of the World Today

Anyone who lived through the day and night that ushered in the twenty-first century and third millennium will recall how thrilled people and countries were in all parts of the world when this became a reality. There was exuberance and celebrations everywhere. A whole new era was opening up in the history of humanity and the world and there was a great deal

of hope, optimism, and excitement that this would result in a much better world for all people and all countries.

Unfortunately, this state of excitement and enthusiasm didn't last long. It was replaced by far more negative feelings and experiences. A year after this historic event took place on January 1, 2000, people and countries in all parts of the world were shocked and saddened by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States on September 11, 2001 that resulted in the death of more than 2,900 people. The profuse outpouring of grief that was exuded in that country and around the world at that time and for some time thereafter was palpable and stands as vivid testimony of how suddenly things can change in the world and often without warning.

Since that fatal day, things have got progressively worst rather than better in many ways and areas of the world. Not long after this dreadful event, people and countries started to get warnings from scientists and environmentalists that life-threatening changes were taking place in the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Initially, this was limited to holes in the ozone layer, climate change, and global warming, as well as rapidly melting ice and snow in the far north and south. More recently, it has manifested itself in horrific hurricanes, terrible tornadoes, disastrous floods of countless crops and coastal areas, and devastating forest fires.

This was followed by the COVID19 pandemic that struck in 2020 without much warning and led to the loss of millions of lives that are still occurring in some parts of the world today. This has been accompanied by adverse effects on people's health, lives, and well-being in general and young people in particular, as well as countless artists who lost their jobs and sources of income during the pandemic but still managed to share their talents and artistic works with millions of people around the world free of charge.

Most recently, there has been the escalation of major conflicts and wars in various parts of the world, such as the war in Europe between Russia and Ukraine and the Middle East between Israel and Hamas, and now in several other countries as well. Added to this is the recent election in the United States that has resulted in imposing huge tariffs on the goods and services of many countries, commitments to making America great again, and reasserting the dominance of the United States in the world.

These developments and others have heightened anxiety, apprehension, hate, and anger in the world as more and more people and countries worry about losing jobs, income, and sources of livelihood, major increases in the cost of living, and digging in their heels in order to resist the robust actions from other countries and parts of the world.

Assessment of the world situation over this period of time has been strongly influenced by the mass media and powerful communications networks that seem to have a penchant for reporting negative news regardless of all the positive developments,

improvements, and good deeds that are occurring in the world and the millions of people who are contributing a great deal to peace and well-being. There is no doubt that the world is in a much more turbulent, difficult, and troublesome state today and going forward into the future than was the case in the past.

As developments like these and others take place, have you noticed that the world has recently become a far more inhumane, impersonal, and callous place, as well as devoid of feelings, emotions, compassion, moral conduct, and ethical ideals? How could it be otherwise when the activities that are most needed in the world to deal with this situation, counteract these undesirable developments, and provide more empathy, kindness, thoughtfulness, and humanity in the world such as the arts and humanities are being progressively marginalized, weakened, and had their funding cut severely in order to promote economic growth, technological change, creation of material and monetary wealth, and expenditure on military weapons, warfare, and defense?

Surely what is needed more than anything else at this crucial time in the history of humanity and the world is a quantum leap in the evolution and cultivation of the arts, humanities, and related activities. As the distinguished cultural historian, Johan Huizinga, said many years ago:

The realities of economic life, of power, of technology, of everything conducive to man's (people's) material well-being must be balanced by *strongly developed spiritual, intellectual, moral and aesthetic values*. (1)

If this doesn't occur, the environmental crisis will not be solved, the vast inequalities that exist in income and wealth throughout the world will not be overcome, there will be many more wars over land and resources, more tensions and conflicts will erupt between the diverse people, races, and countries in the world, and there will be fewer values and ideals. This is a prescription for disaster and turmoil rather than exuberance and delight.

Unleashing the Power and Potential of the Arts

In order to reverse this undesirable situation and set the world on a much better humane, promising, and positive course in the years and decades ahead, it will be necessary to do three things and do them extremely well:

- *value and treat the arts as ends in themselves first and foremost;*
- *take full advantage of the essential role the arts play as means to other ends; and*
- *provide the symbols that are required to open the doors to culture and cultures as the ways of life of people and countries.*

The Arts as Ends in Themselves

Nothing is more essential in the world today than seeing, valuing, and treating the arts in general and the works of artists and arts organizations in particular as “ends in themselves” since everything evolves from this and flows from it.

Unfortunately, this is not the case at the present time due to the marginalization of the arts in the overall scheme of things, the severe cuts that have taken place in arts funding in recent years, and most importantly, the tendency to treat the arts as frills, entertainment activities, and secondary rather than primary activities in countries and the world.

This must change. Not only do the arts, artists, arts organizations, and artistic activities bring an incredible amount of joy, happiness, beauty, peace, compassion, and creativity into the lives of people and countries, but also there is an incredible amount to be learned from the arts about living a full, upright, and fulfilling life, experiencing good health and well-being, understanding and respecting the universal heritage of humankind and the cultures of other peoples and countries, and appreciating and respecting all aspects and manifestations of the natural environment and the lives of other species. (2)

And this is not all. The arts also help to create the new values, value systems, lifestyles, ideals, and ways of life that are required to make the world a better, safer, and more humane place. In order to do this, artists and arts organizations will have to have the freedom and independence that is required to exercise and express their beliefs, imagination, and be respected as important contributors to societies and countries.

This can only be achieved by making the arts mainstream rather than marginal activities. It is especially important for governments, corporations, foundations, educational institutions, and people and countries to accept and make a strong commitment to this. This means recognizing the deep cultural significance and fundamental importance of the arts, as well as dramatically increasing the funding for artists, arts organizations, and artistic events so that they can function effectively and be valued for their remarkable capabilities and accomplishments before anything else. This was visualized and confirmed many years ago by the Rockefeller Panel in its final Report - *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects* – when it stated, “The arts are not for a privileged few but for the many ... their place is not at the periphery of society but at its center ... they are not just a form of recreation but are of central importance to our well-being and happiness.” (3)

The Arts as Means to Other Ends

Treating the arts as ends in themselves needs to be complemented by capitalizing on the value and importance of the arts as “means to other ends”. Over the last century, most of the emphasis in this regard has been placed on the arts as means to economic ends. This is due to the billions of dollars that are spent every year on attending performing arts events,

visiting art galleries and museums, enjoying artistic activities as tourists, purchasing books, magazines, films, tapes, and videos with artistic content, watching artistic productions on television as a result of “the arts and cultural industries,” and many others.

Over the last few years, a major shift has been taking place from the economic benefits of the arts to the social benefits. (4) There are many reasons for this, such as the breakdown that occurred during the COVID19 pandemic when people were unable to attend live artistic events, the fact that the arts bring people together rather than split them apart, the countless social interactions, exchanges, and relationships that go on between people, organizations, and groups at this vital time, and the escalating interest in the social dimensions and significance of the arts and the role they can play in the realization of some of the most essential UN Social Development Goals (UNSDG’s). This is largely because the arts are “*shared experiences*” that ignite the spark that is necessary between artists and audiences. Both have something precious to give to this process as well as something valuable to receive in return. Artists give much of themselves and their innermost thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Audiences respond by taking the time to react to these precious statements and courageous beliefs. “To have great poets there must be great audiences” is how Walt Whitman expressed this intimate and interactive social process.

What is true for the economic and social benefits of the arts is also true for the health and well-being benefits. In recent years, a remarkable amount of research has been conducted on this subject by the International Arts+Mind Lab, NeuroArts Blueprint, Jameel Arts and Health Lab, and many others. (5) This research has revealed that the arts have a quintessential role to play in improving people’s overall health and well-being at each and every stage in life. This results from changes that take place in the mind, body, and especially brain as a result of engaging in artistic activities of every conceivable kind.

These benefits are being compounded by the environmental benefits. Did you know that the arts are capable of reducing the huge impact we are having on nature, the natural environment, and the lives of other species? This is because many artistic, humanistic, and heritage activities are much more “human intensive” than “material intensive.” They do this by providing “experiences” of many different types rather than “products” that are often high in material content. Think about it for a moment. Much less damage is done to the natural environment, other species, other people, and using the world’s finite resources when people are sitting in comfortable chairs in their living room or seated in a concert hall listening to music, watching a theatrical or dance performance at the local arts centre, or painting pictures rather than buying another car to put in the driveway to impress their friends, relatives, and neighbours.

These immense benefits of the arts have even started to seep into the political domain as people and countries begin to realize how valuable artistic activities and achievements are and how much damage is done to them and countries when they are at war. This affects their national identity, sense of bonding, belonging, and pride of place,

what is in their hearts, minds, souls, spirits, and deeds, educating their young people and future generations in their most cherished values, lifestyles, ideals, and ways of life, and how imperative it is to preserve, protect, and keep them safe, secure, and intact.

The Arts as Symbols to Open the Doors to Culture and Cultures

As the gateway to culture, cultures, and civilizations, the arts have an indispensable role to play in this area as well. As interest escalates throughout the world in culture and cultures as ways of life, so does the need for symbols that can open the doors to this. These symbols are specific parts of culture and cultures that have great significance in the overall scheme of things and can be of many different types, such as musical, visual, dramatic, and literary events, architectural masterpieces, monuments and sites, dramatic performances, national anthems and flags, cuisines, festivals, public squares, athletes, famous people, and the like.

Let's delve more deeply into this miraculous "*parts-whole process*" and "*symbolic phenomenon*" to see how powerful artistic symbols such as these and many others are and often can be. (6) Take, for instance, the importance of symbols such as Cervantes' famous novel *Don Quixote*, flamenco music, and football (soccer) for the culture of Spain; the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame Cathedral, and Claude Monet's garden in Giverny for the culture of France, the plays of Shakespeare and Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* for the culture of England, the Colosseum, Venice, and Florence for the culture of Italy, the Taj Mahal and Gandhi for the culture of India, and the Great Wall and cuisines for the cultures of China and Japan. Not only are these symbols well known in the countries where they are located, but also they are well-known in other parts of the world as well. We have all seen and experienced many illustrations and examples of the power and potential of symbols and how essential they are and can be in shedding light on the cultures they epitomize and represent in holistic and all-encompassing terms.

Interestingly, festivals have an especially important role to play in all this. It is because they are very symbolic of the countries and cultures where they are situated, often have many audience members and performers from different parts of the world, are conducted in a very professional manner and sophisticated way, can take place anytime during the year, are often held outdoors rather than indoors during the summer months, and involve historical events and experiences that are very dear to citizens and people's hearts. Think, for example, of all the many artistic festivals that take place in front of famous architectural and historical sites, in parks and conservation areas, beside gushing rivers and on gorgeous lakes, or occur in dense forests rather than concert halls and theatres.

I am thinking here of the Donau Insel festival in the middle of the Danube River in Austria, the Osaka cherry blossom festival in Japan, the Athens Epidaurus festival in Greece, the Orvieto festival in Italy, the Tanglewood music and light festivals in Tanglewood and Tanglewood Park in the United States, the Shakespearean festival in Canada, and the remarkable castle that is situated strategically at the top of a steep hill

overlooking Lake Bled in Slovenia with the beautiful Church - *Our Lady of the Lake* – situated on an island in the middle of this exquisite lake. Not only do these and countless other festivals throughout the world provide profound aesthetic experiences and emotional “highs” for their audiences, but also they enhance natural surroundings and enrich environmental settings that are beautiful to begin with but also produce spiritual and ethereal states that are broader and deeper than the natural settings themselves.

What a great objective this would be for humanity and the world in the future, not only by helping overcome climate change, global warming, and the environmental crisis, but also by enhancing the richness of nature and the natural world far beyond what they are today. Here again, Huizinga, had something profound and prophetic to say:

A community is in a state of culture when the domination of nature in the material, moral, and spiritual realms permits a state of existence which is **higher** and **better** than the given natural conditions; and when this state of existence is furthermore characterized by a harmonious balance of material and spiritual values and is guided by an ideal...towards which the different activities of the community are directed. (7)

It follows from this that many states of existence and the sublime can be created and developed in the world of the future that are “**higher** and **better** than the given natural conditions.” In fact, the potential exists here to experience a real “paradise on earth” through all the actual activities and technological devices that are now available and can be used by people and countries to expand and consolidate their knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of all the diverse arts and cultures in the world and how to cultivate them more effectively in the future. (8) This is a very stimulating process and exciting possibility because it is capable of bringing an immense amount of fulfillment, happiness, and inspiration into people’s and countries’ lives and festivals can provide the most demonstrable illustrations of this and lead the way in this regard.

A world based on the arts and culture’s highest, wisest, and most enduring values, activities, and ideals would be an exciting and stimulating world indeed. It would confirm the fact that the honest expression of feelings and emotions, artistic creation, lifelong learning, spirituality, friendship, compassion, kindness, and human love are among the most essential things in life - the things that are remembered and cherished long after everything else is forgotten. Not only do they bring real fulfillment and happiness into people’s lives and the world, but also they promote peace, harmony, and goodwill rather than conflict, confrontation, and war. Given the state of the world today and prospects for the future, it is difficult to see how it will be possible for people and countries in all parts of the world to live in times as troublesome, turbulent, and volatile as these without embracing the arts as fully and effectively as possible as the direction to go in the future and festivals leading the way.

NOTES

1. Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture: Voltaire, Guizot, Burckhardt, Lamprecht, Huizinga, Ortega y Gasset* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 216 (insert and italics mine).
2. See: D. Paul Schafer, *The Arts: Gateway to a Fulfilling Life and Cultural Age* (Oakville: ON: Rock's Mills Press, 2020, Third Printing, 2022); as well as D. Paul Schafer: *The World as Culture: Cultivation of the Soul to the Cosmic Whole* (Oakville, ON: Rock's Mills Press, 2022).
3. Rockefeller Panel Report, *The Performing Arts: Problems of Prospects* (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1964).
4. See Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, Vols. 1-4 (New York: Vintage Books, Third Printing, 1960) as an illustration of this. Also see: Predag Cvetičanin, Mirico Petrić, and Inga Tornić-Koludrović (eds.) *Towards a Social Turn in Cultural Policy: A Policymaker's Guidebook*. One of the Outputs of the Horizon 2020 Project - European Inventory of Societal Values of Culture as a Basis for Inclusion.
5. See, for example, Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross, *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us* (New York: Random House, 2023).
6. D. Paul Schafer, 'The Significance of Symbols in the Cultivation of Cultures as Whole and Ways of Life,' EdA Esempi di Architettura, Special Two Volume Issue of the International Journal of Engineering and Architecture, Vol II, No. 2, January 26, 2024. pp. 36-51.
7. Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture*, op. cit., p.219.
8. Brian Holihan, *Thinking in a New Light: How to Boost Your Creativity and Live More Fully by Exploring World Cultures*. (Summervale, CA. Full Humanity Press, 2016 (see especially Chapter 13 on A Method for Finding Paradise on Earth, pp. 272-298).

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