

Art and Peace

Christophe Barbey

Published in “Suisse sans Armée”, spring 2010

Many artists through history worked in a decisive manner to improve the human condition or some of its aspects. A large number of writers, musicians and artists of all sorts take (or have taken) stands in favor of peace. So what are the links between peace and artistic creation?

Several elements require our attention:

- The search for beauty and harmony is parallel to the search of peace. If peace tends to transcend conflict and to benefit all parties and future generations by learning, to a certain extent, from conflict solutions, beauty and Art tend to equally overpass mediocrity and the ordinary in order to magnify and highlight the good or the greatness of life.
- Peace is a living dynamic, partly made of commitment, good listening and skills and, as all forms of arts, demands creativity and adaptation capacities, which all should be at the service of well-being and development for all.
- Every man and woman can and probably should contribute to the progress or peace, but also to the beauty of the world and the beauty of the moment.
- So every man and woman has a right to peace, but they also have a certain obligation to respect peace and even to promote it. Equally so, every person is endowed with the gift of imagination and creativity, which he or she enacts in their own way.

So if the right to peace exists – it does ! – there should also be in my opinion a right to artistic creativity. There is an artist and a peacemaker living or sleeping within each of us.

Art provides a human and light touch to human creativity. Peace provides meaning and sustainability to these creations of the human civilization. The artist as the peacemaker, is a dynamic actor in the city. Concerned by his time and evolution, by the civilization and the human condition, he integrates his work to humanity's patrimony, bringing therefore a personal contribution to everyday life and sometimes to humanity's destiny. Peace, just as all arts, addresses the human being with everything it has in terms of beauty, dignity and happiness. Art fills you with joy and wonder. Peace gives you a space of well-being and freedom. They both give meaning to life.

The definition of peace brings a few supplementary clarifications: we can say that peace has two zones. A central zone, intangible, a zone made of harmony and of the joy of living. Then there is another zone, located at the outskirts of this zone, where peace is built or to be built, where conflict is prevented or solved without betraying the peace ideal. Both zones require monitoring and technique for their implementation. They are adjacent, sometimes mingled and complementary to one another.

To peace or art living and fulfilling dynamics, both start most often as spontaneous moves, but then they need techniques and skills to be achieved. Both are made of choices, expressing values but also well understood instincts. Their natural part is made out of emotions and feelings, but also of inspiration and intuition. The learned part is made of evaluation and experience, knowledge, but also practices and share.

Arts and peace are similar in these two types of zones. A central zone where artistic creation results from peace or creation for and with a sense of harmony. And another equally important zone, yet more “marginal”, where peace and arts express themselves as a politic that leads to, or brings out more art or more peace.

Both zones require courage, the courage to ensure respect for art, harmony and peace, but also the courage to create art and peace. This is one of the common features of these two disciplines or values: both express courage, through force or kindness, public or discreet work and ideally void of violence.

A masterpiece of art (or peace) is ahead of its time. Should it be artistic creation or peace, it requires dedication and choosing a future, even if only for a moment, the moment of the artwork or the moment

of peace. And this is already courageous. But this work may also require time or sustainability, which will give it legitimacy and eventually adaptability. There again the work is courageous, some resist better than others to the passing of time.

Finally, if both peace and arts can be, and should be experienced within ourselves, in hearts and consciousness, they are also wonderful tools for sharing and bringing people together.

It is hard to imagine a human relationship, as superficial as it may sometimes be, without providing for it with some sort of peace in order to make it blossom and flourish in all the beauty of the world or in order to give it meaning.

It would be useful to mention at this point the many heroes – from the past as our contemporaries - who made peace their ideal or at least an integrant part of their work. It is difficult to choose, a choice¹ being personal and based on diversity. An “inventory à la Prévert” here, it is yours to add to it: Aristophanes and Victor Hugo, Picasso and Kubrik, Augusto Boal², John Lennon and the Dixies Chicks³, Stephan Eicher and Hans Erni ... The list is infinite. Is this is what the world becomes, infinite peace and beauty?

*Say, for so long Men frightened Men
And frightened the birds living in his head ...
Paul Éluard, 1951*



¹ There are mostly artists included here. It would be interesting to make an inventory of peacemakers, but it would be more difficult as they are more rare, than those people who made peace-work through their artistic work!

² Inventor of the “Theatre of the Oppressed”. It is interesting to note that it is not clear whether he was an artist who worked for peace or the other way around, a peace-maker who used art for his purpose. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augusto_Boal

³Female country-rock group from Texas, USA who were the subject of a massive denigration campaign after they criticized George W. Bush before the invasion of Iraq. This event was described in the movie “Shut up and sing”.