
Art, Creativity, Man and God

An enormous amount of my life's time has been centred around, or focused on, the practise of, and the teaching of, art and creativity! My faith and my family have also been recipients of my time, but by and large, my career as an art teacher has consumed the largest proportion of waking moments. My working hours as an art teacher was concerned with analysing, dissecting, developing, practising, preparing, demonstrating, studying, and teaching the visual arts. It was my life, where even a big part of my home time was given over to its pursuit.

This realisation that the biggest chunk of my life, my career, is or was concerned with something that really does not have a big contribution toward my spiritual life aspirations, can initially be confronting, but upon reflection has some positives, that I would like to share with you.

Firstly, let me share with you two verses that has a profound effect on me and my outlook on life. The verse is from the book of Jeremiah 9:23 -24.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understands and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Where is our heart?

Our worth consists not in where most of our time was spent but in where our heart is, and our attitude to this life in relation to others and to the Creator. Our focus must be on developing and strengthening our vision, or picture, or concept of the eternal God, and how we fit into this 'jigsaw' image of God. This must be our boast, our conclusion, our purpose, if we want to be the recipients of God's delight.

And so, when we try to compartmentalise our lives and ascribe worth to the various parts, we run the risk of losing sight of the big picture; that all of the complex intricacies of our life combine to make us who we are. The crucial observation is that we don't want the wrong part to dominate, and we want all parts of our life to contribute positively to our goal of being in Gods kingdom.

The term, 'the visual arts' covers an incredibly diverse and rich range of human activity. Teaching art was divided into making art and talking about art; in developing practical skills and understandings, and in engaging in analysing and critiquing art and art practices. Problem solving skills were paramount and vital. My job was to challenge and extend.

Invariably the first big challenge in understanding art was to define art!

What is art?

At its most basic level art can be defined as any mark making (actual or imagined?) undertaken or initiated by a human being. All art involves a degree of skill and creativity, but the real discussion came when what defined 'good' or 'great' art. Great art is art that has garnered acclaim over time

and contexts and audiences. One could be considered a great 'craftsman' with unsurpassed technical skills, yet still not be considered a great artist!

This was and is a difficult concept for some to grasp and acknowledge.

A key component of 'great art' is in its ability to communicate, to engage in a dialogue with the viewer. The depth and diversity of this dialogue is the key to understanding art.

We stand before a work of art, as we would before a monarch. We observe and wait for the king to talk to us. So it is with a work of art.

There are two parties in this discussion that dictate the depth and success of this intellectual exchange. Has the artwork the power and depth and vision to engage the viewer, and has the viewer the readiness and capacity to hear and respond and to celebrate the artwork?

My career depended on this capacity to hear and respond, being potentially a learnt and acquired response and not solely a biological one.

God it the greatest 'artist' of all time!

God's creation in its sheer unadulterated beauty, its complexity, its diversity, its humour, and its scope; underscores an incredible and staggering degree of understated communication. God is creativity and art defined. That essence of absolute awe and delight that we experience each time we see something of God's creation anew is boundless and breathtaking. We shake our heads, we smile, we stand in silent admiration, we take deep breaths. We fail to understand such a being that is capable of such beauty and love.

And we in all of creation are the pinnacle of that work, of that effort, the thought, the planning, the discussion; in that He has made us in His image.

Fred Johansen
