

Why Write and Why Make Art: My Top Five List

A friend of mine and I used to create top 10 lists when there was a lull in the work day. Lists included our favourite movies, music, books, etc. The lists were always a source of amusement, sometimes a good laugh, but more importantly, it gave us the opportunity to share what we felt was important to us. It gave us the platform to learn about each other as well as encourage us to be open to differing opinions and to consider new ideas and concepts. In honor of those lists, here is my top 5 list responding to the question, "Why write and why make art?"

(1) Therapeutic. Sometimes putting pencil to paper or fingers to keyboard when there are a rush of thoughts stirring around inside my mind provides the avenue by which I am able to come to terms with a problem I'm having in my life. Sometimes I write poetry or a fictional piece, more recently, I have engaged in writing subject journals which are based on a subject matter rather than a particular date, as a diary would. For me, the writing helps to sort out all the emotions, emptying out my brain, so to speak, onto the computer. Immediately afterwards, I have a sense of peace and viable solutions to the issue I was struggling with. I may not look at the writing (or sometimes the art) again for years, if ever (such as when it's on an old disk that the computer doesn't have a slot for because of technological advances). At other times, I go back over what I have written, fine-tuning and wordsmithing. It really is amazing how calming writing and art can be. Albert Camus once claimed that "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger." He was right.

(2) Outlet for creativity. Complimenting the first point above, writing and creating art are fantastic outlets for creativity. Sometimes when words cannot express a feeling, idea, or concept, a painting or photograph can. The outlet is different for each person. Famed psychologist, C.G. Jung had this to say about creativity: "The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves." The by product of the creative mind: paintings, photographs, music, poetry, writing. Some may think that they are not creative, that they cannot even draw a straight line, but it shouldn't necessarily be perfection on the first try, as much as show progress and movement forward. So, if you are one of these people, do not get bogged down by the limitations you impose on yourself, break free and let your creativity bloom.

(3) Form of expression. The painting, the words, the poem is extension of the artist self. Everyone sees and experiences everything differently from one another and no one way is the right way. Musician Charlie Parker summarizes it well, "Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out your horn." Who knows what might come of the efforts where, for instance, Duke Ellington revealed he "took the energy it takes to pout and wrote some blues." Some blues!

(4) Connectiveness with others. Author Elizabeth Engstrom says that she has "come to believe that there are no new photos and few new stories, only unusual recombinations of things that have been told before. But what is new, and fresh and original is the author's lens through which these situations are viewed... We are each unique in the universe and, therefore, so are the stories we tell." I agree. And I believe that by expressing our stories, whether through our words or images, they provide the avenue by which we can share and connect with others, a basic human need to feed the spirit within.

(5) Record to pass onto future generations. As a person who loves to learn and experience history vicariously through past writings and art, I think that it shows just how crucial it is for all of us to record our experiences, here and now, for the generations that will follow us. With that in mind, I think that the words of William Faulkner, an excerpt from his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Literature (1950), are appropriate to ponder: "I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail."

So, there you have it, my top five list responding to why write and why make art. What is your top five list?