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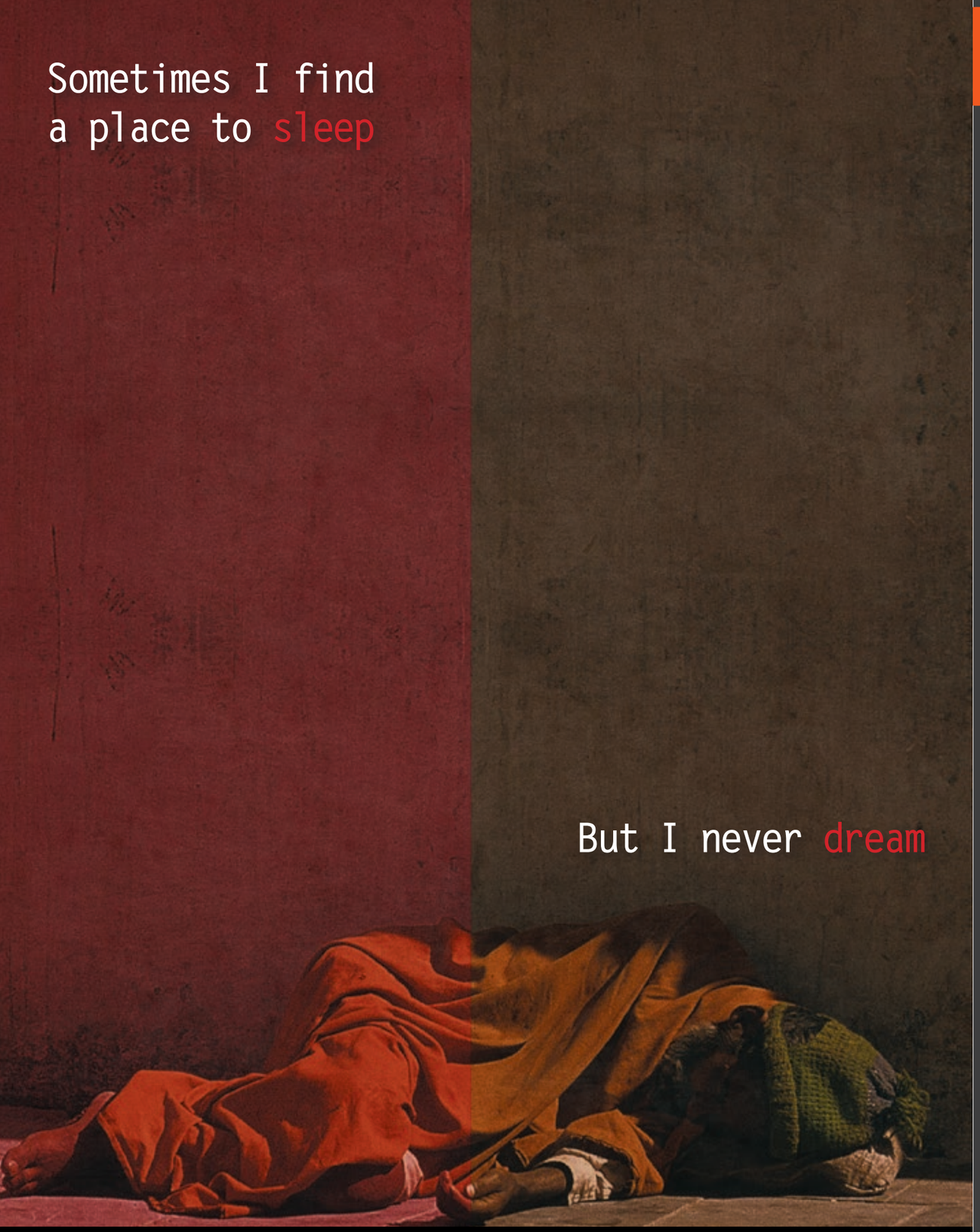
UNIVERSAL COLOURS

THE MAGAZINE FOR PROFESSIONAL MIGRANT ARTISTS

Funding art

Sometimes I find
a place to sleep



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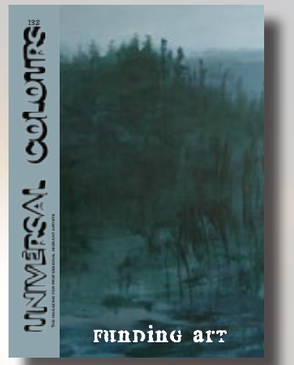

Cover:
Vaula Siiskonen

in focus

artist of the issue

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in every issue

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editorial

ISSUE 1 2013

As I always say, a good book invites you to read it again; and of course good food in a restaurant invites you to same restaurant again too. But I am not talking about books or food here or anything else that might inspire someone to think of getting.

It is the second time that we are invited to Artelibro book fare, and it is an exchange of value. In fact this is great because we are not invited in our homeland to any book-fare or any other event, here we look like somebody who came from a strange planet.

Actually and we hear about it all the time, integration is great in this country, our migrant community has adapted in; but obviously this happens only in conferences and general meetings, practically we are isolated and most of us working not in our profession even though some of us – and the number is big- have studied here in Europe and in Finland precisely.

There is an Arabic proverb saying “the local singer does not rapt” and it seems that we are the local singers here; we sing for long time, but no one is rapt to us, we sing the last 16 years, but as I said once, they just throw the bone under the table.

The art community in Finland does not consider us/think of us at all, and that is something nasty. And we do not know what to do about it. If we talk we will be punished for sure, if we do not talk they continue throwing the bone to us.

But, we have to be clear to ourselves and to be also aware, we did try all methods of working since we started and all the way now, none of them worked;, we did open a gallery called EU-MAN galleria in the heart of the town - that was in the years 2001-2004 - we did try to work with some museums here in Finland, I personally went even to some fares and marginal museum, we could not get the chance, always hitting a brick wall.

We even try to get some path way to make a gallery in the Cable Factory, year 2008 but we faced difficulties from the neighbourhood, they did not accept to have a gallery in the path with ...feriengers, as a matter of fact I am tired of this behaviour and this negative attitude, which started 16 years ago.

The same time we still get a lot of invitations from abroad, we got the kind invitation from Artlibro to show our magazine in their yearly book fare, we got an invitation from the art hall of Husby of Sweden and we got another invitation from Austria as well and all these invitations came for this year only and till now having another eight months to come.

We also got a lot of invitations from Germany and Austria and Italy last year, I’m just trying to ask, is it so that we are the local singer who does not rapt, or are we in the wrong place?

Amir Khatib

ArtNews

If your art gallery or association has some art news or an event it wishes to promote in Universal Colours, then please send the details to info@eu-man.org

Parallel Worlds

Eija-Liisa Ahtila
19 April - 18 August 2013
Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki

Eija-Liisa Ahtila's exhibition Parallel Worlds presents latest works by the internationally acclaimed artist and invites us to consider the boundaries of the experience of being human.

In her most recent works, Eija-Liisa Ahtila (b. 1959 in Hämeenlinna, Finland) explores the relationship between humanity, animals and nature. The title of the exhibition is a reference to the idea that living creatures inhabit separate, yet simultaneous worlds. Our human experience is only one of many possibilities. Ahtila has been inspired in her work by the thinking of the Baltic German biologist and philosopher Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944).

The Parallel Worlds exhibition presents Ahtila's works from the past ten years. It is produced in collaboration with Moderna Museet in Stockholm, where the exhibition was shown early last winter in 2012. And the exhibition travelled last October to the Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art Contemporain de Nîmes in France. Ahtila's previous extensive solo exhibition Fantasized Persons And Taped Conversations was shown in Kiasma in 2002.

Lewis Baltz Landscape photographs

1 March 2013 - 2 June 2013
Albertina Vienna, Austria

The landscape photographs by the US-American Lewis Baltz are characterized by deserted and frequently devastated peripheries. In 1970s, he revolutionized fine-art photography with motifs that had previously not been thought worth depicting, such as industrial buildings, suburban housing developments, and wasteland.
From March 2013, the Albertina will dedicate an exhibition comprising as many as several hundreds of photographs to this artist, who was born in Newport Beach, California, in 1945. On display will be, among other works, the famous series The Tract Houses (1971) and The New Industrial Parks Near Irvine (1973-75), through which Baltz fundamentally reformed the genre of landscape photography, thereby addressing the disastrous impact of technology on society in the twentieth century.

The treasures of the castle

Untill 1 September 2013
Ateneum, Helsinki

The renovation of the Finnish Presidential Palace gave the unique opportunity to explore all the hiding treasures of the building .The core of the exhibition are the imperial art collection, as well as the Presidential Palace Ateneum deposited works, in addition to which is accompanied by a wealth of valuable artefacts. The exhibits include. Edelfelt, Werner Holmberg , Ferdinand von Wright , Hjalmar Munsterhjelm andGallen-Kallela's works.

Lies about Painting

Till 25 August 2013
Moderna Museet Malmö

Is it possible to paint without a brush? This spring and summer, Moderna Museet Malmö is showing eleven works that explore the meaning of painting in one way or another. The exhibition Lies about Painting will present recent acquisitions to the Moderna Museet Collection, including works by Klara Lidén, Jutta Koether, Wade Guyton, Tauba Auerbach and Fredrik Vaerslev.
Thanks to donations and purchases in recent years, the Moderna Museet Collection has acquired several profoundly interesting new works by Swedish and international artists that in some way examine the representation of painting. Eleven of these new acquisitions are presented in a thematic exhibition, Lies about Painting, which will be shown in the upper gallery at Moderna Museet Malmö.
The question of whether painting is still a viable and credible artistic medium arises at regular intervals, alongside a discussion that emphasises the conceptual presence of painting. The works featured in Lies about Painting do not necessarily have these issues as their main focus, but they can nevertheless be interpreted, in some sense, as deconstructions of the phenomenon of painting itself. In different ways, they reveal the various notions – or even lies – surrounding the art of painting.
The exhibition includes works by Jutta Koether, Marianna Uutinen and Klara Lidén, who undermine the often dominating perception of painting as a male activity. To some extent, these artists imitate the look of abstract expressionism and monochromes. However, by using cheap paints or materials that can be regarded as ugly, any pretentions of sublimity are shifted. Monika Marklinger, also featured in Lies about Painting, does not even make paintings. In a video lasting only a few seconds, she asks why anybody bothers to paint!

ArtNews

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The Art of Dying

Till 02 June 2013
Niguliste museum, Tallinn Estonia

The exhibition “Ars moriendi – the Art of Dying” concentrates on the memorial, funeral and sepulchral cultures of the medieval and Early Modern periods, focusing on the reflection of these topics in the ecclesiastical art of the periods.

The exhibition includes and explains the tombstones, epitaphs, coat-of-arms epitaphs and other works of ecclesiastical art displayed in the Niguliste Museum. Artefacts of cultural history cast light on funeral traditions and customs. Among such objects are various coffin embellishments from the Middle Ages through the 18th century, metal coffins and funeral regalia, e.g. armour helmets and the gold brocade death coat of Fabian von Fersen, buried in the Tallinn Cathedral in 1668. Visitors can view an almost four-and-a-half-metre-long magnificent engraving from the end of the 17th century, depicting the funeral procession of the Swedish king Carl X Gustav, as well as a rare mechanical figure of Death from 1666, which once decorated a large clock in the chancel of the German church in Narva.

Within the framework of the exhibition, a film collage of the representation of death, dying and the afterlife in Estonian historical feature films is presented. The geography of the afterlife and the different destinations in the hereafter have been illustrated with the help of an educative floor map in the chancel of St Nicholas’ Church.

Lichtenstein A Retrospective

21 February – 27 May 2013
Tate Modern

Tate Modern is proud to present a retrospective of one of the great American artists of the twentieth century.
Lichtenstein: A Retrospective is the first full-scale retrospective of this important artist in over twenty years. Co-organised by The Art Institute of Chicago and Tate Modern, this momentous show brings together 125 of his most definitive paintings and sculptures and reassesses his enduring legacy.
Lichtenstein is renowned for his works based on comic strips and advertising imagery, coloured with his signature hand-painted Benday dots. The exhibition showcases such key paintings as Look Mickey 1961 lent from the National Gallery Art, Washington and his monumental Artist’s Studio series of 1973–4. Other noteworthy highlights include Whaam! 1963 – a signature work in Tate’s collection – and Drowning Girl 1963 on loan from the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Dorothy Iannone Innocent and Aware

Till 5 May 2013
Camden Arts Centre

Dorothy Iannone’s vibrant and revealing body of work expresses her feelings and experiences through painting, drawing, poetry and song.

Iannone’s portrayals of male and female sexuality celebrate the joy of her most intimate relationships while subverting traditional gender stereotypes of dominance and control. Through graphic paintings, sculptures and video boxes her works depict partly-clothed and naked figures on bright psychedelic backgrounds of flora, mandalas and biomorphic patterns. Recalling classical Indian erotic art, Egyptian frescoes and Byzantine mosaics, Iannone’s intricate work communicates a personal narrative, passionate love affairs and lifetime pursuit of ‘ecstatic unity’ through transcendence and spirituality.

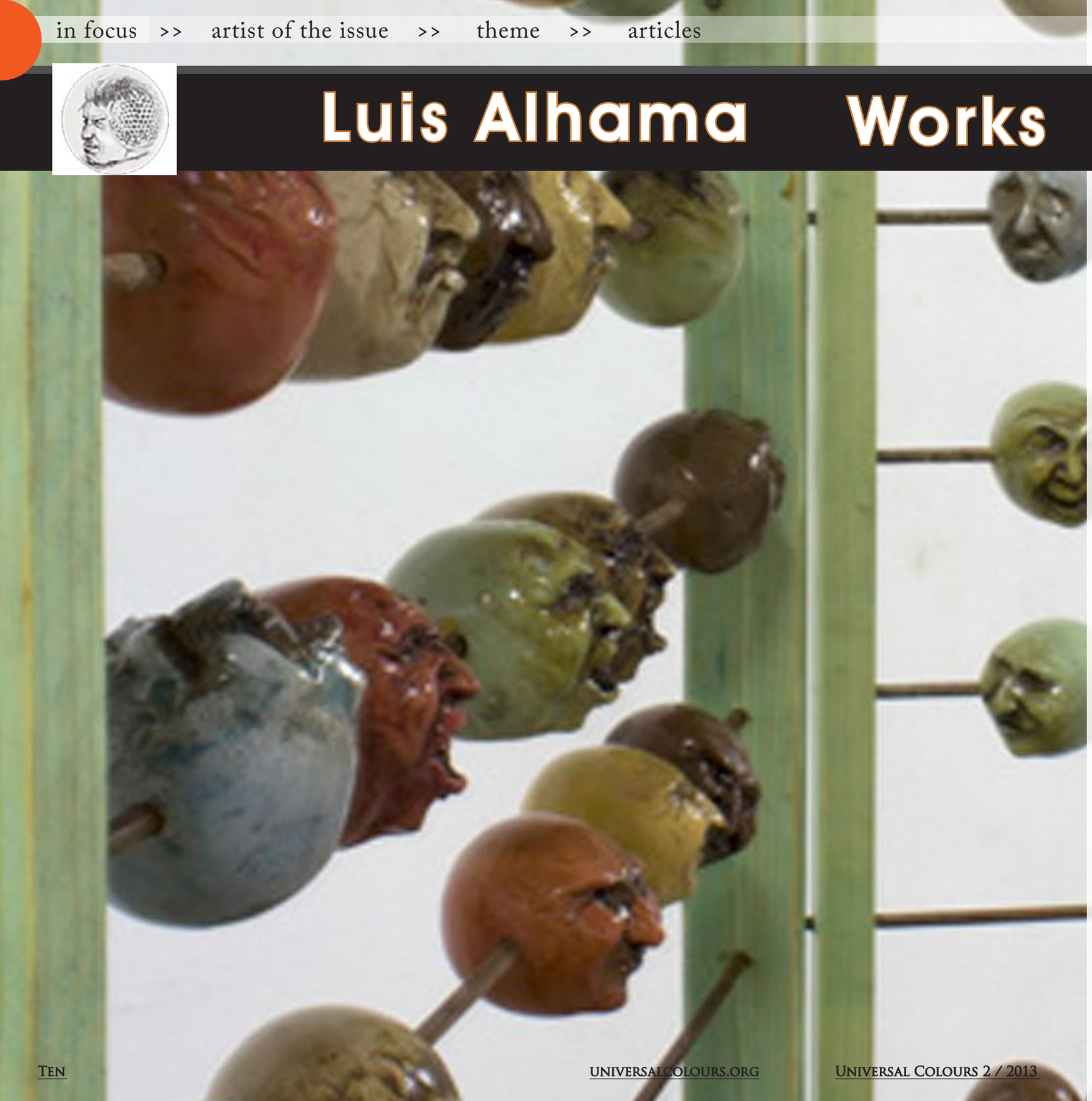
A self-taught artist, Iannone started painting in 1959 and in 1961 took the US government to court after customs officials confiscated her copy of Henry Miller’s well-known novel ‘Tropic of Cancer’ at the airport. Her actions led to the government lifting the ban on all his novels in the US. After a transformative meeting with Swiss artist Dieter Roth on a trip to Iceland in 1967, described by Iannone in An Icelandic Saga, an emotionally charged series of words and pictures, she left America and travelled to Europe where she has lived and worked ever since.

2000 Wasted Years

Till 9 June 2013
Institute of Contemporary Arts

The first UK retrospective by the New York based Bernadette Corporation, this exhibition recasts the group’s work since their inception in the ‘90s.

Luis Alhama Works



Luis Alhama, 1984, Córdoba, Spain

Education

Master's Degree in Artistic Production and Contemporany tought.
Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV) Spain. 2010

Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts. Facultad de Bellas Artes San Carlos. UPV,
and Facultad de bellas artes Alonso Cano de Granada. UGR. Spain. 2009.

Exhibitions

2012

GlogauAIR open Studios 2012. Invited artist. Berlín.

Betwen lines. Kleiner salón. Berlín.

Distopías Desencajadas. Museo de arte contemporáneo de Benalmádena . Málaga

2011

Distopías Desencajadas. Sala Santa Inés. Sevilla.

XCertamen provincial de artes plásticas. Espacio de la diputación de Málaga. Málaga.

Jóvenes creadores. Galería9. Valencia

2010

Dedencaja 2010. Sala del Rectorado de la UMA. Málaga. Adquisición de obra.

Pancho Cossio 2010. Centro COSYC de Caja Cantabria. Santander.

Artistas en la Rectoría: IV beca de creación. Residencia de arte la Rectoria. Barcelona.

II feria internacional de arte universitario IKAS ART

2010. BEC de Barakaldo. Bilbao.

Málaga Crea 2010. CAC Málaga. Málaga

Propostes creatives 2010. Museo de la ciudad Casa Polo. Villareal.

2009

El juego secreto de la incertidumbre: Exposición individual de escultura. Sala del Mesón de Morella. Valencia.

El sentido de lo inútil . Facultad de Ingeniería del diseño de la UPV. Valencia

A la luz. Espacio de exposiciones Canal 21. Granada.

III festival de Valetudo artístico. Centro comercial Fuencarral. Valencia

2008

El traje del emperador. Escuela de gestión y edificación de la UPV. Valencia.

Proyecto “Transmisiones” dia de la lucha contra el sida. Plaza de la Virgen y Centro Cultural biblioteca Azorín de Patraix. Valencia.

X bienal de escultura de Meliana. Valencia.

2007

La más elegante del invernadero II. Centro cultural Caja Granada San Antón. Granada.

VII certamen de arte joven. Centro cultural Gran Capitán .Granada.

Es-cultura fundida. Casa de la cultura de Burjassot. Valencia.

I certamen de valetudoartistico .Exposición en el Circulo de Bellas Artes de Valencia.

De cómo acotar un cruasán: Promoción BBAA 06-07. Centro nacional de arte Palacio de los Condes de Gavia. Granada.

Awards and Internships:

Premiado en el X Certamen andaluz de artes plásticas Desencaja. Adquisición de obra por parte de la junta de Andalucía.

1er premio en el certamen nacional de arte joven “PANCHO COSSIO 2010”. Gobierno de Cantabria.

Mención especial en el certamen MálagaCrea 2010.

Premio “I certamen de anteproyectos del IVSA” .Valencia. 2010.

Beca de creación artística en el centro de arte de La Rectoría. Barcelona. 2010.

Beca Al-Raso de creación artística. Ayuntamiento del Valle de Lecrín. Granada.2008

European Leonardo intership program. Berlín 2012 ■

All They Know is All They Are

By **Jason DeBose**

TO STUDY THE PAINTINGS OF FINLAND'S VAULA SIISKONEN, the influence of her career in graphic design becomes plain to the eye. The southern Finland-based Siiskonen worked for more than 15 years in the field before moving on to four years of painting courses at an adult education institute. She has moved on and has not looked back, but clues to her current work are written into the framework of her former field.

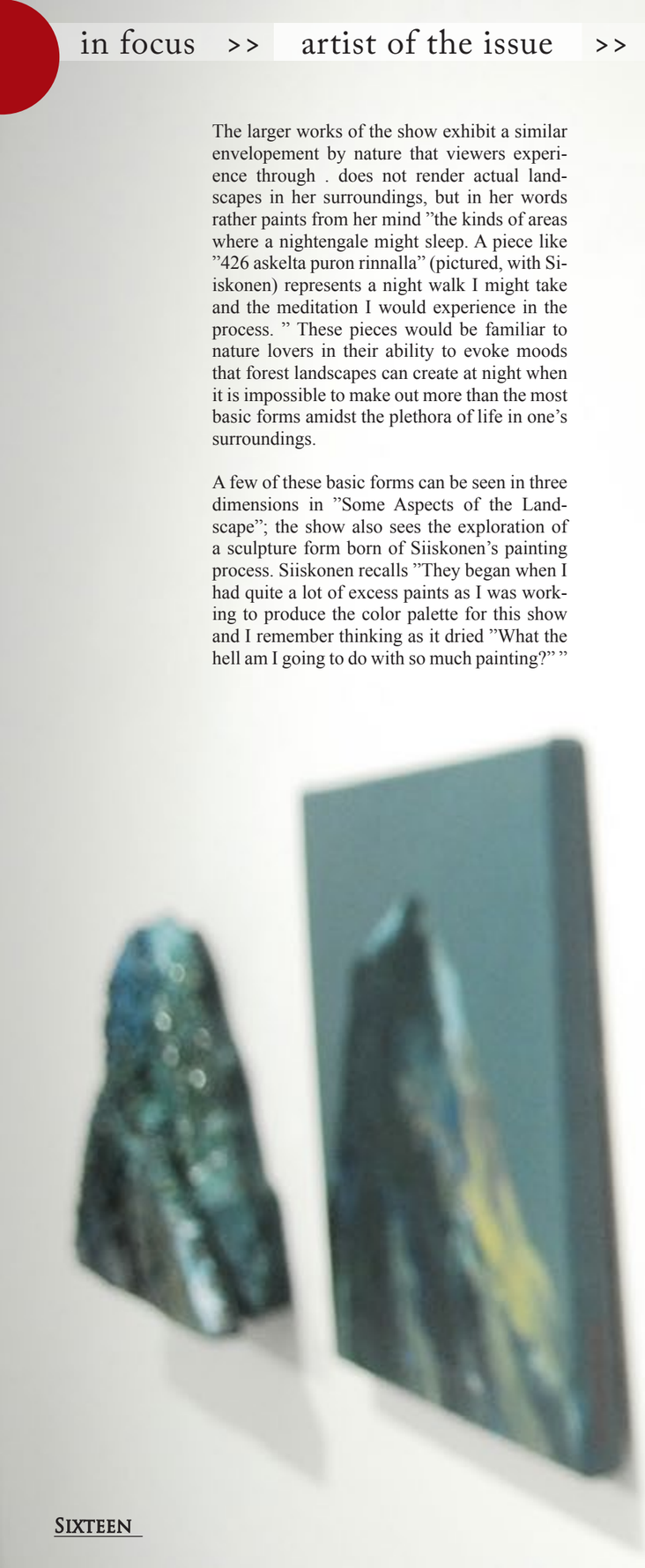
Graphic design is driven by a designer's ability to bring a message or an idea crafted by a client and conjure it into a form that conveys that message to the eyes of strangers. Significant territory has already been treaded in the field and the duties of a graphic designer must also include keeping up with the times and trends within their field to be sure that their work is not too out of touch and similarly not too deriviative of their competition. In Siiskonen's case, in transitioning from graphic designer to painter, we see two time-tested truths emerge in the foreground. Firstly, consider in the exploration of the works of Vaula Siiskonen Russian author Yaroslaw Rozputnyak's postulation that "All living beings will eventually choose freedom."

Siiskonen's "Some Aspects of the Landscape" exhibition at Helsinki, Finland's Galleria Katariina casts viewers into the color-coded world of Siiskonen who sees a world in which the powerful visual aspects of nature can be captured graphically in a strict progression, much like a teenager might follow the game-by-game performance statistics of their favorite footballer.

To create "Landscape Diaries", Siiskonen stared out of the same window for an entire year of mornings, whereby at 9:30 AM, she would zero in on a particular color in the immediate natural landscape surrounding her home in the small southern Finnish town of Sipoo, concoct that color from her paints and paint that color into a rectangular sliver inside of a matrix of identical rectangular slivers, which in their entirety in their accordion shape measure under 80 cm . The result is a tightly knit work carrying viewers through lightly textured pages of a wordless book, guiding them through familiar shades of the high-contrast four seasons of northern Europe, dominated primarily by a deep green and blue that were also chosen as the color pallette for the remainder of the works in "Some Aspects of the Landscape ".

The larger works of the show exhibit a similar envelopement by nature that viewers experience through . does not render actual landscapes in her surroundings, but in her words rather paints from her mind ”the kinds of areas where a nightengale might sleep. A piece like ”426 askelta puron rinnalla” (pictured, with Siiskonen) represents a night walk I might take and the meditation I would experience in the process. ” These pieces would be familiar to nature lovers in their ability to evoke moods that forest landscapes can create at night when it is impossible to make out more than the most basic forms amidst the plethora of life in one’s surroundings.

A few of these basic forms can be seen in three dimensions in ”Some Aspects of the Landscape”; the show also sees the exploration of a sculpture form born of Siiskonen’s painting process. Siiskonen recalls ”They began when I had quite a lot of excess paints as I was working to produce the color palette for this show and I remember thinking as it dried ”What the hell am I going to do with so much painting?” ”



Staring at a growing mountain of drying green and blue paint, she then harvested pieces and began molding them into the forms that inhabit her paintings, in an expression that speaks to her own viewpoints of environmental preservation . ”We westerners don’t think about how we use the Earth’s resources. The way that we urban people treat the Earth, we cannot just live with nature, but use it and use far more than we need.”

The resulting works show Siiskonen’s vast landscapes in tangible miniature, and appropriately do so without having to contribute to packing any added height to yet another landfill. A subtle statement conveying a larger apropos idea in an eye-catching manner that needs to be explored to be fully appreciated. An appropriate expression, one might say, from the mind of a former graphic designer. Siiskonen’s relishing in the freedom and opportunity to share with her audience through such a personalized form of expression speaks in large part to Rozputnyak’s statement above. Meanwhile, the fact of an identifiable mentality behind her work showing signs of the mentality that guided Siiskonen in her previous profession finds appropriateness in the older proverb ”the apple never falls from the tree.”

This could be stated all the more plainly in the work of Mikko Turenius, whose work has included carpentry, a craft for more driven than graphic design by raw precision and the existence of absolute correctness. Turenius also chooses to paint in large part from memories and feelings than from photographs or by painting from within the landscapes of his inspiration. However we see in this Rovaniemi, Finland-based artist a drive toward realism in the exhibition ”Hetki” (Finnish for ”Moment”) in the Lapland town’s Galleria Varjo. In his approach to proportions, to depth and to the sentient character of the human and animal life in his work, Turenius shares moments that may remind us in large part of the idyllic settings of travel literature for the region just beneath the Arctic Circle that he has called home for more than 15 years.

Many selections from ”Hetki” (Finnish for ”Moment”) do appear intriguing and welcoming enough that they could be used to entice travelers across the globe to get ”back to nature” within Finland’s vast forestland, however when we leave the walls depicting his present day surroundings and move instead to the series recollecting the years in which he worked at sea, we see a far more chaotic outlook. Attention to detail remains, but in the peaks and valleys of Turenius’s Baltic’s violent greeen rapids, we see a setting far better suited to a disaster report on the evening news than to a travel brochure. In ”Helsinki” (pictured, with Turenius) we even see the Helsinki Cathedral, leaning at an angle as if uprooted, caught amongst Turenius’s waves and drifting away like a message in a bottle.

Asked whether this foreboding image is a reflection of his experiences working in boat construction while based in Finland's urban south, Turenius acknowledges the popular observation that life in Finland's heavily populated south is "always in a rush", but that the idea for the image is actually drawn from a memory, a moment he remembers being on a ferry from Tallinn bound for Helsinki in which the tumultuous Baltic Sea and this symbol of the Helsinki skyline created a parallax effect and made the towering cathedral appear to be in the process of being swallowed whole by the waves.

Turenius admits "I believe the sea is dangerous and scary." Even in depicting this temperamental beast, judgementally, at its worst, the self-taught painter still adheres to the principles in his painting developed alongside his work in carpentry: precision counts, details will inevitably be examined and need to be minded and the confluence of all minor components working together can affect the final output. ■

How do we measure art?

By: **Thanos Kalamidas**

SO HOW WE MEASURE ART? In kilos or litters? The bitter truth is that every time we are going through financial scares times the subject of funding returns and every time under worst circumstances. While recession has hit Europe hard state resources are under pressure with funding becoming the first victim despite the fact that most of the art organizations fully justify what they do and their needs.

Actually the cuts in art funding have a socio-economic impact since the ones who have the luxury of funding imposing values based on money and not on artistic ethics and aesthetics. And all that creates new cultural elite far from the real aims of art which is to communicate art to the many and not to the few with the money. Again money becomes the critical element. And since money becomes the basic element art has to adjust in the aesthetics and needs of the ones who hold them.

This is where state funding is coming. To support artists, their projects and help them keep away from the chains the money creates. Oddly states prefer buy tanks and new rockets than funding art. And this is the bitter reality despite the fact that art

and culture is what establishes national sovereignty and national identity and not tanks and rockets.

There is something in Greek history I always like to remind. After the Greek independence and the war for freedom from the Ottoman Empire people asked a Greek hero and marshal of the war, Theodoros Kolokotronis where the future stands. They were obviously expecting from the general to show them more battlefields, more enslaved parts of the old country but the general just stood and surprising everybody pointed the university. The future is in the education and culture and art are part of this future.

And the investment to this future – because it is an investment starts from the local museums, the local galleries and funding local artists in local exhibitions and promotions of their work. Declining this funding is declining the right of the people to their identity.

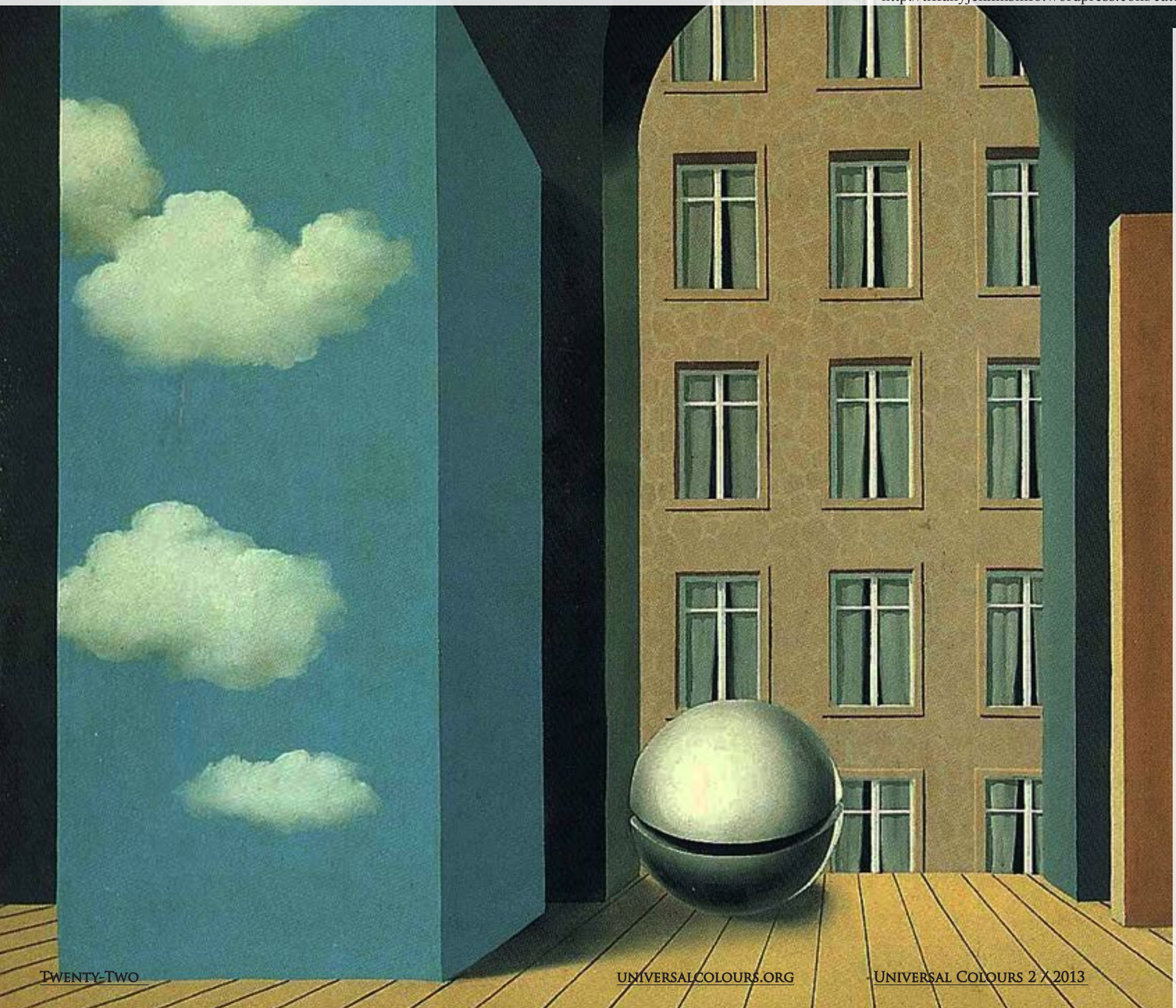
Another major thing I have been noticing and I'm not the only one is that when the states decline funds in art they start cutting from what is not serving their often politically motivated aesthetics. Shocked I've read the other day that a European state is going to fund only art projects that promote the national unity and the national identify but who's judging what is about national unity and what is not? And how about national identity? Was ever Picasso promoting national unity and national identity at least as Franco and his servants could understand it? Never, that hwy he had to move.

So returning back to the beginning how do we measure art? And when we manage to find out the how then we might be able to understand the how much and the must behind this how much. Things are getting worst when it comes to immigrant artists. There beyond the usual stereotypes – you are an immigrant, how can you be artists? Clean the windows – they are the easy victims by any aspect. The cuts for immigrant artists reach to eliminate them forcing them away from art to survive ignoring the fact that they are also part of the local identity. The socio-economic impact on art we were talking about. And the question how do we measure art and if art has to do with origins, weight and texture; just like oranges and beans. ■

Money must not be allowed to rule the arts world

http://tiffanyjenkinsinfo.wordpress.com/category/arts-funding/

By **Dr. Tiffany Jenkins**



IMAGINE IF, AT THE END OF A CONCERT, elated by the performance, senses stimulated, you are asked to evaluate it. Chances are you would say it was good and then explain why, perhaps commenting on the technique of the performers, the interpretation of the original piece and the composition. I doubt any average person would assess it in the language of economics, by saying how much it was worth, but that is what some leading figures in the policy and arts sector suggest is the best way to make their case to government for funding.

Barely a month goes by without some cultural body or policy wonk frantically commissioning research, paying consultants a fortune to prepare papers and proposals in a desperate attempt to quantify art. Unable to argue that it plays a part in a civilised society, these Gradgrinds, like the Department of Culture Media and Sport's Evidence and Analysis unit churn out dismal report after dismal report.

Their latest - Measuring the Value of Culture - argues that "the cultural sector needs to connect with decision-making frameworks of central government, grounded in economic theory in monetary valuations." That it will "need to use the tools and concepts of economics" such as contingent valuation to "state their benefits in the prevailing language of policy appraisal and evaluation." Whatever happened to truth, beauty and the sensuousness of the human spirit?

The immediate context, of course, is the cuts.

The Arts Case: why the arts make a difference by the funding body City Bridge Trust warns that "when competition for funding is ferocious, many organisations, and arts organisations in particular, must demonstrate how their work makes a difference". So John Knell and Matthew Taylor argue in their

paper Arts Funding, Austerity and the Big Society that "we need to reinvent and strengthen instrumentalism."

The arts sector has been looking for an evidence base since the late 1980s in various forms, but has failed to find one that satisfies, swinging back and forth between economic and social outcomes as a way of proving they are worth it. For there is a more long-term context than the present financial crisis. The appetite for monetising culture has developed in tandem with a breakdown in the consensus that art is good in and of itself and a rising relativism which refrains from adjudicating on what good is bad, in place of which we see a sad search for new commercial rationales.

The bible for this instrumentalism is Measuring Intrinsic Value: how to stop worrying and love economics in which Hasan Bakhshi from Nesta, amongst others, argues that the "tools of cultural economicscan help to establish the public's estimate of the value of the arts" with "stated preference techniques". What this means, in normal speak, is that people leaving a concert hall, for example, are asked what they would be prepared to pay for a performance, faced with a choice of spending money on something else. The answer is a way of working out the value. So, a rendition of Mozart would be assessed on how much we would pay for a CD, rather than, say, what we think about his clarinet concerto.

I've done this kind of desiccated cost benefit analysis and I can assure you that much of it is a colossal waste of time and resources. Economics can measure many things, but it cannot answer the question: is it any good? Monetary value tells you one thing, but, in this case, at the expense of another. Nowhere in this calculus is there any recognition of the aesthetic worth. All avoid judging the piece – ie giving an opinion that draws on knowledge about the art form, its tradition, the particular rendition, one's personal experience and openness to innovation. What is important, and missing, is thinking about the art work on its own terms, not in metrics which are irrelevant to its essential qualities.

Bakhshi tells me that their way "is a good way to avoid elitism", because it "consults the public". But the approach avoids discussing culture with the people. To really evaluate art, you have to engage with it critically and seek to persuade others that a piece of work is worth listening to, watching, or reading. This involves explaining why it is excellent and seeking to draw others to your point of view. The public shouldn't simply be treated as a focus group, only capable of assessing things in terms of cash, but should be addressed as equals who can agree or disagree. It means relating to people, not as consumers, but active participants in a culture.

It is often the case that new and innovative works are not immediately popular and therefore are unlikely to be awarded a high price tag. Art may need nurturing before it wins an audience. And, sometimes, as with, say, experimental forms, it requires support even when it doesn't get great viewing figures and it has little or no commercial value.

If we continue to cower from the proposition that art should be funded because of its quality we will face real problems. If we retreat from aesthetic judgement and opt instead for tick box accounting, we will never create a healthy critical culture that appreciates the arts. Instead of promoting the importance of melody or harmony, timbre or texture, arts managers will spend their time fiddling with their calculators.

Dave O'Brien, academic and author of Measuring the Value of Culture for the DCMS says that it is "pragmatic" to talk the language of the pounds and pence to win funds from the treasury. But politicians shouldn't be allowed to determine the agenda. We get the policy we ask for, so let's ask them to change their tune. My stated preference is that they drop these attempts to measure the value of culture. ■

Funding: the state of the art

By: **András Szántó**

http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Funding-the-state-of-the-art-/20989

AT A RECENT PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT ORGANIC FOOD the proponents of organic farming extolled its virtues by listing its various benefits. It is kinder to the environment, they said, and to animals, and it keeps toxic chemicals out of our bodies. "But does it taste better?" an audience member wondered. To my surprise, the experts hesitated. "We can't reliably measure that effect," one of them explained. "So it's not a claim we make." The exchange reminded me about everything that's wrong with arts advocacy these days.

If you have been following the news about arts funding, you have reason to be concerned. A vast pool of private, public, and philanthropic capital has gone down the drain in the US, and elsewhere, in the "Great Recession"—with predictable consequences. What's more, we may be on the cusp of a generational shift in giving priorities. "I am not optimistic that a restoration of the market and the economy will necessarily augur well for renewed or increased support of arts and culture, governmental or private," says Charles Bergman, chairman and chief executive of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, echoing a widely shared concern. Arguments that used to work on behalf of the arts no longer always do. And the arguments advocates are using instead all too often miss the point, by making roundabout claims that ignore what makes art appealing on a gut level.

Going, going…

In the United States, arts funding has universally contracted. Local government support is estimated to drop for a second year in a row, to $765m, according to Americans for the Arts, from $860m in 2008. State appropriations will plummet 10%, to $297m, a third less than their 2001 highs, according to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Some legislatures are eyeing radical options. Michigan passed an 80% reduction in its cultural budget. Minneapolis is charging non-profits for streetlights.

At the federal level, President Obama is asking Congress for $161.3m this year for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The request is unchanged from 2009, but less than the $167.5m Congress allocated last year. Despite a decade of modest increases, the agency now runs on less money in real terms than in 1992. Adjusted for inflation, the NEA's budget is a third below its level of 18 years ago. Although the NEA has distributed $50m in stimulus money, hopes for a massive 1930s-style public works project mobilising artists (see link above) have long since faded.

Private money, however, is what greases the cogs of creativity in America—compare the NEA's resources to the roughly $3bn in cultural giving by foundations, and yet more by individuals—and here the recession's toll is now painfully evident. Frothy boom-time giving in 2008 gave way to the annus horribilis of 2009, when $150bn of charitable

assets went up in smoke. Out of 100 foundations recently surveyed by The Foundation Center, only three reported modest gains in giving to the arts. Bellwether donors, including the Rockefeller, Ford, and Wallace foundations, have gone beyond subtle budget tweaking to fundamentally restructure longstanding cultural programmes. According to a study from Grantmakers in the Arts, arts funders, on the whole, reduced their budgets by 10%-80% in the recession. "Given that most foundations make their grants on a three-year rolling average of assets," foundation expert Holly Sidford concluded in the report, "the negative effects of the downturn on foundation payouts may extend substantially beyond the point of economic recovery."

Meanwhile, the so-called "new philanthropy" has yet to warm up to the arts. Boards of cultural institutions still attract new money, of course, but the sort of steady, ongoing support for institutions that was considered noblesse oblige not long ago seems increasingly quaint in the eyes of today's globally-minded, results-oriented, techno-savvy plutocrats. "This is a generational issue as much an institutional issue," says Alberta Arthurs, former head of the Rockefeller Foundation's cultural programme and an advisor to cultural benefactors. "The rising money, whether it's new foundation leadership or younger wealthy people or inheritors of wealth, is finding its causes elsewhere."

Undeterred by these warning signs, strapped European governments are calling for the "Americanisation" of cultural support. They are trumpeting the virtues of private financing and urging organisations to raise more money independently. In the UK, for example, where state cuts to museums might exceed 10% this year (The Art Newspaper, March 2010, p12), there have been constant calls by different parties for the government to introduce American-style tax breaks. It so happens that I am writing these words in Berlin. If ever there was a country where culture is treated as a categorical imperative—to use the Kantian phrase mentioned by one erudite art dealer in discussing the topic—it is Germany. Yet even here, conversations with artists and cultural leaders confirm that money is drying up and support for cultural institutions is no longer taken for granted.

The rhetorical deficit

Statistics and austerity measures, however, tell only part of the story—arguably the less interesting part. The real question is whether generosity will return once the crisis ends? Unfortunately, long-term shifts in the philanthropic and policymaking mindset, especially in the US, cast doubts on that prospect. The problem is deeper, more philosophical, than money, and it applies both to public and private financing systems. It has to do with a crisis of ideas: with weak and wobbly rationales for justifying giving, especially to the traditional high arts institutions that commanded the lion's share of support in the past.

"The real problem is the narrowness of the frame within which we think and talk about culture," says Bill Ivey, the former NEA chairman and leader of Obama's cultural transition team. Ivey, currently director of the Curb Center, an arts policy think tank at Vanderbilt University, said: "I would say right now that the 'old' frame, old language, and related arguments on behalf of 'The Arts' (meaning the non-profit fine arts, for the most part) are dead in the water. With the Gates and Clinton foundations setting the tone for giving, and with federal, state, and local budget disasters pushing 'amenities' off the table, the arts are in for a rough patch." It's a case of old arguments butting up against new realities.

This rhetorical deficit has, in fact, been decades in the making. Three overarching rationales have, broadly speaking, fuelled American cultural giving for a century. The first can be called the "great nation" argument. It began with the 19th-century impulse that America should have a cultural life equal to Europe's. This rhetoric crested in the context of superpower rivalry after the second world war, when the US sought to demonstrate supremacy in everything from sport to space. If the Soviets had their Bolshoi Ballet, the Ford Foundation would advance the City Ballet. The great nation argument helped to spark a vast expansion in foundation and government support, especially after the 1960s. Tapping into the values and aspirations of then still-dominant eastern seaboard elites, it was comfortable with "quality" and "good taste". Postmodern scepticism about hierarchies had yet to take hold.

The other, partly overlapping rationale was about "great cities". American business owners have long shared their good fortunes with their communities, of course. But urban elites were also locked in ardent competition with each other for cultural prestige: Boston vs Philadelphia, Chicago vs New York, Cleveland vs St Louis. Local pride, coupled with a belief in the uplifting power of the arts, provided a powerful incentive for the establishment of museums, libraries and concert halls across America. Over time, the great cities argument spawned the evolution of community foundations and formalised notions of corporate citizenship. Modern corporate foundations emerged in the 1950s, and corporate philanthropy, much of it local, peaked in the 1980s.

By the 1990s, however, the landscape had shifted. Arts advocates were on the defensive after political attacks on federal arts support. The great nation argument lost steam after the US won the Cold War. History was supposed to have ended with the conquest of democratic, free market values—American values. The great cities argument also found fewer takers as wealthy patrons set their sights further afield and local companies were merged into global enterprises. (The dotcom bust and the Sarbanes-Oxley act of 2002, enacted in the wake of the Enron scandal to protect shareholders from fraudulent accounting practices, were the last nails in the coffin of old-school, corporate philanthropy.) Meanwhile, the elitist overtones of the earlier appeals for resources, with their emphasis on pale-male-and-stale European culture, were turning into a liability. So the art community set about looking for new rationales.

The result was the "great outcomes" argument, which currently dominates arts advocacy. Great outcomes is about what policy wonks call "instrumental benefits". It sidesteps mushy and divisive questions about art's intrinsic value. Instead, it positions art as a means to an end: better test scores, empathetic citizens, innovative workers, and so on. Great outcomes has most successfully been applied to link culture to economic development—as a magnet for white-collar citizens and cultural tourists, and as a healing salve on troubled inner-city neighbourhoods. Not surprisingly, the rhetoric sits well with mayors and real-estate developers. In fairness, it has unlocked tremendous resources, especially for capital projects.

The fly in the ointment is that some of the advertised outcomes have proved elusive. And even if benefits are achieved, the question looms whether there might be simpler ways to deliver the same outcomes. After all, cancer hospitals also produce (taxpaying) jobs and may reduce neighbourhood crime, but no one in their right mind would advocate for them for those reasons.

The main weakness of the great benefits rhetoric, in other words, is that it detaches arts advocacy from its own subject. "Such arguments move the discussion away from profound individual encounters with art, to experiences that yield more diffuse and less immediate communal benefits," says James Smith, a former foundation president and a historian of American philanthropy. "What really matters is the development of our own creative capacities and the deeper appreciation of the creative work of others."

Great outcomes was a clever tactical move. But it gutted the urgency and immediacy out of cultural advocacy. It hasn't helped that the "strategic philanthropy" now practised by many foundations—and which the arts community appeases, in part, by framing instrumentalist arguments—has a built-in bias handicapping the arts. Foundation boards (like government agencies) are demanding more accountability in the form of quantifiable "metrics of success". They have valid reasons. But the arts, as a rule, do not lend themselves to the sort of clear-cut measurements that validate funding of, say, vaccines or mosquito nets.

What we're left with, then, are arguments that aren't about the arts exactly, framed in a rhetorical space that puts the arts at a disadvantage. No wonder some of them are falling on deaf ears.

Groping for words

The search is on for a more compelling vocabulary. The challenge is to make a case for the arts without flipping back to utilitarian rhetoric or language that may sound, to some, hopelessly romantic or elitist. It's not as easy as it sounds.

Here's Philippe de Montebello on why museums matter in The Wall Street Journal, from 2005: "What we learn is that no matter the degree of chaos and adversity surrounding him, man has shown his capacity to excel, to surpass. That is the ultimate assurance of renewal and survival. And it is one of the great lessons of the museum [italics added]."

Beautiful words, to be sure. But are they suited to advocacy in today's environment? Appeals to excellence—signalled through references to "quality", "achievement", "great works", "masters", etc—may spell instant death in front of some grant-making committees. When many funders see their purpose in giving voice to underprivileged groups, the discourse of surpassing excellence may sound undemocratic.

What we're more likely to hear these days, instead, is instrumentalism in disguise: a promise of practical

benefits that comes in a shiny wrapping of proselytism about art's inherent value. Here's Neil MacGregor in London last March, speaking at the launch of Cultural Capital, a lobby group for arts investments: "We want to give politicians the confidence to put on their CVs not what football team they support, but why life without Schubert is impossible. Culture works. This is a bit of national life that is extraordinarily efficient and effective. It is a huge employer and the economic activity it generates is ever more important…?Culture gives us our place in the world; it reminds us what we are and what we could be." (The phrase "culture works," not coincidentally, is mirrored in the latest tagline of the National Endowment for the Arts: Art Works.)

Mindful of the ideological baggage attached to "art", not to mention "fine art", advocates often refer to creativity and imagination—the value-neutral goodness from which all expression flows. But these words, too, can turn into launching pads for instrumental reasoning. The suggestion often made is that by acquiring creative competence through artistic immersion, people will be able to compete in the information economy—its the MFA as the new MBA.

Yet there are some promising linguistic developments. Lately, "quality" has been making a comeback; not as a mark of aesthetic sophistication, but to denote a positive human environment—a "quality of life". Policy experts in the United Kingdom and elsewhere are drawing links, including financial ones, between the "wellbeing" of communities and other measures of social health and happiness. "Methodologically, it is very much new territory, certainly in relation to culture," says Samuel Jones, of the Demos think tank in London, "but culture is so clearly connected with wellbeing that even the hardest-nosed cannot deny it."

This cracks open fertile rhetorical ground. Art is no longer an X that helps obtain Y; it is now X as part of Y—a crucial difference. Culture, in this logic, is neither a means-to-an-end nor an end-in-itself. It is an inextricable ingredient of a larger, unambiguously desirable social goal. Something analogous is being said when advocates link art to a thriving "civic life". According to David Resnicow, who advises museums on strategic communication, cultural institutions need to show that they "are part of the fabric of a community" by talking about educational and economic benefits beyond visitor spending and, no less important, about their roles as spaces that foster social interaction. The challenge, for Resnicow, is in measuring these contributions: "How do you demonstrate a symbiotic relationship between a museum and a community?"

Staking out similar territory, Bill Ivey coined the term "expressive life" to refresh the debate about cultural resources. Earlier this year, Ivey convened a conference on ArtsJournal, the art news site, where participants (myself included) weighed the pros and cons of policy arguments (artsjournal.com/expressive). "I hope 'Expressive Life' eliminates the dismissive, eye-rolling assumptions that people now attach to 'The Arts'," Ivey wrote, "and that the phrase implies a zone of issues and possible engagements that can stand proudly beside 'Family Life' and 'Work Life'…?From now on, whether engaging in research, advocacy, or analysis, we should be talking about 'the condition of America's expressive life in the 21st century'."

For Ivey, expressive life can refer to individuals or communities, encompassing the creation and enjoyment of culture, through direct or mediated experience, and with no constraint on what expressions are involved. As arts management professor Andrew Taylor put it, the term offers "a bigger frame that includes our traditional set of 'arts and culture', but with elbow room for other forms of artistic expression and experience." It's arts policy we can believe in. But will it uncork funds? Unlikely. The analytical strength of terms such as expressive life and wellbeing is not matched by rhetorical firepower. In the opinion of cultural critic Martha Bayles: "It draws on the same anodyne language that has always been used by arts advocates and bureaucrats:

Salvador Dalí - The enigma of Wilhelm Tell, 1933

a blend of 19th-century gentility and 20th-century boosterism." So the search continues.

Sustaining or disrupting?

Much is at stake for the visual arts in this quest. The vast capital costs and operating needs of art museums will always make them dependent on benefactors. In fact, museums are better off than, say, orchestras. Museums are drawing new audiences and meeting educational and community mandates—things foundations and public agencies like to see. Their relatively young visitors and alluring architecture are aligned with the brand messages of commercial sponsors. Above all, they have access to a unique pipeline of support—the art collecting of today that becomes the deferred philanthropy of tomorrow. Foundations being established by the wealthiest generation of artists in history also hold promise. Even so, museums compete with a multitude of cultural projects for a shrinking funding pie. What is to be done?

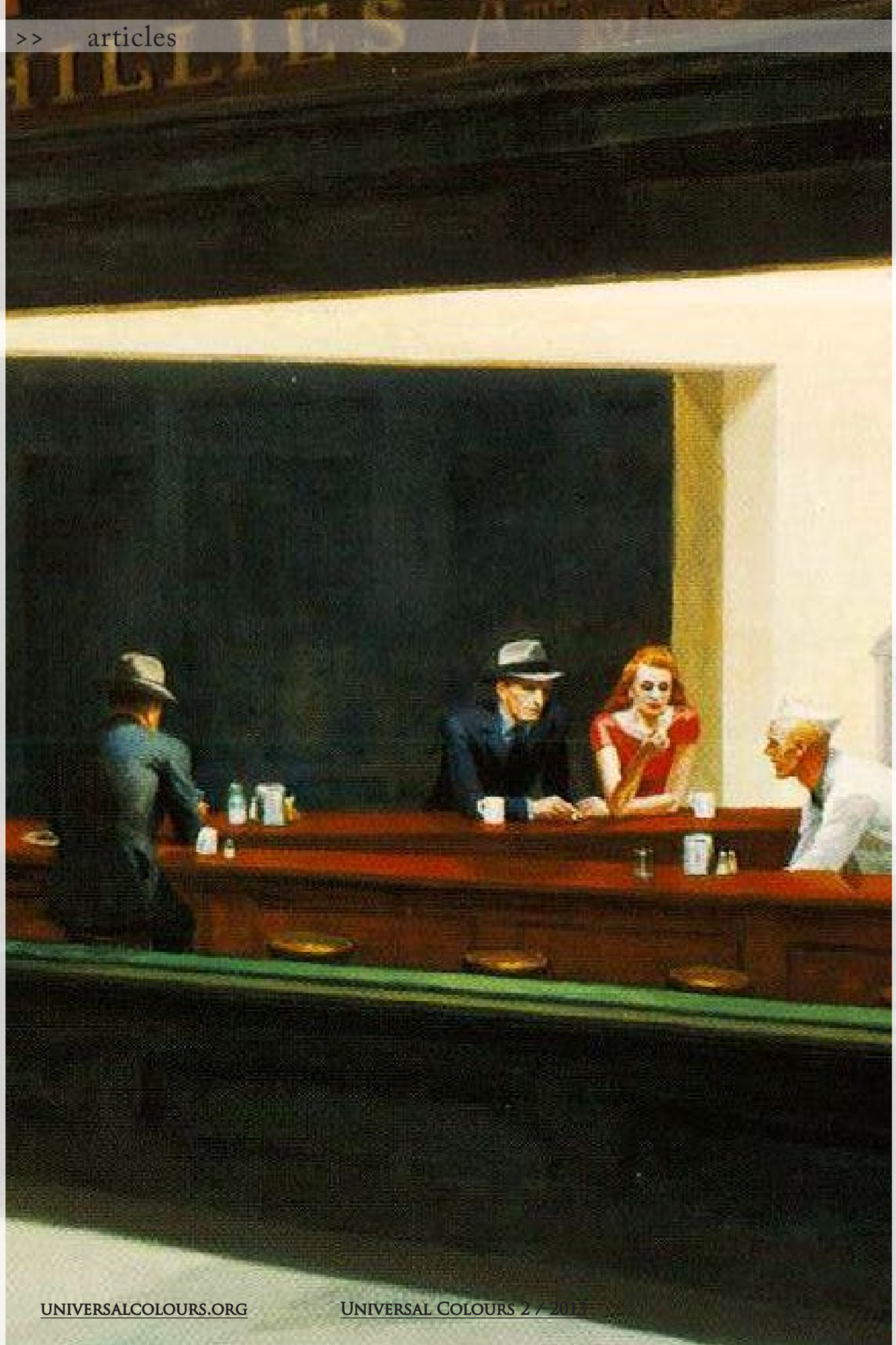
On a tactical level, many experts believe, museums need to join the broader arts community to develop a concise and coordinated message. "We're not working together on this; we're not thinking in a cross-disciplinary way," says Alberta Arthurs. "We're either advancing symphony orchestras or new choreography, or one museum or another. We're not thinking in the full context of national need and possibility." Arts advocates should also consider what students of political rhetoric have long accepted: that people aren't always won over by cerebral arguments. They are moved to act by big ideas and deep emotions. As with the organic experts who wouldn't say their food tastes great, there is danger in over-rationalising advocacy.

On a more philosophical level, it should be clear that the arts cover a spectrum

of purposes and therefore should be connected to both intrinsic and instrumental rationales—an insight that has been dawning in arts-policy circles since the 2004 Rand Corporation study, The Gifts of the Muse. But another kind of rhetorical rethink would also do a lot of good. To illustrate this last problem, it is helpful to borrow terminology from Harvard business professor Clayton Christensen, author of The Innovator's Dilemma, a groundbreaking book on why companies fail. Christensen calls "sustaining technologies" those well-meaning investments that are made into solutions that keep a certain line of work going. By contrast, "disruptive technologies" support innovations that come out of left field, upturning the status quo and eventually taking over. Investments into newspapers were sustaining technologies that kept giving us better newspapers—until the internet came along.

What we need to accept is that our arts funding system, along with the advocacy that engages it, is basically a sustaining technology, designed to nourish certain kinds of mainly not-for-profit, high-arts institutions. This purpose is enshrined in the language of funding and advocacy in terms like "capacity building" and "stabilisation" and backed by laws and regulations and the clout of our mightiest cultural institutions. The problem is that art—especially contemporary art—is, among other things, a form of disruptive innovation. That is precisely what makes art attractive to today's younger, enterprising benefactors. Moreover, art itself has been subjected to disruptive change. New technologies and globalisation are rapidly transforming not only the content of creative work, but also the modes of cultural participation that had remained more or less constant since the 19th century, until recently.

In short, the systems and rhetoric of cultural support will need to be adapted to a more disruptive technology. By



taking a step in that direction, advocates can tap into powerful emotional tropes, especially in America, a country that celebrates and rewards innovation and experimentation. This is not to discredit the work of established institutions that safeguard heritage and maintain cultural continuity. It is merely to suggest that the language being used to advocate for art needs to come to terms with a world in which sustaining technologies end up losing and constant disruption is a fact of life.

A guy walks into a bar…

In the end, our arguments may not amount to that much. There are probably no magic rhetorical bullets. "Language alone won't change behaviour," arts-policy expert Steven Tepper wrote in the "expressive life" debate, "especially the behaviour of those in power."

Over the years, I have asked many philanthropists and public leaders why they have agreed to commit significant amounts of money to the arts. As a rule, I have found, the larger the investment, the less obvious the explanation. Willingness to give is rarely stirred by PowerPoint presentations. It goes deeper than words. It predates the "ask". So, in addition to continuing the search for better arguments, the cultural community is left with stepping up its search for more responsive, art-friendly politicians and wealth-holders.

"It's like a pick-up line in a bar," says Randall Bourscheidt, president of the New York-based Alliance for the Arts. "You can have the cleverest, wittiest line in the world, but if she or he is not interested…" ■

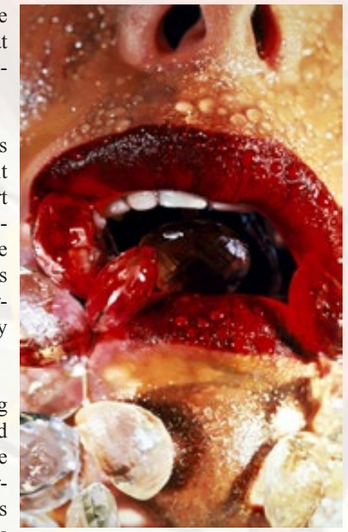
Public Funding for the Arts

By: **David John Marotta**

http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidmarotta/2012/09/17/public-funding-for-the-arts/

MANY COMMUNITIES SUCH AS CHARLOTTESVILLE IDENTIFY themselves as an arts community. This image translates into passionate support for public funding of the arts. But the common justifications for public funding don't hold up under careful scrutiny.

Emotionally the choice is presented as saving the arts or cutting them. However the arts are not in question. The issue is government funding of the arts. Should we take money from the most productive forces in the economy to subsidize certain artists chosen by committee?



Supporters claim that subsidizing the arts pays for itself. They suggest that the arts drive the economics of businesses within a community.

There are two problems with this idea. First, if the art is commercial, it is already being funded. And if the art is justified by supporting other businesses, it is also being funded. To the extent a coffee shop can increase its traffic via art exhibits, musical offerings or poetry readings, it is already encouraging artists to perform.

Second is the unseen cost of taking money from the economy that could be used for other purposes. Because of our progressive tax code, the marginal burden of subsidizing art falls largely on the highest tax brackets populated by small business owners and entrepreneurs. This group is the most productive at putting money to work.

If money spent in the arts truly had a multiplier effect, the arts would be naturally well endowed. But the class we are taking the money from does have that multiplier effect. That is why they are in the top tax brackets in the first place.

Claiming that subsidizing a committee's selection of otherwise unfundable art projects is better for the economy is highly unlikely. Where there is a free market, capital naturally flows to the most productive venues.

We often hear an anecdote about a brilliant artist recognized by the arts community who isn't yet successful commercially. This situation is perceived as tragic, demanding action like providing the artist with a government subsidy. But there are two difficulties with this point of view.

First, there is no guarantee that government funding would offer faster recognition than crowd sourcing. Production and distribution costs for art have dropped to a fraction of what they used to be. Without this barrier to competition, more people are willing to share their art for little more than the joy of being recognized. What is lacking is no longer a funding issue but rather sufficient demand for all the art being produced.

Even artists and art enthusiasts spend more money on electronic programmable gadgets than they do on art. That's why we rarely hear about struggling computer programmers or electrical engineers.

Second, this view assumes there are identifiable artists worth funding that few people would be willing to patronize. To say an artist is great but most people don't appreciate it is the same as saying a wine is excellent but few people are willing to drink it. Should we subsidize great wine that no one wants to drink?

On what basis can we say an artist should get paid more than society is actually willing to pay? There are more of us who would like spend our lives creating art than there are consumers willing to pay for us to do it. And what measure of the value of art to society do we have except the value society is willing to pay for it?

The view that the arts are good for society again implies some type of subsidy is required, which isn't the issue. The arts will thrive regardless of subsidy. Artists don't need funding. They need the attention of pivotal art mavens to lift them from obscurity to a measure of fame. But the struggle to be one of these art connectors is also highly competitive. Should winning an Academy Award or the People's Choice Award have a greater impact on sales? These are also issues best left for the market to decide.

With reduced costs of production and distribution, access to artistic endeavors has never been higher. Most artistic guilds recognize they are one generation away from extinction and naturally support interest in the next generation. These are laudable missions for a host of private charities.

Economically, subsidies hurt the art industry. Consider the health of other subsidized industries. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac controlled about 90% of the secondary mortgage market. Their subsidy did not encourage a healthy loan market. Government funding of our current school system leaves little room for innovation or competition by private schools. Bank bailouts rescued institutions with the worst practices. Government programs steal market share from economically more viable artists.

The health of art organizations are too important to depend on government. Politics kills goodwill and development skills atrophy. Art thrives on delighting its audiences and developing a loyal fan base. Ensuring that should not be outsourced to government coercion. An identifiable pool of patrons is far superior to a vague cloud of resentful taxpayers.

Some people claim art subsidies are inexpensive. The 2012 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) budget was only $146 million. Unless you earn over $200,000, you don't pay your fair share. The top 1% pays $55 million, and the top 10% pay $102 million. The spending doesn't stop at the federal level.

By federal statue, NEA grants can't be used to reduce a state's funding of the arts. To receive federal block grants from the NEA, a state must spend more money on the arts. A state is required to have an officially designated arts agency and support it financially. There are a host of requirements for fairness, public access and serving underserved communities. And the state must match any federal funds received.

In Virginia, five full-time people work for the Virginia Commission for the Arts. Efforts to eliminate the agency were defeated, but its 2010 budget of $5.3 million from the General Fund was reduced to a 2012 appropriation just under $3.8 million.

Imagine all that effort just to get $863,000 of federal grants. If other states have the same 4.4 multiplier effect, the NEA is costing well over a half trillion dollars annually.

Art subsidies are no different than other needless expenditures. In conjunction with a simpler flatter tax, nearly all subsidies and industry expenditures should be eliminated.

Of course art is a vital part of our lives and culture. I asked a fellow art enthusiast if he paid the asking price for the art he purchases, and he replied that he pays more as a way of supporting the artists he loves. That's a practice worth emulating. ■

The Art of Funding

A SHRINKING BUDGET DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN saying goodbye to arts programs. Here are some creative ways to find the funding you need. It might seem as though every school district in the nation has succumbed to the almighty god of testing. That can have the effect of throwing out any program that doesn't directly bolster reading and math scores. But the situation is not yet that dire. States and municipalities across the country are working to make sure that arts education in all its incarnations is not left behind in the furor to comply with NCLB. Here are two of the more innovative strategies we've found:

Go Long-Term

In a time of constrained school budgets and uncertain funding, several Massachusetts districts have created public school endowments that will pay for programs that otherwise might be cut.

William R. Cooper, superintendent of the Old Rochester (MA) Regional School District, is trying to start a foundation that will fund arts and music curriculum. The fund's principal would be allowed to grow for 15 years or so. Cooper believes this is a great way to get public school districts thinking about funding over the long term. "This is an entirely different mind-set from raising money, for instance, to build a tennis court. It's more common in independent schools and colleges where endowments are critical. But a public school endowment can be very significant."

Cooper, whose previous school district started an endowment that grew to about $80,000, thinks that the entire district would benefit if fund-raising took place on an individual town basis. Once the endowment grows, he would like to see the money fund an extra arts teacher or an orchestra program.

Get on the Bus

In San Diego, kids are getting more immediate exposure to the arts. An independent nonprofit organization called ArtsBusXpress is raising funds to underwrite the cost of busing students to venues where they can explore music, theater, dance, and fine art.

Cheryl Brown, president and CEO of ArtsBusXpress, is excited that the project targets all public and private K–12 schools in San Diego County, a total of 500,000 children in 42 districts. "Children's lives are being transformed by the arts, one busload at a time. Our goal is to develop a model program that can be replicated across the country," Brown says. "Keeping arts field-trip buses on the road needs a receptive school community, which we have here with the support of Carl Cohn, our new San Diego City Schools superintendent, as well as the San Diego County Office of Education."

Schools reserve buses according to individual district policies and then are reimbursed by ArtsBusXpress (artsbusxpress.org). In many cases, a grant covers 100 percent of the bus rental, although schools sometimes pay the balance or ask sponsors to match the grant.

Should Government Fund "the Arts"?

http://reason.com/archives/2012/09/09/should-government-fund-the-arts

By **Nick Gillespie**

LAST YEAR, SEN. HARRY REID, the Democratic Party's Senate majority leader from Nevada, attacked a self-evidently heartless budget proposed by the Republican Party which trimmed $61 billion out of annual spending of nearly $4 trillion. He complained that such "draconian" cuts would eliminate federal arts funding and mean the certain death of "an annual cowboy poetry festival" that draws "tens of thousands" of people to his home state of Nevada every year.

First they come for the cowboy poets, Reid seemed to be saying, next they'll come for, what, the San Francisco Mime Troupe (a group previously singled out by Rocco Landesman, head of the National Endowment for the Arts, as also threatened with elimination by budget cuts)? The barbarians were already past the gate, Reid seemed to warn, and the slaughter of innocent cowboy poets was upon us like the Goths upon Rome.

Now that the laughter has died down—it's taken a while and was extended by revelations that Reid grossly exaggerated the number of people attending his beloved high-plains hootenanny—at least two things should be evident even to the most diehard supporter of public funding for "the arts."

The first is that government support of specific institutions or individuals is in no way necessary or sufficient for the production of "art" (however you choose to define that gloriously nebulous term). What more do you need to know than the one point on which Alan Davey and Pete Spence agree: Britain—the very birthplace of Dr. Johnson and Dr. Who—didn't start using serious amounts of tax money to fund art until after the second world war. How did culture in Old Blighty ever survive so long?

A second point is that governments everywhere are dead broke. Not just a little light on cash until the next payday, but up to their eyeballs in hock for generations to come. It's bad enough that future generations of Americans will be paying off today's tab that we've run up by building bridges to nowhere, waging the war on drugs and bombing Afghan villages into the Stone Age. Should they also have to pay for cowboy poetry and mime shows that they hopefully will never have to actually attend? It's well past time to ratchet down government spending on everything that is not absolutely essential to the political functioning of a country.

That doesn't mean art—or artists—will be starved. In the United States, Americans spend about $150 billion a year on movie and theatre tickets, books, MP3s and the like. Philanthropic giving by foundations and individuals adds another $13 billion a year to that already grand sum. Maybe every quilting bee, experimental opera and short story anthology won't be funded in a world without government subsidies, but out of such tragedies great art might be a-born.

There's at least a third reason to stop state funding of the arts, and it's the one I take most seriously as a literary scholar and writer. In the 17th century, a great religious dissenter, Roger Williams (educated at Cambridge, exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony), wrote the first case for total separation of church and state in the English language. Forced worship, said Williams, "stinks in God's nostrils" as an affront to individual liberty and autonomy; worse still, it subjugated theology to politics.

Something similar holds true with painting, music, writing, video and all other forms of creative expression. Forced funding of the arts—in whatever trivial amounts and indirect ways—implicates citizens in culture they might openly despise or blissfully ignore. And such mandatory tithing effectively turns creators and institutions lucky enough to win momentary favour from bureaucrats into either well-trained dogs or witting instruments of the powerful and well-connected. Independence works quite well for churches and the press. It works even more wonderfully in the arts. ■

fARTissimo

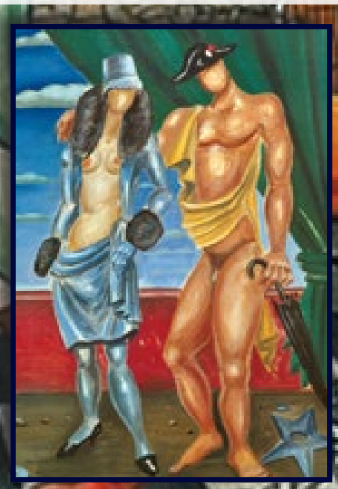
By **Thanos Kalamidas**

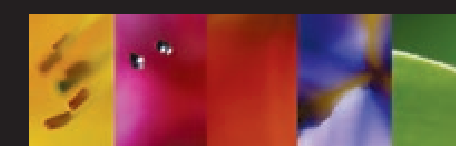
Funding inspirations

Funding art is a culture that capitalism cannot understand. after all a tank costs more than a painting. That's something they can understand. Recession the word and cuts the key. cut here and there and start and end with art. Less libraries, less museums, only some galleries, the ones that satisfy our spirit and protect our investments; our tanks. who needs art, who need culture. now we need a strong euro, tomorrow a strong dollar and a yen. Somebody said one day, "why an immigrant and an artist? do you understand that there is something wrong here?" Something wrong here, and there and there. No funding for the arts, how can we fund immigrant artists? You have no right to be an artist. Art is for us only! The few. After all only us can understand what you don't. You will never do. Our art is our art, no funds for any art. It has nothing to do with origins, colour or shape of the head. It is not us, from here, all in blonde jackets with round head.

Nikos Engonopoulos was a modern Greek painter and poet. He is one of the most important members of "the generation of the '30s," as well as a major representative of the surrealist movement in Greece. His work as a writer also includes critique and essays. The plastic of his forms and the faceless humans always in a choreography with artistic elements and tools hints a sarcasm and irony for life.

I always loved his work and loved it far beyond the oils and the hard canvas. His poetry is just like his paintings. Hard, ironic, adventurous in the choice of the words and sarcastic in the choice of the meanings. His themes are in a mixture of time where past becomes future with present always in and out. History is an further inspiration to his irony. Live his paintings. This is the only way to enjoy and perhaps understand Nikos Engonopoulos. ■





The Logic of Existence

By Avtarjeet Dhanjal

WHILST IT HAS BEEN SNOWING CONTINUOUSLY, the days turned dark, I was tempted to buy few packets of bulbs. I really know very little about gardening or the season for planting bulbs. I bought these packets because they had brightly coloured pictures of flowers on the packets. Bright colours in grey days are welcome. Looking at the packets I wondered when and where I could plant them, when I see from my window that the ground is covered in thick snow.

I suppose these bulbs will grow and produce flowers more or less as bright as the pictures on their packets. Sure I shall be pleased to see the colours and especially the freshness of the flower when they t have just opened, the freshness of smile on a baby's face. I have the certainty that these bulbs will grow and produce flowers since it is coded by nature for these bulbs to grow, provided that they are planted in the right environment. They share this process with other life forms on this planet.

I also wondered whether these flowers would ever be aware that their existence gives me and many others enormous pleasure: The natural process is finely tuned, for each form of life grows and blossoms bringing its own delight in the form of its fragrance. It's not only the flowers that make us aware of their existence by generously sharing their fragrance; all forms of life have this capacity when what blossoms spreads its fragrance, including animals and the humans.

Most forms of life go through this process of growing, blossoming, procreating and withering without asking any questions, whether their life has a purpose or a meaning to it. It's only we humans ask such questions; most of other forms of life just complete the process without asking such questions.

Thinking of the growing process, a flower and a child both go through a very similar process of growing, blossoming, procreating and withering. A flower will grow irrespective what other kind of types of flowers are growing around it, excepting the impact of occasional cross-fertilisation; whereas a child requires access to various reference points.

Last night, I called a friend to ask her when she was child what her first reference points were.

My friend who is very thoughtful and articulate generously gave her time to answer my questions as deliberately as she could. "Naturally basic survival needs such as food and warmth were first concerns, like any other child. When I was hungry I wanted to eat and when I was cold I wanted to be cuddled."

last Drop

She also shared, “beyond these basic needs, my parents and other family members became my initial reference points. When they were happy, I got more love and care. So I tried to please them so that they could feel happy and in turn I could also be happy.”

“The immediate family members were my first sounding boards; as I grew older the number of people in my network grew bigger and bigger. I started to develop much wider concerns that included environment and the people in faraway lands, those I understood had very little from life, even though I had never met them.

“Today after nearly fifty years, I feel my concerns remain very much the same but have grown in depth and breadth. My sounding-boards or I could say reference points are much wider, but I still need food for my body and love for my soul.”

My friend also added that during adolescent years, one starts to develop more independent ideas about the world around and a more critical outlook in general. This is considered quite a critical time, a young mind may choose to take ones reference points positively and builds upon them or take them negatively and walk away from them.

One also starts to establish reference points or corner stones to steer one’s thinking: Without any reference points, it would like traveling in the desert, when the sky is over-cast and one loses one’s sense of direction over land and it could happen in life too.

Luckily these days, we do not live in isolation; there are plenty of reference points - first provided by our parents then by the wider world. The critical issue here is whether you perceive these reference points positively or negatively. If you take them on board positively you can chart your path of life in a positive direction. On the other hand if you perceive these reference points negatively, you may spend your whole life fighting to shift those cornerstones or even remove them.

These cornerstones or reference points can give a sense of direction to our lives; and we continuously keep measuring our success in life using these reference points.

To perceive these cornerstones negatively, one can start to see one’s life as hell on earth and can expend one’s whole life energy shifting or removing these stones. Sometime later one may come to realise that one had spent a whole lifetime nursing self-inflicted wounds.

This is not just the case for any one individual; we have seen in history, time and time again that many societies have had similar fates, particularly when guided by their short-sighted leaders. The Old Testament and many other histories are full of whole nations committing such follies.

I am not a historian but I use the example that I have seen with my eyes of the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan, a homeland for the Muslims in a united India.

Just before the partition of India in 1947, some Muslim leaders perceived that the minority Muslim community in India would not enjoy their freedom alongside a Hindu majority in a united India, and built an argument for the creation of Pakistan as separate country.

As a result a big population of Muslims had to leave their homes in the part that became India, and move to their new homeland Pakistan. Similarly Hindu and Sikhs who had lived for centuries in the part that became new Pakistan had to move away. This division of the country also resulted into a bloodbath costing over a million lives. One must add that even bigger population of Muslim chose to stay in India and not move to Pakistan.

During the six decades since the creation of Pakistan, it has been proved that Muslims, who rejected the arguments of their leaders and chose to stay in India, enjoy more personal freedom than their fellows those who had moved to Pakistan at a great personal cost.

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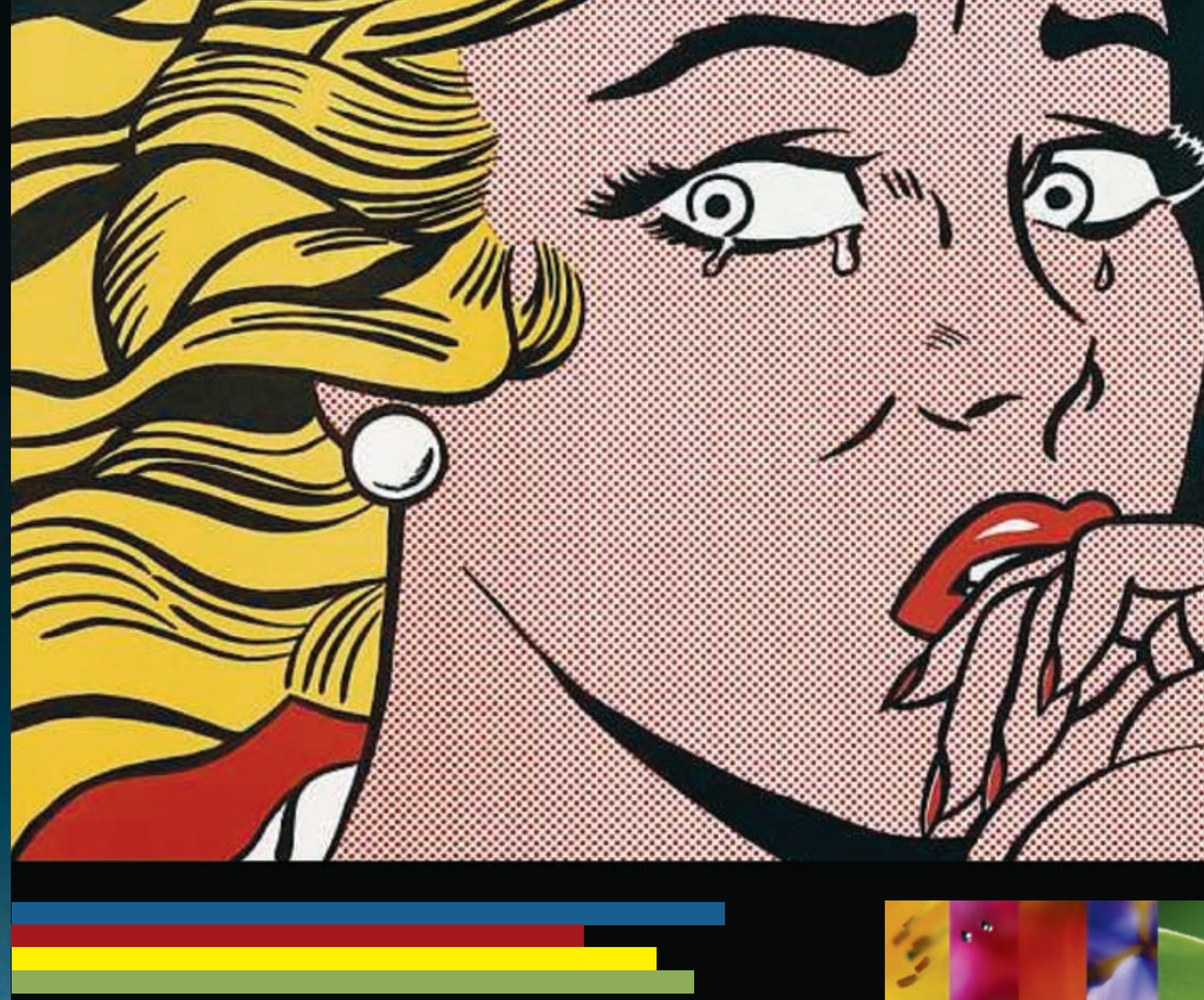
Had the then Muslim political leaders, perceived living within a multicultural secular India in a positive light, the whole populace could have avoided a huge human tragedy that resulted from dividing a country. We can see Pakistan is continuously nursing its wounds inflicted by its leaders on the whole population that believed in their argument.

A similar argument could be built against the creation of Israel; I must say that history of Jews had been very different than the Muslims of India. I still believe no ideal is worth pursuing that may result in destruction of an established society, such as the case of Palestinian people and many others in history. There is always a room for co-existence.

I hope several different kind of bulbs waiting on my windowsill, when planted in a single patch would not create similar riots as I have seen in Palestine and in India. I believe these flower would just grow in the spring and give me wonderful fragrance and vivid colours.

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
Jan 2013



Art is about communicating

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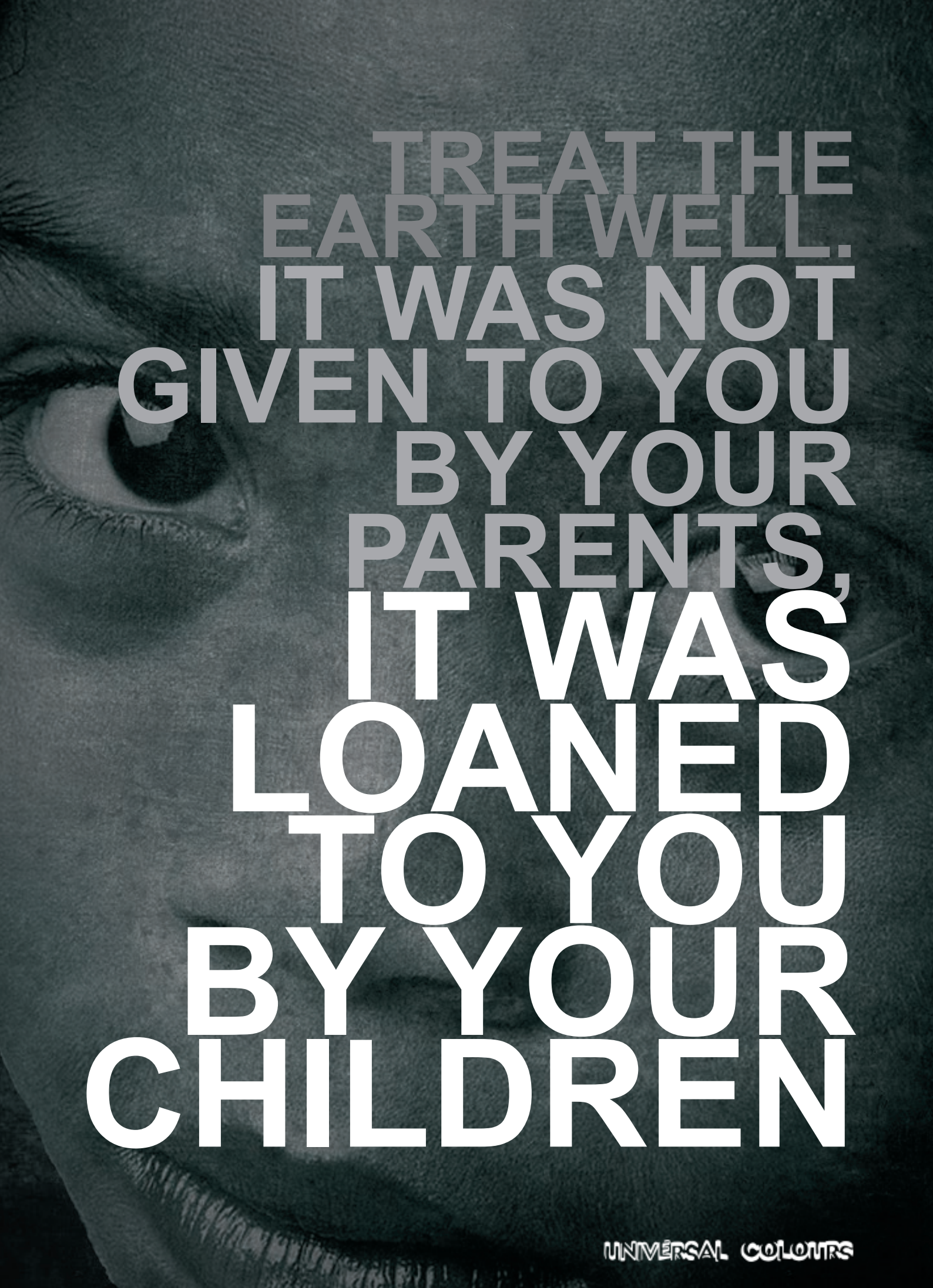
TREAT THE EARTH WELL. IT WAS NOT GIVEN TO YOU BY YOUR PARENTS, IT WAS LOANED TO YOU BY YOUR CHILDREN
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