

ART IS LOVE

The Wisdom of Adi Da Samraj

(A compilation of excerpts from Discourses by
Adi Da Samraj Given in the 1980s)

Many of the purposes of art have been lost.

Traditionally, the arts were not a means of self-expression. All the arts were forms of ritual, or service to the community. There were dancers, painters, singers, sculptors, people who would recite, people who wrote stories--but they did not do these things merely to express themselves. They did them because all the arts were presumed to have a function within the community. An individual would study to become proficient in any one of the arts, if he or she had the talent for it, and the talent was proven. Then that person could go on and spend his or her life doing this kind of work.

In general, the community in which an individual lived had a formula, a consideration, an idol, a history. It had a spectrum in which a person could operate as an artist. What a person was to do--for instance, as a painter--was pre-established, including the techniques to be used and the images to be created. Therefore, the individual had to transcend himself or herself to learn the art.

He or she would submit to a master--not a spiritual master necessarily, but generally a master of the craft--and would be schooled in the "cult" of the art. The artist would learn the tradition, the limits, the techniques, and the purposes of art in that culture. By submitting to this demand of the culture in general, the individual transcended his or her own ego-possessed motivation. The apprentice was not permitted to paint or to sing or to play an instrument until the master could profess to the community that the individual had prepared to the degree that he or she could now serve the community. Not only had the artist learned all the techniques, not only did he or she know how to evoke for others the archetypes to which that culture was devoted, but the individual had mastered self in the process, had become responsible for himself or herself.

In recent centuries, however, the arts have more and more ceased to have a cultural purpose that is acknowledged to be necessary. They have become mere entertainments. They have become a way of expressing one's self, one's contents. From this point of view, there is no culture, no center, no society, no necessity to what the artist does. He or she communicates the failure of the social order, the failure of the demands within an art to

represent an obligation to transcend one's self, to master one's self, and to provide something within the social order that is valued by others, that has intrinsic value--fundamental value that is not just decoration, but that is part of the sacred purpose of the community.

At the present, there is no cultural necessity to the arts. They are secondary to daily life. The arts do not have any necessity in the social order.

Art was originally a sacred activity, generated within a sacred culture.

But even apart from those aspects of a culture that one might specifically call sacred, there is another fundamental subject of art, which is beauty--to portray it, to represent it, to present something that is found to be beautiful by people.

But the sense of what is actually beautiful has also been lost.

The idea of what is beautiful has been reduced to something about the appearance of someone or something. Much of contemporary art is basically an effort to construct something based on some system. If the purpose is to make something beautiful, it is a matter of creating some object or performance that is consistent and consistently applies some principles, perhaps even achieves some sort of balance between various forms or elements. In other words, the notion of what is beautiful has been reduced to the structure of something, or its appearance.

It is commonly said that architecture is the mother of the arts. This suggests that structure is the basis of anything that can be called art. But the beautiful is certainly a fundamental subject of the arts.

Even where something apparently ugly was represented traditionally, even that object or performance was somehow mysteriously associated with the feeling of the beautiful.

What is something beautiful then? What is a beautiful subject?

Only that which is loved is beautiful.

No form--however comely, however it may conform to some system of structure--is truly beautiful if it is not also loved.

The traditional subjects of the arts--of the representational arts for instance, like sculpture or painting--were beings: Gods or Spiritual figures, personages commonly known in the society in which the art was produced. Or they were images of the world, perhaps, in the case of paintings of the natural environment. But the subject was something, generally, for which any viewer could feel love. When Nature became a subject of art, it was on

the basis of feeling God in Nature, loving Nature, not just seeing trees and sky and mountains.

The necessary essence of art is Love.

Art depends on the ability of the viewers of any object or performance to feel love relative to the process or object that is presented to them. The work of art must in some way or other generate this feeling, this attitude, this gesture--even if it is something as seemingly simple as a finely made pot. It must evoke somehow this participatory feeling. If it frustrates it, or does not allow it, or does not even try to invoke it, then it is not really art.

True art invites participation, and it is part of a cultural exercise. All art originally came out of the temple, or the religious culture, the sacred culture of the past. The art was used. There are high forms of art that were used within the ceremonial practices of various societies, past and present. There were other objects that were utilitarian, but were, like pots, designed in such a way that they created continuity between the temple life, or the ceremonial life, and daily life. Individuals in these cultures were expected to constantly participate in the sacred process. Even objects in daily use were designed to create that continuity. They are what we call crafts, even though they are very beautiful. They were considered high art if they had this ceremonial purpose, if they were part of the sacred participation of everyone who would gather on certain occasions.

But much of the art of the last several centuries has been moving in a totally different direction, not in the direction of participation, but in the direction of abstract viewing, ownership, and egoic indulgence. A lot of modern art is part of the ego-based consciousness of secular society.

If you examine the last hundred years or so, you will see that there is a lot of anti-art. Much of it is self-consciously trying to be anti-art, non-art, or trying to violate structural principles, or abandon structural principles that were considered necessary before.

From this point of view, to be doing art means to simply be doing it somehow differently, to be inventive in a different way than people felt obliged to be before. The process has become largely one of dealing with structure, being inventive with structures of one kind or another, in all kinds of ways, using some system for making these constructs, or using no system at all, or creating something that is opposed to a standard system.

This obsessive involvement with inventiveness relative to structure is not the essence of art, but it has become, in general, the primary preoccupation of modern art. The characteristic of modern art is that it is specifically non-religious. Most artists are not Spiritually oriented, and their art is not a Spiritual practice.

Even in those cases where modern art may achieve a form that is comely or conforms to a system, even where it creates some sort of balanced presentation that conforms to some degree to some previous academic system of how forms are supposed to be generated, even if it fulfills those expectations or rules, it is not true art if it does not evoke or invoke this participation on the part of viewers--if it is not associated directly with love.

I would say that love must be the mother of the arts--not architecture, not structure, not function. True art always involves the observer in the participatory gesture of being--or what is called "love".

If art frustrates the participatory gesture, or even avoids that entirely, it degrades the viewer. It calls for non-participation.

Much of modern art frustrates all possible participation, often even intentionally. Or it is reduced to a functional performance, inventiveness relative to structure somehow. This is not sufficient for true art.

True art heals. True art restores equanimity. Art must regenerate the sense of well-being. That is its true purpose. When art is really useful, it is devoted to that purpose, not limited to a specific system. But whichever system is used, it must serve this ultimate process of healing, well-being, higher sympathy, and Spiritual Awakening.

In the twentieth century, a great deal lot of the experimentation that has taken place in artistic media has actually been along the lines of scientific experimentation. Just as the disposition underlying science tends to be such that people become devoted to the plastic manipulation of themselves as elemental beings, much of modern art has been devoted to the mere plastic manipulation of media. But the approach of science does not allow people to participate in the greater aspects of existence which are acknowledged in the sacred culture.

Where the sacred culture is lost and the materialistic culture replaces it, then even the arts--which traditionally had a sacred purpose--are reduced to the same vision. This materialistic vision has possessed the arts. Art has been reduced to plastic experimentation and the introduction of the orientation of arbitrariness. What comes out of that is dissonance, or the loss of equanimity. If you can see this, then it purifies you, perhaps, awakens you to be devoted to great purpose.

During the last several centuries, as humankind has moved into the age of technology, the sacred purpose and orientation of human culture has gradually been lost. Even the arts reflect this loss of the sacred. First religion is lost, and then the arts become degraded. The fields of human endeavor are basically devoted, at present, to the mood of scientific materialism and the apparent creativity of the sheerly plastic arts of human existence.

The true artist is a sacred performer. The true artist must do that magic that causes others to participate in conditional reality in the sacred sense-- or the sense of love, in the sense of ego-transcendence, of ecstasy.

When the culture and politics of human beings are harmonious, when they involve sacred association, then the true artist appears. And he or she must go through a trial, an ordeal of learning and transcending self, locating the mysterious creative process that transcends his or her own egoity.

When the artist has done this, then his or her performance, or whatever he or she makes, becomes valuable to others. The artist is not what is valuable, although he or she may be honored. It is his or her work that is valuable. Often, true artists did not even leave signatures, or identify themselves along with what they created.

True art is a sacred performance, an act of love. And sacred performance can only occur in a sacred setting, a sacred culture, a sacred society. Ultimately, the artist must associate people with the sacred, must invoke in them that capacity to participate in reality that is about ego-transcendence, love, Divine Communion.

This loss of the ability to use art, true art, is one of the regrettable aspects of modern civilization. It is part of the whole development of materialistic thinking.

Even in a society that is relatively secularized, the beautiful, at least, must be fundamental to art. And a society that is complete in the cultural sense adds to the beautiful the sacred dimension, the Spiritual dimension.

Where the sacred is absent, then the best art can do is meditate on the beautiful and bring people to feel that. But there is nothing beautiful without love.

So much of modern art is just design. Again, the reference to architecture is significant. Design is certainly an aspect of art, whatever art form is involved, but it is not the end phenomenon. It is not the essential principle. It is only part of the craft of art.

An artist must learn his or her craft and then must be able to do that mysterious something that connects the viewer with the Divine Reality, the Spiritual feeling associated with loving, and with experiencing feelings that go beyond the contracted state of life--as you do when you are in love with someone.

Someone you love is beautiful, whatever his or her physical attributes. It is the love that makes the person beautiful. It is only because you love that you can truly feel this.

There is no great art without the sacred. There is no true art without the beautiful. For there to be the sacred, there must be the ability to participate Spiritually in Reality, beyond self. Great art must be associated with the Divine. And for something to be beautiful, there must be love. And for this, there must be a culture of love, because all art objects are somehow generalized for everyone to observe. The subject must be, somehow or other, something that anyone, in general, could love.

Without the ability of an art form to evoke the feeling of love in you, you cannot find it to be beautiful.

Participation in true art should be ego-transcending, should permit that, should invite it. It also serves the observer, permits the observer to transcend himself or herself. It is not merely the product of some hero who was able to transcend self and make this art product and then you go and admire it. Participation in some art forms should be a great exercise also. And an exercise that enables you to transcend your self.

Participation in an art form should be at least as great as the creation of that art form.

You must be able to participate in Reality, participate in the Divine, participate in the sacred.

You should dance. You should sing. You should become ecstatic. You should go beyond your self. Participate in art. Do not just look at it. Do not just see that it is there. Do not just know that it is there.

Art should change you.

That is the entire purpose of it.

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