

Art: Lifeblood of the Soul

VAN JAMES

Art and the encouragement of art are political in the most profound sense, not as a weapon in the struggle, but as an instrument of understanding of the futility of struggle between those who share man's faith. Aeschylus and Plato are remembered today long after the triumphs of imperial Athens are gone. Dante outlived the ambitions of thirteenth-century Florence. Goethe stands serenely above the politics of Germany; and I am certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we too will be remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit.

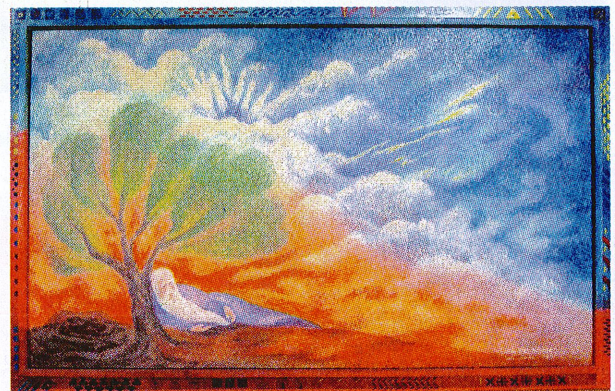
—JOHN F. KENNEDY¹

In this challenging era in which we live, a time that is described by some as apocalyptic in character, we might wonder how art can possibly play any kind of significant role in current affairs, in contemporary civilization, and truly be a “contribution to the human spirit.” Yet, as human souls, we strive to achieve

our highest ideals and that which is worthy of the human spirit, when through art we transform the material world in order to affect harmonious development. As Kennedy pointed out in the last century, history eventually demonstrates this achievement.

“Rip Van Winkle” tells the early American folk tale of a young man who falls asleep in the Catskill Mountains for twenty years, while the elemental world thunders around him, only to awaken and see how the world has changed while he grew old.

RIP VAN WINKLE, acrylic, Van James



“...educational studies and advanced brain research have confirmed a fundamental principle that creativity and the arts are stimuli for learning.”

LIFEBLOOD [continued from page 61]

"Jonny Appleseed" is the story of a man who planted apple seeds throughout the country because his vision was that of a fruitful land. Artistic creativity is the planting of seeds that may only bear fruit in the future.

JONNY APPLESEED, Watercolor, Van James



eight ways to bring art into your life

- 1 **Carve the butter** in unique and creative shapes.
- 2 Change your **handwriting**.
- 3 **Sing** to yourself, your family, and your friends at every appropriate opportunity. Then sing to strangers.
- 4 Make every **encounter** with another person a new and creative experience by the details you observe concerning them, especially the people you know.
- 5 Keep a small **sketch pad** near at hand and do a drawing every day.
- 6 Read a **poem** every day.
- 7 Wear a different **color** each day.
- 8 **Dance** to elevator music.

The artistic process is so akin to the activity of the human soul that Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf Education, referred to art as the "lifeblood of the soul."² In fact, we engage in an artistic process the instant we see something, as soon as someone speaks to us, or whenever we consider an idea. We respond to almost everything we meet in the world by making images and creating mental pictures. Consider the following exercise: If we hear the word "shiny," then the word "wooden," and finally "bowl"; if we pause and consider each word separately, we go through a unique picture-making process. Although we may not pay a great deal of attention to this process, we nevertheless form new pictures with each word. Upon hearing (or reading) the word "shiny," we might form a picture of shiny

light, water, or metal; but when we hear the word “wooden,” we instantly modify our picture of “shiny.” Our image of “shiny wooden” likewise metamorphoses to suit the idea “bowl,” and a creative transformation is completed upon hearing the finished phrase “shiny wooden bowl.” We go through this artistic, picture-forming process many, many times during the course of a day, but the way we do so is always entirely unique to each one of us. Everyone has a different mental picture of the “shiny wooden bowl.” No one has the same picture that I have. It is no wonder the late modern artist Josef Beuys said “everyone is an artist,” because we are continually painting pictures, mental pictures.

In recent years, educational studies and advanced brain research have confirmed a fundamental principle that creativity and the arts are stimuli for learning. The importance of the arts in education is verified by current research, from the work of Howard Gardner on Multiple Intelligence Theory³ to Jane Healy’s conclusions on neurological studies and how children learn.⁴ Studies of multiple intelligences have shown that “a program rich in the arts should assume a significant role in the school. Otherwise, it will be difficult

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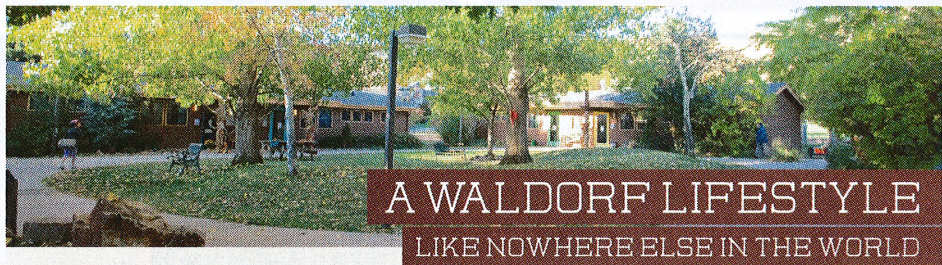
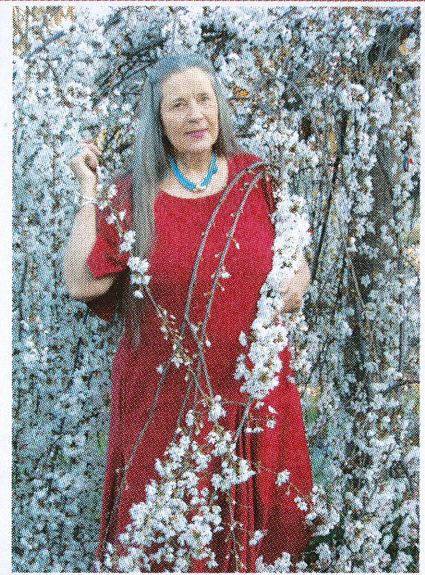
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Boulder is a vibrant, thriving community, providing the perfect backdrop for our focus on raising healthy, thinking, whole human beings. We believe learning begins as soon as we enter the world. Students at Shining Mountain find a passion for learning that lasts throughout their lives.

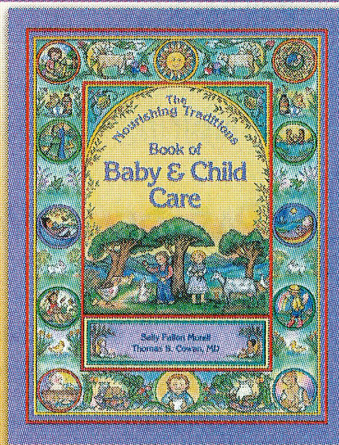
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“Art in education touches us at our most essential human level.”

to address the range of intelligences exhibited by students and teachers.”⁵

Yet most of the industrial nations of the world tend to stress a math/science curriculum as early in the educational process as possible, while sidelining the arts in school programs. Such actions are carried out in the belief that this emphasis is what will strengthen practical intelligence in young students and give a better technological-economic edge to the home country. This belief persists in the face of current research⁶ pointing to the arts as a proven path to developing informed perception; enhancing critical thinking skills such as problem-solving and decision-making; building self-discipline and self-esteem; and encouraging cooperation and multicultural understanding. The arts engage traditional and non-traditional learners equally, offer a way to integrate subjects, provide alternative ways of assessing students, and prepare students for future achievement. Art in education extends our language as it enlarges our store of images, and touches us at our most essential human level.

It is important in today's education that all subjects are taught artistically, so they can meet the soul-life of the student on the common ground of creative process. Storytelling, singing, playing music, creative movement, drama, drawing, painting, sculpting, and crafting serve as a core curriculum, integrating all the other subjects. By practicing the various arts, the student develops more than just the intellect. In fact, numerous faculties and “multiple intelligences” unfold because of the arts. The ultimate capacities of the student will be determined by whether or not brain development

is enhanced by creative learning skills or is stifled by mechanistic, data-oriented patterning. Barbara Nielson, former Superintendent of Education for the state of South Carolina, noted that “the skills needed in the twenty-first century are the very skills you learn through the arts—teamwork, creativity, discipline, innovation, being open to change. We are no longer a manufacturing-based economy. Part of our strength as a nation has been our creativity and innovation, precisely what we're cultivating through arts education.”⁷

Einstein, too, suggested that present-day world problems will not be solved by the thinking that created them. He felt that “imagination is more important than knowledge.” That is, the ability for the soul to freely create images and mental pictures, rather than to simply possess conceptual information and memorized facts. Future solutions to world problems will really be possible only when we fully realize and put into practice what developing minds require—that art become the lifeblood of the soul. Then, in whatever country we call home, we might realize, as Kennedy expressed it, “our contribution to the human spirit.”

1 Loyacono, Laura. *Reinventing the Wheel: A Design for Student Achievement in the 21st Century*. 1992.

2 Steiner, Rudolf. *The Younger Generation*. 1922.

3 Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. 1983, and *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. 1993.

4 Healy, Jane. *Endangered Minds: Why Our Children Don't Think*. 1990, and *Your Child's Growing Mind: A Guide to Learning and Brain Development from Birth to Adolescence*. 1994. *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds—For Better and Worse*. 1998.

5 Gardner, Howard. *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. 1999.

6 Loyacono, *Reinventing the Wheel*.

7 *Ibid.*



MOHALA PUA (DEVELOPING FLOWER) depicts the plant as a being woven of light and warmth, air, water, and earth.
Watercolor, Van James