

A Diverse Collection of Youth Created Art in Response to War

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War is a subject that continues to be explored universally by artists of all ages. When artists explore the aspects of war they must consider their personal memories, experiences, connections, reactions, views, and feelings concerning the topic. Children are easily able to respond artistically to what they experience, “Like the *New York Times* ad, *Children or War, 1914-1993* made the point “Children always draw what they have experienced. Their drawings come from the heart. Rather than reproduce what they see, they feel what they perceive and transmit it into their drawings” (Hausman, 1994, p. 43). War triggers reactions and provokes responses. A child might define war differently than a military veteran. A person raised in an environment experiencing war might be more prone to use more violent imagery in their artistic response. Creating art in response to violence serves as an outlet for expression, “The creation of images in response to violence and war is considered a natural means for the expression of feelings during times of crises” (Cohen-Evron, 2005, p. 311). My Pinterest collection of youth created art is a selection of art depicting different artist’s responses to war. Both male and female artists represented in this collection range from age 6 to 14. The artists are from a range of locations, including: India, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Columbia, Iran, Moscow, Jamaica, Netherlands, Greece, and the United States. Artists have used a variety of materials to create their work.

When viewing this diverse collection of artistic responses to war, it is interesting to think about how each individual relates to the topic of war. The artist’s culture and personal experiences with war become part of their identity and their art becomes their unique visual interpretation of war. When students create images in response to war they connect to their culture and develop and learn more about their own identity (Burton, 2001). War is a part of all cultures and becomes part of a person’s identity and personal voice, “Teaching visual culture requires a critical examination of the power of visual culture to shape the ways in which we come to know the world and ourselves” (Black & Cap, 2011, p. 253). Artists use their experiences to realistically and imaginatively develop their identity through artistic development, “In another age and with more understanding, we now know that if youngsters develop visual voices that

draw on their own experiences, both real and imagined, and that are rooted in rich interactions with materials, then the integrity of the personal voice is not so easily dislodged” (Burton, 2001, p. 35). Images created by students derive meaning from their constant exposure to images from their cultures, everyday lives, and experiences and contribute to their evolving identities and personal voices (Ivashkevich, 2009). In children’s work there is power in their ability to express thought, “”...the primitive and the child “draw the natural object not as a representation of itself envisaged as beautiful, but as a sign of intention...of an elementary beauty that may be rough and crude indeed but which issues at last absolutely and exclusively from the power of thought” (Leeds, 1989, p. 98).

The students in the collection have individual ideas and definitions of war, but the pieces included in the collection are unified through the artists’ use of symbolism to define war visually. It is interesting to consider how war has been depicted through a collection of symbols. Some of the symbols used by the artists in this collection include: flags, doves, weapons, tankers, blood, bombs, banners and airplanes. Artists are able to communicate with their viewers universally through the use of symbolism. A research study was conducted about the memory drawings produced by French and Brazilian children. The study reveals that cognitive devices, like symbolism, are used in visual representation universally, “Cognitive categories are mental entities humans build for themselves through interaction with their socio-cultural environments...This cognitive device and the system of categories are universal, although the content may vary from one culture to another. Even so, this content is shared to a very significant degree among humans in different communities” (Coutinho, Darras, Ferreira, & Miranda, 2008, p. 71).

Having minimal background information about the works included in my collection of youth art, I want to know more about the circumstances in which these pieces were created. Are these students responding to war influenced by direct exposure, media coverage, or through lessons taught in the education environment? A variety of materials have been used to create the work in the collection. Did the students have access to a multitude of materials or were they given specific materials to use? A student’s choice of material can influence their ability to express themselves through their work, “...his changing understanding of the expressive possibilities inherent in paint

profoundly influenced his choices about how to represent an experience” (Louis, 2005, p. 345). It is also interesting to think about the differences in the male and female responses to war and violence. Research about gender roles in artistic development report that girl’s suppress aggressive feelings, “...traditional “gender roles” for girls require that they be “nice” and suppress aggressive feelings, meaning that any resistant attitude usually occurs “in private spaces of interaction,” particularly within the circle of female friends” (Ivashkevich, 2009, p. 55-56). The artwork in the collection titled, “Cannon of Peace!” is a good representation of a female’s “nice” response to conflict.

When considering the ways that I have responded to war personally through visual representation, I immediately think of the September 11th attacks. This is the first time that I can remember being asked to respond to a war through artwork. My graphic design professor asked my class to abandon the project that we were currently working on, and turn our attention to the present conflict that was consuming our thoughts. I found this time to respond to the September 11th attacks therapeutic. It helped me to better understand my emotions. It prompted me to consider how people, no matter age or nationality, experience emotions in response to conflict and war. After exposure to conflict like this you experience a range of emotions, like hatred, fear, compassion, and a need to help. The piece that I created in college consisted of visual representation that responded to these emotions. The piece that I created inspired by discoveries in doing this project started as my personal response to war through symbolism. After creating the piece I discovered that it was a representation of my life currently and has little to do with war. It helped me to understand how I feel about decisions I have recently made

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