

Combating Terror: Security through Art Education
UNESCO WORLD CONFERENCE ON ARTS EDUCATION

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The record of war and destruction which art documents, traces back thousands of years. Art has historically been linked with political unrest, as propagandist, as critic, as documenter; the legacy of despair which it conveys includes some of the most powerful and moving images in the history of art: the horror of Jacques Callot's etchings of the siege of Nancy, in his *Miseries of War*, 1634; the atrocities in Goya's *Disasters of War*, 1810-14 ; the tragic indictment of society turned to war in George Rouault's moving recollections of the suffering of World War 1, in his *Misery and War* 1922-27. The theme pervades the twentieth century from the desperate recollections of Grosz, Kollwitz, Dix and others to the devastating documentation of contemporary events in Rwanda, Bosnia and elsewhere documented in the paintings of Rick Amor, George Gittoes and other artists who have confronted the ravages of these horrific events. Their works document disaster and show us the ongoing legacy of terror which accompanies the breakdown of security. Throughout history art has been witness to the ravages of culture; in the twenty first century it can also contribute to its stabilization and growth.

The huge emphasis on security in the post 911 political context, has provided new opportunities for art and particularly design, to contribute to a secure world, in the process of supporting oppressed and potentially disenfranchised social groups; this can be achieved by specific support programs and by arts education. This paper argues that by integrating cultural support projects involving art and design into national security policy, and by ensuring educational opportunities for a society's traditional art forms, we can address the root causes of terrorism, rather than respond to the terror of its impact.

1. The tragedy of terrorism is not a recent development, although recent events have given it a heightened awareness . Statistical information varies, but the following figures from the *Journal of International Affairs*, give some idea of the scope of the problem in life and death terms.¹ During the 1980s, 5,431 acts of international terrorism occurred, claiming 4,684 lives. In the 1990s a further 3,824 incidents took 2,468 lives. From 1970 to 1995, a total of 64,319 terrorist incidents were recorded. When state-sponsored terrorism is included, the figure becomes astronomical. It is estimated that governments killed 169 million of their own people between 1900 and 1987. Stalin's purges accounted for some 43 million deaths; Mao Tse Tung about 38 million and Hitler 21 million.² But the events of 911 ushered in a new consciousness; terrorism can no longer be solely identified with wars, political ideology or particular geographic locations. American security analyst, Louis Pojman, characterizes terrorism as actions which “.. employ horrific violence against unsuspecting civilians, as well as combatants, in order to inspire fear and create panic, which in turn will advance the terrorists' ...agenda”.³ Such events potentially bring the security of any nation on earth into question. He maintains that the history of world security can be divided into 'Before September 11 and After September

11', in terms of the impact the events have had on our consciousness, as demonstrated by the changes in levels of public security we are now subject to.

2. Response to terrorism has been immediate and direct. Governments around the world have implemented policies aimed at increased national security; massively increasing spending on defense. Much of the blame for terrorist activities is focused on cultural attitudes, such as religious dogma and extreme fundamentalist interpretations of belief. However, while security analysts acknowledge this as a major cause, a prior and more significant cause may be identified as social despair and a sense of hopelessness resulting from oppression, ignorance, poverty and injustice, perceived or actual, which results in a sense of disaffection; social groups feel culturally alienated and without hope. It is these social conditions which create the environment where fundamentalism can grow. In March 2005, Kofi Anan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, announced a five point plan to combat terrorism and improve international security. First on the list of priorities was to dissuade disaffected groups from resorting to terrorism in an attempt to resolve their concerns.⁴ The UN's recognition of this issue and the priority given to addressing it suggests it is increasingly regarded as a base cause of terrorist activity and a principle source of global insecurity.

3. Policies on national security have been strengthened in various ways; these include the build up of military capability through the increase of armaments and armed forces, attention to border security, refinement of intelligence gathering systems and introducing legislation, with often extreme penalties, for breaches of national security; degrees of personal freedom have sometimes been limited and security forces have been provided with new and controversial powers. While these might seem logical ways to address security issues, it is a response to the threat terrorism poses, rather than a process aimed at the prevention of it further developing. It responds to the fundamentalist context instead of dealing with the social environment which allows disaffection and the potential for recourse to terrorist acts. Any policy which deals with a comprehensive approach to the terror environment must develop strategies to combat both. In the Asia-Pacific regional context, as early as 1991, the need for a more multidimensional approach to security issues was proposed, in response to a Ministerial Statement on Australian Regional Security.⁵ It posited the need for policies on development assistance to provide cultural support, suggesting focal areas as health care, scientific and technological development and the development of a sustainable economy. The argument suggested such measures were integral to security planning. While this proposal contributed to the conceptual debate of the 90s, in the post 911 security environment, the potential for a non military related approach to security seems to have been forgotten. Perhaps it is time to reconsider the role of cultural programs as part of the security debate as well as educational mechanisms through which they can be achieved. This would provide a twofold approach to security, where immediate problems were combated through more established means and potential threats were addressed through cultural support. Addressing the base causes of terrorism is better than responding to the devastating impact of terror itself. Since 911, and the political events which flowed from it, the effects of terrorism have been only too evident. The prospect of reducing future security

threats through integrating policies involving social and cultural support with more military based responses, should at least be considered in future policy.

4. In a threatening environment it is conceivable that cultural support might be considered as peripheral to the brutal potential of terrorist acts, the notion of a band aid to stem a major blood flow. However the following examples show how small cultural contributions have resulted in disproportionately large benefits. These examples relate to groups which in various ways could be categorized as disaffected.

5. In the early 1990s an exhibition was held in Tehran to give identity to Iranian women artists. The exhibition was organized to highlight the cultural contribution made by women artists which was often ignored by the broader art world and received limited attention in any context. The Iranian art world had been dominated by male artists and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art developed a project to address the imbalance. The exhibition was designed to create an opportunity for women, to raise the profile of what they were doing and to integrate them into the broader art world. Iranian women artists had seldom received recognition outside the country except when they had chosen to live and work abroad. This event attracted ex patriot artists giving extra attention to the considerable role of female artists generally and especially the significant role their work made to Iranian culture. A major publication accompanied the exhibition which catalogued the scope and style of the work.⁶

6. In the remote Kimberley region of the north west of Western Australia is the tiny community of Balgo. In recent years it has become known as a centre of domestic violence, alcoholism and drug taking and has confounded efforts by both white and black communities to combat the problems which, at their most extreme, have resulted in several young people committing suicide, influenced by intoxicant induced depression. In 2000, several fine art research students undertook a project through the Balgo Community Centre aimed at developing the artistic skills of the local community. All of the students were either Master of Fine Art or PhD candidates undertaking research in glass and between them provided a broad range of glass working techniques. Balgo has become a centre of art production over the last 25 years, being home to a number of highly esteemed female artists from the local indigenous community, some of whom had established major reputations for their paintings representing abstracted interpretations of the local landscape. They were based on designs and symbols which were their tribal property, many recounting the sacred stories of their personal 'Dreaming', or creation legends. The art of this region is known for its brilliant colour and small dot like shapes which develop the intricate forms and images in the compositions. This style of composition readily lent itself to interpretation in glass, with small glass beads forming the designs laid down flat and fires in kilns to set the patterns. Similarly the saturated hues of the glass, with its vivid translucent colour added an exciting dimension to the already intense colour of the local art. The results were spectacular. As well as the research artists, important local artists participated in the projects, where artist and non artist alike explored their creativity in glass. So successful were the results that funding was supplied to repeat the workshops over the next two years, again with outstanding outcomes. The work produced was so successful that it was exhibited in major national

venues and formed the basis of televised documentaries on art. This project had a significant flow on effect; not only did the participants gain confidence in their own abilities, build new skills and increase their potential earning abilities, but they found new ways of communicating the myths and legends which were so much a part of their personal identities, this reinforced the status of the indigenous community as a whole and strengthened the status of the tribe. A further and more inclusive aspect of the project was that it contributed to the recognition of Balgo as a creative centre, as opposed to a trouble centre, which reinforced the standing of the community and levels of antisocial behaviour improved; the whole community indirectly benefited from this project.⁷

7. In the early 1990s the Israeli Artists Association (IAA) in Jerusalem undertook a joint project with a number of Palestinian artists. Tensions between Israel and Palestine over four decades, had lead to major wars, terrorist actions and various forms of direct and indirect conflict which had destabilized both communities. It had become difficult to imagine common ground which might lead to any form of productive discussion, let alone peace. A number of Israeli artists felt the need to explore ways of integrating the Palestinian art community into the broader Israeli art world. Although resident in Israel, many Palestinian artists were marginalized creatively and were not accepted into main stream art. The IAA permitted Palestinians into the association, where they worked side by side and interactively with Israeli members. This caused considerable criticism from many Israeli artists and many attempted to remove the status of the IAA as Israel's main artist group. Intent in fighting for peace through integration the President of the IAA, applied for funds through the UNESCO Participation Program for a joint exhibition of its Israeli and Palestinian members to be held in France. The exhibition was funded and a major show was curated and showed in Marsaille, attracting significant attention through Europe and as a result of the IAA being the Israeli representatives of the UNESCO NGO for artists, the International Association of Art, throughout the world.

This exhibition was a tangible demonstration of common ground between politically opposed individuals; art had provided an opportunity for a cooperative and harmonious cultural exchange where political and religious differences set aside their respective grievances to find ways in which they agreed and more, supported each other. This constituted a major move for peace through culture and found ways in which substantial groups of Israelis and Palestinians could work constructively and happily together. This was a giant step toward peace in a climate of insecurity and hostility, facilitated by a mutual support for culture.⁸

8. In the past two decades, India has become an increasingly influential world force. Its massive industrialization and IT capacity has placed it as a major participant in modern intellectual and economic developments. A huge middle class has evolved as an integral part of this prosperity and large personal fortunes have been amassed by individual industrialists. This vast achievement has often meant an increasing separation of rich and poor with rural workers, village dwellers and some craftspeople suffering deteriorating working conditions as a result. One of the outcomes in regard to furniture manufacture is that as consumers purchased modern, mass produced products, demand for traditional furniture designs went into decline. Hand carved wooden furniture producers suffered and highly skilled craftspeople became unemployed. The woodcraft tradition had been

built around furniture design which used traditional carving skills to decorate chairs, tables, and other products with motifs, reflecting India's glorious history with the richness of its legends. These were an integral part of Indian identity and touched a personal and religious chord in the community. The last ten years has seen a considerable revival of furniture craft, based on traditional design and using carving skills, which has benefited craftspeople, designers and consumers as a result. The awareness of the need to preserve national heritage and individual identity in the globalised context has led to a major interest in this craft form; people need furniture and carved furniture which asserts their identity has become in demand. The industry has concentrated around Agra and built a network of high quality production, employing craft skills and traditional knowledge matched with contemporary design needs.⁹

9. Some years ago a community of sculptors working in Burkina Faso had become impoverished, without access to a foundry to exercise the traditional bronze techniques they employed; as a result they were artistically alienated and economically destitute. A project was undertaken by the International Association of Art to design a small scale foundry which enabled these bronze castors to use their lost wax casting techniques to express their personal, social and cultural needs, develop their traditional art forms and to project these into the contemporary art context. A promotional video was also designed and produced to explain and advertise what they were doing; (this gave them a promotional tool to develop interest in their art beyond their normal audience as well as nationally and internationally). The result was spectacular; not only were the artists able to earn a living, but they did so by strengthening the bonds of their cultural heritage, expressing the legends of their past; their work became better known through promotion and the community of which they were part, grew both in cultural identity and prosperity.¹⁰

10. World Education, a non profit organization dedicated to projects for economic and social development is undertaking a program aimed at restoring the status and art forms of the 'Living Treasures' of Cambodia, the cultural figures whose status and practice was destroyed under the Khmer Rouge regime and which Cambodian artists are now trying to restore. The program is reasserting traditional Khmer culture, reinforcing its forms and values and communicating these to a national and international audience. The Cambodian artists involved see this as an important reawakening of the historic identity of the nation. It links a new generation with their cultural foundations and recognizes the worth of the past, reestablishing the knowledge and prestige of Khmer culture both nationally and internationally. One aspect of this project deals with reviving the Khmer shadow puppet theatre and involves the design of new puppets which represent traditional characters; new construction techniques will be used employing more durable materials, which will be less subject to the impact of climate and the effects of transport. It seeks to design new theatres, easily portable and more practical for travel over long distances. Sets will also be redesigned, extending the visual effect of the performances, exploring a new range of expressive elements which relate to contemporary society, bridging the gap between past and present, while preserving the relevance of traditional culture to both. A central part of the project is the designing of new festivals and plays, making the theatre

an integral part of community life and a mechanism of communication and learning. A role that has already been developed is using puppetry to teach community health programs, developing plays which deal with family planning and the growing problem of AIDS. When it is completed, the project will leave a new generation of performers, aware of Khmer traditions, but employing contemporary resources to communicate them and integrate them with the needs of contemporary life.¹¹

11. A systematic project to support traditional craft activities can be seen in the project developed by the Government of Tamil Nadu, in India in collaboration with the National Institute of Design, India's most important Design School. The project was aimed at reviving the textile industry, which although strong in tradition, had lost popularity and was in decline. The approach was systematic; the Government Commissioner of Handloom and Textiles consulted NID to develop a plan for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the textile industry and mechanisms for addressing its needs. The project had three phases-need assessment, development of design concepts and prototype development. This was then implemented through design training programs at the field level with weavers, aimed at developing the ideas and skills necessary for the origination of new products; the process was reversed by implementing an education format relevant to the design and skill needs of the craft. Interestingly, the whole project was documented to act as a model for other activities. The following areas were addressed:

A revival of traditional designs for both cotton and silk saris;

Strengthening home furnishing design aimed at export;

Introduction of saris and other fabrics with contemporary designs;

Development of new textile products to revive dormant markets;

The overall strategy was to lift the conceptual base of design in order to reinvigorate the products and address a contemporary market, particularly with an eye toward exports.

Although this project is not yet complete, it has already demonstrated how a systematic approach to a declining craft industry, with the attendant economic problems, loss of design confidence and sense of craft worth and personal identity, might be reversed by creative intervention through education.¹²

12. These examples demonstrate how fairly small scale projects can have an impact on supporting disenfranchised groups or declining communities and demonstrates how cultural support projects might equivalently have a constructive impact on groups who might otherwise fall prey to negative forces. The outcomes are disproportionately large in relation to the scale of the support. Careful targeting of where and how cultural support programs are applied can be directly linked with potential security risks; the results build the community and remove the risk, a situation of mutual benefit. Whether cultural support for disaffected groups is achieved through contributions to economic development, cultural identity, or social support, all help mitigate the potential for destructive political forces to take hold and exploit a situation. The examples referred to demonstrate ways in which visual culture can contribute to social and cultural preservation, and as a result, to broader cultural issues including security. Governments around the globe already contribute to cultural support through various aid programs. To invest further in such programs and target them not just to areas of need, but to areas relevant to future security issues, is a minor step; this is an issue of planning to strengthen

security by investment in culture. Where communities have strong identity, a pride in their values, a reverence for their traditions, they are less subject to values, ideas and attitudes from outside. It is not easy to change or influence individuals or communities where they have an established sense of cultural worth, even if they are economically weak.

13. The strongest and most public embodiment of culture is found in the arts; it is through the arts that the values, forms and events which shape identity, preserve tradition and reinforce cultural identity are maintained; when we refer to culture we think of the arts. When we travel, when we want to learn about a new place, society or people, we turn to their arts; the literature which represents them, the music and dance which reflects their values and practices and the art which expresses who they are. Possibly the clearest and most systematic process to reinforce cultural identity is education in a culture's traditional art forms, strengthening a society's sense of its history, values and self worth for a new generation. This opens the door for arts educators to apply their specialist skills in preserving and extending the traditions of creative culture, asserting the privileged place the arts hold as custodians of national identity and monitors of the health of culture as a whole. Migrant communities around the world preserve their identity by teaching traditional culture to their children, acknowledging the heritage of their ancestors. In multi cultural societies immigrant groups express, preserve and communicate their heritage through clubs and associations to facilitate social interaction, community schools ensuring social traditions are kept alive and public festivals communicating cultural values to the broader community. They build links with their adopted environments through cuisine, music, dance and other tangible aspects of their national identities; it is this which has led to the richness and diversity of foods and festivals in many countries with diverse national groups. Through education in their art forms, communities teach each new generation to continue and extend their identity, and to tell the world who they are.

14. Addressing security issues through culture requires a shift in thinking, from solving the problem to removing the cause. Both dimensions are integral to a safe world, but an approach through cultural programs, allows artists and designers, professionals characterized by their creativity, to apply that creativity in the service of a secure world while assisting alienated social groups. For governments to broaden their security policies to embrace cultural support would seem a logical, as well as a necessary step, if both national and international security is to be addressed successfully in the short and longer term. Integral to this approach and complementary to it, is reinforcing the educational systems which preserve the arts, supporting societies in how they link past with present.

Postscript: A final thought, almost a postscript on a theme which has become unpopular in modern terms, the issue of morality. In an environment where the United Nations 2005 Summit on Terrorism, could not even agree on a definition of what constituted terrorism, it is too optimistic to hope for any agreement on moral values; divisions of politics, social ideology and religion mandate against this. However, whatever our political, social or religious conviction, there is no doubt we all recognize basic moral principles, values

which reflect the fundamental expectations of humanity, incontrovertible and universal; the dilemma is that we often disagree about how they are applied in specific situations. An emphasis on art education has emerged as an important aspect of this paper and it is in art education we find an important vehicle for reinforcing morality. Art is about many things, but at base level it must be about the recognition and appreciation of beauty, the ability to perceive and reproduce the beautiful in life and incorporate it as a dimension of our experience; and in beauty we find a first premise of morality. Historically and inter culturally we repeatedly find that beauty is linked to morality; whatever our faith we seek to express its moral ideals through beauty, in the art and architecture we build to communicate it; whatever our social values, we embody them in the principles which aspire to perfection; whatever our political ideals we embellish them with the trappings of dignity, harmony and authority and make them evident in the art and structure which best conveys their worth. Our philosophical traditions theorize beauty and its relationship to the good and our psychological speculations have seen beauty as an integral companion to truth. There is a clear argument for the worth of art education in the strengthening of cultural identity and the benefits which flow from it, but there is a further argument for its importance in the security context. Art education builds our awareness of beauty, it refines our understanding of aesthetic issues in art and in life, it sensitizes us to the ethical dimensions of our existence and although we may disagree about how morality is given meaning, we remain aware that it is a core dimension of our actions and the monitor of our accountability to law and faith alike.

Notes

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Bernard Hoffert
 Monash University
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