

*...art, the spark for
social change.*

-Terry Tempest Williams

EDITORIAL

Marcia L. Rosal

*Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL*

*Creating art and using
art to address community-
building, cultural
awareness, and
getting to the heart
of understanding
and embracing
differences are
at the core of
these writings.*

The technological age affords easy access to the thoughts and words of great contemporary thinkers. Through the Internet, YouTube®, magazine and audio archives, and the like, I have been enlightened by the musings of people who not only have great love for humanity but also offer creative ways individuals connect with others. One of these people is writer Terry Tempest Williams. Several months ago I listened to her speak on a podcast of Wisconsin Public Radio's *To the Best of Our Knowledge*®. At one point in the interview Ms. Williams stated, "art, the spark for social change" (2010). She elaborated on how beauty and art "are not an option" and how "art is a strategy for survival" after horrific events such as the Holocaust.

Williams went on to talk about an artist who travelled to Rwanda shortly after the genocide. Using the broken shards from buildings, the artist began a mosaic, welcoming the help of anyone who wanted to pitch in. Since, the mosaic has become a metaphor for putting back the pieces of that country. In the *Orion Magazine* Williams (2008) wrote,

....Lily Yeh, a Chinese-American artist who understands mosaic as taking that which is broken and creating something whole. She helped to create The Village of Arts and Humanities in Philadelphia

from the poorest of neighborhoods. She stood in the center of an empty lot littered with glass, picked up a stick, and drew a circle around herself. One by one, a curious community came to see who this tiny Chinese woman was and what she was doing. She invited them to pick up shards of glass and together they began making art. Mosaics. A Tree of Life was constructed on the only standing wall of a building otherwise destroyed. It was the first of many mosaics to restore beauty to a place of violence and abuse.

Creating a mosaic is a brilliant metaphor for rebuilding and was the spark for social change in that war ravaged country of Rwanda. Williams and Yeh later teamed-up to design a genocide memorial in Rugerero, Rwanda.

Creating art and using art to address community-building, cultural awareness, and getting to the heart of understanding and embracing differences are at the core of these writings. The six simple words spoken by Williams have such enormous implications. Certainly artists like Ms. Yeh intuitively understand them. And I hope this journal will be a touchstone for exploring her ideas. They certainly were inspirational as I worked on this issue. The quote resonated with me as I read and reviewed the four articles in this issue of the *Journal of Art for Life*.

In the first three articles, art educators wrote about preparing students (school-aged children and

pre-professional art teachers) for understanding socially-relevant issues and becoming justice-minded people.

In the lead article by Buda, school-aged children partnered with the community and used tiles to build a path for use by individuals with disabilities. Although the significance of piecing together a tiled path is not as profound as the Rwandan mosaics, it represented the efforts of a community coming together to construct a passageway so that all citizens could access beauty. Art therapists, too, are finding ways that art created in therapy sessions can illuminate the societal ills that plague client-artists. The fourth article puts forth an argument that art therapists are agents of social transformation. Potash theorizes that empathy-building, like creating mosaics, is a metaphor for reconstruction.

Like the authors in this issue we, as art educators, therapists, and administrators, embody the ideals so deftly spoken by Williams. At the root of these articles is the understanding that art can indeed spark social change and we, as art professionals, offer art as a strategy for survival.

References

- Williams, T. T. (2008, September/October). Healing Rwanda. *Orion Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.orionmagazine.org>
- Wisconsin Public Radio (Producer). (2010, April 4). *To the best of our knowledge* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <http://www.wpr.org/webcasting/archives>

Journal of Art for Life 2(1)