

LIBERATION ARTS AND ITS PLACE IN PEACE MAKING

By Linda Blincko, Creative Director, Depot Artspace

Peace is not a relationship of nations. It is a condition of mind brought about by a serenity of soul. Peace is not merely the absence of war. It is also a state of mind. Lasting peace can come only to peaceful people.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889 - 1964)

We can never obtain peace in the world if we neglect the inner world and don't make peace with ourselves.

Dalai Lama

2017 marked the 30th anniversary of New Zealand becoming Nuclear Free. On June 8, 1987, legislation was passed “to establish in New Zealand a Nuclear Free Zone, to promote and encourage an active and effective contribution by New Zealand to the essential process of disarmament and international arms control.”

Being nuclear free is a defining component of New Zealand identity, celebrated by cities across the country who have adopted peace city status. What a fantastic characteristic to know ourselves, and for the world to know us by!

It is a bold declaration for cities to make because commitment is necessary to bear the fruits of peace. Commemoration is great, and reflection also, but action is essential. The Dalai Lama made this point during his visit to Auckland in 2009 - no amount of meditation or wishful thinking will transform the planet into a peaceful place. Nor is it enough to tweak the existing paradigm into which war is woven. St Augustine's notion of the just war contains still the seeds of pugilism. Peace attained in this way continues to validate aggression and even finds a place for the power-crazed megalomaniac or pugilistic fundamentalist who justify peace as their outcome.

War will never cease, as Nehru states, without a change in our state of mind. We have one radical solution to the problem of attaining to peace. It is to remove the arts from their lonely pedestal and to place them in an inclusive environment where participation is actively encouraged. When people consider the democratising of art they tend to relate it to the propagation of mediocrity, that something precious, almost deified, is likely to be reduced to the **lowest common denominator**. We, however, believe the reverse is true; that, when an individual takes the opportunity to engage in the creative, they have access something extra-ordinary in themselves. As playwright Jonathan Abarbenal asserts;



“The arts DO appeal to the highest ideals of humanity, and that’s why they are important. The arts are the antidote for the world’s spiritual poisons and irrigation for our cultural deserts, and that’s why they are important. They work, slowly and painstakingly to be sure, one-on-one or in small groups for the business of teaching, of inspiring, of opening minds is extremely labour-intensive. But the arts endure, which is why civilizations are remembered for the culture they leave behind, not for wars won, damage inflicted, or for political and military leaders.

Terror fears freedom of thought and expression. Terror fears the exultation of the spirit. Terror fears the fresh winds of creativity and originality. Terror fears the pleasures of laughter and catharsis. Terror fears the strength of a people who will not be terrorized.”

A Peace City is both unifying and liberating. People free to be truly themselves are most likely to exist harmoniously. The individual this current social environment celebrates has been cultivated by the competitive imperative to become divisive and self-seeking and significantly devoid of regard for others. The arts, as they arise from the creative self, have no interest in the economy for its own sake, nor in success or domination. They are therefore one of the last outposts of true and binding community.

Politicians who represent the popular concept of Peace City should absolutely factor in the arts among their Strategic Outcomes and Long Term Plans, for the arts signify peace as intrinsic to humanity. Simply put, if we are creating we are not destroying. The Depot’s infinite circular mantra, “creating an environment that encourages creating...”, reflects the aspiration towards a state of peace in which we live and by which we can claim to truly know ourselves.

