



THE ART OF IMAGINATION

My contribution speech at the conference of United Nations 65th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Anat Ratzabi ©

UN Conference

A parallel event at the United Nations 65th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Subject: Arts and Sports for Preventing Violence and building Peaceful Inclusive Societies

Introduction

The event & dialogue aims to explore the roles of the arts and sports in the prevention of violence and the promotion of peace. Participants will propose alternatives to conventional patriarchal constructs embedded in societies and cultures around the world.

These constructs perpetuate traditional gender identities and promote both overt and covert abuse of power. The arts and sports can interrupt abusive patterns and boredom, a trigger for violence. Creativity and collaboration do not tolerate conventions. Instead, they may help engage community members of all ages, transform rigid beliefs, help heal the legacies of multi-generational trauma, and build and nurture a peaceful and inclusive society.

Moderator:

Dr. Yael Danieli, Founder and Acting Director, International Center for the Study, Prevention and Treatment of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma (ICMGLT); UN Representative, International Organization for Victim Assistance (IOVA), (USA)

Speakers:

Doris Sommer, Director of the [Cultural Agents Initiative](#) at Harvard University, Ira and Jewell Williams Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures, and African and African American Studies, Harvard University; Founder of Cultural Agents, Inc. (USA)

Anat Ratsabi, Visual Artist/Sculptor, awarded significant private and public commissions in cooperation with the municipality of The Hague (The Netherlands)

Peter Campbell, Designer/Singer/Songwriter. Wrote/performed the song *Waited too long* adopted as the anthem of the International Summit on Domestic/Family Violence during the COVID-19 Era. <http://AllianceEventHub.org> (Australia)

Chris Storm and **Cornelia Elbrecht**, Art therapists, Institute for Sensorimotor Art Therapy (Australia)

Fikiri Nzoyisenga, Founder and Executive Director, Youth Coalition Against Gender-based Violence – SEMERERA (Burundi)

Abbas Mancey, Founding member of Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN) and Alberta Men's Network. ManUp Campaign (Guyana; Canada)

INTRO

In March this year, (2021) I participated in a United Nation conference that was about Preventing Violence and building Peaceful Inclusive Societies.

The conference was related to the Covid19 era, and I was invited to advocate and talk about the use of Art as prevention of domestic violence during covid19

Considering that artists anticipate social change and can help develop new ways of looking at the world, I was asked to share my personal views and perceptions.

In my talk I focused on the following topics:

How art and the use of our imagination, help us expand our mental and emotional space and how to claim it as our own. As well, about the role of engagements with the arts in the public space, – Its Benefits and impact.

Transcription of the speech

I would like to begin with basic facts, said by many before.. Non the less support our search for understanding how to engage, or if you wish, unwrap the gift of creativity.

We enter our lives with the natural ability to create. Our primary behaviors as children are that:
Before we speak, We sing
When we hear music, We dance to the beat
Before we can write, We draw & Paint

All of these activities – we do not do on command. They already exist in our system.
These are all forms of self-expression.
So, I believe that– **THE ARTS IS THE FOUNDATION OF ALL HUMAN EXPRESSION**

ARTIST POINT OF VIEW

When speaking about my personal story, I (metaphorically) say that i work in two studio's:
One is in my head and one in my actual studio in the City center of the Hague.
The studio that I have in my head is more like a laboratory, think-tank. Or, if you like, a delivery room where ideas are being born and nurtured.
Here i do my research, I make plans, develop strategies, I design.. I clarify my concepts and make decision on things that matter. I think, feel and experience – "**I IMAGINE**"
It is a wonderful journey & It is the **GREATER SPACE** where almost everything is possible.

The "other studio" is where I transform ideas into shapes, colors and materials.
Often, I must deal with the reality that things don't always work as I imagine. This is the time to experiment, change plans, and adjust.
It is the time for patience and for remaining centered, come to your core and engaging with your essence.

CHALLENGING & VIVID STATE OF BEING

At the moment that you allow yourself to be where you can navigate, float and explore ideas and thoughts, You are no longer in a static motion, You no longer in a void or a state of emptiness. You then switch frameworks and transform into a different dynamic space where you are mentally, physically and emotionally active and in full potential.
It is not at all an idealistic space where everything is perfect, But it is certainly a challenging and vivid state of being ! It gives energy, Vitality, a sense of aliveness. And Vibrancy.

THROUGH OUR IMAGINATION

We transform our thoughts and feelings through our imagination.

The central agent of transformation and change is our ability to renew, our ability to anticipate, to envision ourselves in another dimension, and subject to other behavior Patterns.

We are all born with the capacity to create, but sometimes the world and the realities around us dictate unexpected or uncomfortable rules and circumstances.

We lose contact with the gift of imagination and creativity.

TEACHING ART AND ADVOCATING CREATIVITY

Mostly as adults, we tend to limit our creativity when we engage in social referencing,

We compromise our creative expressions in favor of fitting in and acceptance by others.

We neglect our most dynamic space of freedom & imagination in favor of obeying the collective, built-in and standard frameworks that provide us with ready solutions and outlets.

Self-expression often becomes self-criticism. That can turn into self-criticism

We find ourselves in a narrow mental and emotional space which can lead to stress, frustration and aggression.

COVID 19 has brought upon many of us similar conditions. It has shaken our sense of freedom and for some, it has narrowed life into its bare existential meaning.

It definitely interferes with our rights to freedom in decision making and self-expression.

Teaching art and advocating creativity can be a key to expanding these narrowed spaces and promote developing new realities.

HEALING OF SOCIETY & METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

Advocating on the subject.. An important challenge facing both as an artist and a teacher, is to bridge extremes by embracing opposites: secular and holy, traditional and contemporary, order and chaos.

It is important to help others connect with their own talents and envision/imagine opportunities.

It is about learning how to reconnect with that authentic quality of renewal, of playfulness, of aliveness, of curiosity, of mystery, of transcendence.

It is a kind of transformation of a new state of mind! it is not something that you do, Rather it is a space you enter, -- It is in my perception the path to HEALING OF SOCEITY

I find it important to mention, that creativity does not necessarily mean we all have to become artists and create mind- blowing artworks.

It is about recognizing the right to define your own space in thoughts, in feelings, in words, in color, in sound and in movement.

We all must be made aware of that creativity and imagination allow a way of channeling our feelings and thoughts.!!! It enables us to expand and rearrange our mental and emotional space and how we experience events in a way that does not clash with external influences.

The benefits of creative activities is that they help us acknowledge and celebrate our own uniqueness - because it is something that comes from within – it is similar to the authentic feeling that we experience when we were children.

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES -

ART PROJECT "Discovering my future self "

In the past, i have worked with the welfare department of our municipality, I was asked to develop an art project, to support young migrant teenage girls who were found in a study to show low self-image as well as cultural clashes and traces of multigenerational traumatic behavior.

Born in the Netherlands the girls were caught up in a crossfire.

On one hand the obligations and loyalty to the inherited faith & cultural legacies; on the other hand, the fitting into the Western reality they were born into. This conflict generated stress and overwhelming emotions which resulted in obstructions of self – development. Fear and compromise has threatened to take over both their growth and self – expression.

The art project i developed , titled "Discovering my future self " was also Inspired by my own experience as a migrant, an Artist, a mind traveler, and former backpacker.

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES.

It was clearly important to help them find a path that will enlarge their imaginary space and make choices that will enable them to gain insights into how to create opportunities that will support a healthy process of building self-determination and importantly, at the same time, to stay true to their ethnicity, culture, and community.

We began the group process by talking about how we define ourselves – This has opened up the opportunity to hear others "DREAMS" and reflect and mirror our own. I then asked the girls to build a mood board made of clippings from magazines and, if possible, to draw and paint.

These act of conversation & externalizing your thoughts from your head onto a piece of paper, helped the girls navigate their way into understanding of the meaning of exploration; that it is Okay to engage with ideas without any commitment or obligations to any theory or belief besides the action of collecting findings to enrich your data and explore **OPPORTUNITIES**.

This process progressed the greater space where one is free to **IMAGINE** and possibly made to feel how it is to be different from what you have being, Which mean the beginning of change. After "defining" and "framing" thoughts and aspirations we have worked on modeling the "Self-Portrait" in clay. I chose to work with clay because it is malleable and forgiving material and as such, provide us with a metaphoric framework that made it easy to explain/understand that life itself is malleable and forgiving as well.

By providing access to aspirations and an intersection between present and potential future self, the project enabled implementing ideas in actions.

At the end we organized a group exhibition where parents and friends were invited. The girls were extremely proud of their accomplishments.

My last topic is about: **ART IN THE PUBLIC SPACE**

There is a public art continuum that appreciates the role and contribution of the artist. It recognizes the fact that artist can be advocating through art for alternative perspectives that can challenge beliefs, assumptions, and community values.

The values and means of expression involved in the process of creating Art in the public space are in fact a magnification of the process of advocating for the intellectual & emotional welfare of the individual as mentioned earlier.

In 2014 i was commissioned by the municipality of the Hague, to design & realize the new Holocaust monument in the city center. This meant collaboration with others involved in planning public spaces, from elected officials, city engineers and planners to community stakeholders.

The symbolic elements incorporated in the installation were meant to create an intersection between past, present and future.

The memorial captures and documents the spirit and atmosphere of the events and meant to generate curiosity and as well to evoke compassion and tolerance.
In fact, to impress upon the present and future generation the eternal impact we can have on each other's lives.

The underlying thought while designing the monument were that, – Public art is uniquely accessible and available in the course of our daily life.
A powerful art expression creates valuable imprints in the way we conceive, experience and relate to our history and our environment, and lead us to self-reflection.

It activates our imagination and thoughts and can challenge us to alternative assumptions, beliefs and values. It contributes to the collective awareness and elevates a sense of communal identity and cohesion.

So finally, we can conclude that, through art and creativity, we find ways that can help mitigate mental and emotional turbulency and possibly violence, and contribute to peace, both at home, in oneself and the world outside.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR LISTENING