



Arts for Life

Canadian Conference of the Arts ~ Conférence canadienne des arts

"The history of both science and the arts has a common origin in the cave paintings of some fifteen thousand years ago. At a time when survival was a daily miracle, our ancestors found within themselves the resources to record the world around them.... For most of human history it is art that has been in the ascendancy.... for it was art that had more to tell the world than science."

John Polanyi, Nobel laureate, from remarks made on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Killam Prizes for Science awarded by the Canada Council, Toronto, April 1990

From time immemorial, art has been used as a key means of communication. Figurines unearthed in southwestern Germany have been shown to be carved about 30,000-35,000 years ago, predating the evolution of modern humans and demonstrating an extraordinary level of skill. Other evidence suggests humans were producing art as long as 400,000 years ago. In many parts of the world, the remnants of earlier civilizations speak to us today through their art: the cave paintings in Lascaux, the treasures of Tutankamon, the frescoes at Santorini, the ancient temples at Angkor Wat, the ruins at Machu Picchu - in Canada, all that remain of a people which once inhabited the Arctic region thousands of years ago are the tiny ivory artefacts depicting birds, fish, and animals. When all else is gone, culture remains as a mute testimony to the life of a people, bearing witness to those who went before, forming part of today's collective heritage, and enriching our lives.

The arts continue to enrich and enhance our lives on a daily and lifelong basis. The following are just a few examples of how the arts are integrated into our lives to educate, stimulate, nurture, revitalize, rejuvenate, restore, revive, and generally improve our quality of life.

Arts for Life

ArtsSmarts is the largest education initiative in Canada dedicated to improving the lives and learning capacity of Canadian children by injecting arts into their academic programmes. The project, funded by The J W McConnell Family Foundation and administered by the Canadian Conference of the Arts, recently released an evaluation report which indicates 70% of educators saw behavioural changes in students and increased student engagement in school. Other benefits included the demonstration by "problem students" of significant artistic skill and leadership in projects, and lower absenteeism rates during ArtsSmarts projects. Similar arts-infused programmes in other countries have reported similar benefits: in Georgia, USA, students recorded higher test scores and were less likely to drop out of high school; in Austrian and Swiss schools, students with increased music classes (at the expense of mathematics and language classes) were as good in math and better in languages than their peers with regular schedules.

Arts for Life

An Americans for the Arts fact sheet reports young people who participate in the arts for at least three hours on three days each week for at least one full year are:

- ⇒ 4 times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, participate in a math and science fair, or to win an award for writing an essay or poem
- ⇒ 3 times more likely to be elected to class office within their schools, or to be recognised for school attendance.

Arts for Life

In Great Britain, the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education set up two Secretaries of State to produce a major report on the future of education. The advisory committee was composed of a unique group of scientists, artists, educators and business leaders. The result was All Our Futures: Creative and Cultural Education, an extensive report declaring that promoting creative and cultural education was a necessity, not an option. The report prompted the government to reinstate the place of the arts in the national curriculum in September 2000, resulting in a much stronger emphasis on creative and cultural education to motivate students and promote their self-



esteem, and to develop the skills and aptitudes they require for today's - and tomorrow's - world.

Arts for Life

A report in the US, Champions for Change - a collection of seven major studies, revealed that the arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached, transform the environment for learning, connect learning experiences to the world of real work, and provide new challenges for already successful students.

Arts for Life

ICE: Beyond Cool, a quasi rock-show from DanceArts, Vancouver, uses song, dance and theatre as vehicles for self-discovery and explores why some teens become uncommunicative and ultimately suicidal. The product of three years of workshops with young people, this production has toured the country and has been credited with saving at least one teen's life.

Arts for Life

More and more communities are learning that culture can revitalize their inner cities, through the restoration of heritage buildings and the development of cultural tourism through galleries, theatres, and artists' workshops and studios (Edmonton, AB; Chemainus, BC; Port au Port and Trinity, NF). In Britain, the enormous success of the Tate Modern has joined with the reconstructed Globe Theatre to give depressed central-south London a huge economic boost. And the building of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, has proved that "culture can rejuvenate blighted post-industrial cities".

Arts for Life

For the past few years, a programme called Poetry in Motion has put Canadian poetry front and centre on the local transit systems of a dozen municipalities. In Calgary, the idea has been expanded to Art in Motion which involves displaying the work of visual artists for city commuters. Calgary's city planners are also using art to make ordinary objects (such as manhole covers, sewer pipes, crosswalks, etc) into objets d'art. Poetry has also been "on the move" for a number of years in Toronto, where it is placed in buses and the subway system, making Toronto the "biggest publisher of poetry in Canada"!

Arts for Life

Artists continue to use their talents to help particular causes: singer/songwriter Richard Desjardins staged benefit concerts to save the boreal forest in northern Quebec; Vancouver's Dancers for Life raises funds for AIDS research on an annual basis; wildlife artist Robert Bateman donates paintings to help conservation groups; actor/singer Tom Jackson's The Huron Carole raises much needed funds for food banks and homeless people across Canada. A couple of years ago, a group of Vancouver musicians recorded a CD in honour of the 50 missing women from that city's east end; the money raised will be used for a drug-detoxification centre.

Arts for Life

Unusual partnerships between the arts and business continue to thrive. Vancouver poet, David Whyte makes a living urging corporate executives to find soul in the modern workplace through poetry; Boeing Co. even signed him on as its poet-in-residence. The Second City Improvisational Theatre troupe puts on workshops to help MBA students and corporate employees to think on their feet. In England, the son of theatre legend Laurence Olivier is using his extensive knowledge of Shakespeare to provide leadership workshops for senior executives.

Arts for Life

The Cirque du Soleil's outreach arm, Cirque du Monde, works internationally helping street children channel their youthful energy, aggression, and risk-taking into learning circus arts, thus building self-esteem and providing the children with a skill they can use to earn money. In Brazil, the programme has evolved into Cirque pour tous where street kids are given a chance



to get off the streets through a four year training programme to become professional performers.

Arts for Life

The Spiral Garden in Toronto is a programme of Bloorview MacMillan Centre, a facility which serves children and youth with disabilities and complex medical conditions. In the garden setting, art is the catalyst to help children connect the worlds of nature and social interaction, to enter a world of therapeutic creativity. Through play, music, story-telling, art and crafts, and theatre, children become fully involved and all aspects of the individual - physical, emotional, spiritual, rational and intuitive - can be integrated into the process.

Arts for Life

CARE Canada has used the power of theatre to promote understanding among the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Through the plays, issues of gender, equality and freedom of speech are examined. Other international aid agencies have used visual art to assist refugees, particularly children, to come to terms with the horrors they have experienced.

Arts for Life

A Swedish study suggested that cultural activity may boost the immune system and relax people. An independent think tank explored the impact on health of participating in the arts and found that over half those surveyed reported feeling healthier, nearly three-quarters felt happier, 80% had learned new skills, and 84% felt more confident. A US foundation reports that the number of arts-related projects in hospitals had risen from 56 in 1983 to more than 300 in 1992.

Arts for Life

A few years ago, a unique partnership in Halifax between a doctor (Kenneth Rockwood) and an artist (Jennifer Hiscox), resulted in a special programme using art works "to instill more humanity into the clinical world of medicine". The Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre replaced bland posters on its walls with real art works. Hiscox was appointed artist-in-residence and commissioned to paint images of doctors caring for the elderly, particularly those with Alzheimer's.

Arts for Life

Several studies indicate that the arts assist in childhood education: in the UK, after school activities, particularly sports and drama, have been associated with good school performance; in the US, students who enjoyed participating in the arts were more likely to be motivated to learn new skills and thus their general attitude to learning was enhanced; in Switzerland, children who took extra music classes became better at languages and more socially skilled.

Arts for Life

In Winnipeg, classically-trained dance teacher Sophia Costentini, an instructor with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, has worked wonders with high school students. Kids who once might have dropped out through lack of interest, became actively involved in a high-energy dance programme, and their grades improved in all subject areas.

Arts for Life

The skills nurtured through a liberal arts and science education (creative thinking, ability to problem solve, expertise in communications - verbal and written) are increasingly valued by modern corporations. Leaders of Canadian high-technology corporations issued a statement a couple of years ago upholding the importance of a liberal arts education. These CEOs feel the debate shouldn't be around an "either/or" proposition between technology and the liberal arts and sciences; rather, they feel industry and the economy in general benefit more from a balanced approach.

Sources: CCA Spotlights; ArtsSmarts; Statistics Canada; National Campaign for the Arts; various media: Globe and Mail, Ottawa Citizen, CBC Radio and Television; Internet.

