

SMAK & MSK
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Healing The Museum by Grace Ndiritu

« Man is a social being. Factors such as political conflict, social tension and economic stress affect his mental health. Such factors are at least as important as biological factors. Frantz Fanon paid particular attention to these social problems and his brand of political psychiatry is as relevant today as it was during his time. Alienation and oppression still exist. Unemployment is widespread and tyrannical rulers still oppress their people. Mental illness cannot be solved by drugs but by changes in the political and social order. » H.A. Youssef

In 2012 I began creating a new body of works under the title **Healing The Museum**. It came out of a deep need to re-introduce non-rational methodologies such as shamanism to re-activate the 'sacredness' of art spaces. I believed that most modern art institutions were out of sync with their audiences' everyday experiences and the widespread socio-economical and political changes that have taken place globally in the recent decades. Museums are dying. And I see shamanism as a way to re-activate the dying art space as a space for sharing, participation and ethics. From prehistoric to modern times the shaman was not only the group healer and facilitator of peace but also the creative; the artist.

I choose to do this because collective healing ceremonies allow us to weave together threads of intention, peace, love, equality and harmony to support social change, bridge social divides and heal ancient rifts — even around issues that have gone unresolved for centuries. Many people associate shamanism with personal healing, but similar practices can be applied to create shifts in challenging situations all the way up to the global level. And I believe that these symptoms which are currently being enacted in society i.e. the destruction of the environment, mass human migrations and an increase in global acts of terrorism _ and specifically in Europe in the last two years are a reflection of the fragmentation of the collective mind.

Hence, at the foundation of the **Healing the Museum** methodology is the idea of using performance as a Peace Building tool to deal with issues of global conflict which is currently taking place in the world. This include countries that are all at differing stages of rebuilding their societies post-conflict and in the process of attaining a permanent peace solution. Using shamanic performance as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building not only is a way of 'healing' the Museum but is an attempt to understand the 'Other' again by making the world a safer, more generous place. Using the Museum as a performative platform within the human history of gift-giving will attempt to heal the distrust by Western people to trust Non-Western methodologies in the aftermath of genocide, slavery and colonialism.

Various factors have inspired this new way of working. Firstly, I grew up in an activist household with a feminist mother that believed in the power of grass-roots politics. So from a young age I have taken part in anti- war, pro-multiculturalism , anti-racism, anti-apartheid, pro-peace rallies. Because of this I see critical thinking as an key mental faculty that needs to be actively cultivated by all humans and institutions like Museums should play an important role in this to counter the culture of fear which is propagated by the mainstream media. This fixation on war has led to an unhealthy mass reliance on government and especially agencies like the U.N. to solve all problems of global conflict and to take care of all its citizens. The people have given way their power to these institutions (until recent events with Occupy) by allowing them to make decisions for them and therefore have played their part in screwing up

the democratic process. And with the current misuse of the democratic process by Pro-racist Nationalist groups like UKIP during the Brexit fiasco in Britain and the election of Donald J. Trump, make **Healing the Museum** even more relevant.

Secondly, these questions reflect the deep fragmentation within the collective mind and where once the Museum could be seen as a safe place to which to espouse our views, the reliance on corporate sponsorship has changed the relationship between the Museum and the public forever. How can we see contemporary art as a tool to activate good in the world? How can the general public regain the faith they have lost in contemporary art and Museums to remake the world and show a different way forward?

Most modern institutions like the U.N and Museums founded after the 1st world war are currently out of sync with what their citizens and the audiences need. Therefore these institution and Museum are dying. I see shamanism as a way to re-activate the dying Museum as a space for sharing, by using the concept of Commensality - sharing a meal together. Commensality is a lived concept in which all cultures and religions have once used this throughout history. It is also a cathartic way of excising the 'demons' of war which we are all affected by whether we live in ongoing conflict zones or terrorised by the deluge of propaganda on the mainstream news on a daily basis. The general public has given way their power to these institutions by allowing them to make decisions for them and therefore have played their part in the devolution of the democratic process. Rather than giving into the Freudian inevitability that we as humans are just violent animals in constant state of reaction, I want to use my project to show that we as humans can use their consciousness to rise above violence. I want to dig deeper into the subconscious of human psyche and use a Jungian idea of using non-rational methods like shamanism to heal the collective mind.

Therefore, **Healing the Museum** incorporates the acts of listening and receiving, giving and sharing and requires the trust of all participants and audiences to take place. By doing this they will see the holistic, bigger picture that we as humans are all connected, I aim to trigger a global movement for peace subliminally in which the both the audience and participants can take back to their job and relieve the pressure working within these powerful institutions that make decisions on a daily basis that affect everyone.

"Soul loss is also happening on a larger scale on the entire planet. Soul loss is not limited to individual human experience. It is also quite evident that societies experience this. Examples of collective soul loss and its effects can be found by studying the experience of cultures, such as Native American cultures that have experienced genocide, or cultures in Africa where the demoralization generated by colonialism has created a cultural, political and spiritual vacuum. The Earth herself is in a state of soul loss due to the war that has been waged against her by unbridled industrialization. Even so, I have great faith in her regenerative capacity. There is much we can do as shamanic practitioners to heal, safeguard and restore the Earth and the beings that dwell there. Working on a spirit level makes many things possible. So much that happens in spiritual reality affects material reality. It is important to remember this even though the effect of spiritual healing like soul retrieval may not always be immediately evident on a material level." Isa Gucciard.

Thus, it is interesting to note that the only trace of any live event but especially one that chooses to affect the unconscious in a non-rational way can only play out in the memories of the participants that attended, in the days and weeks to come. The capturing of the 'dead' performance onto film can only provide a sneak peek at the longterm goal of **Healing the Museum** as an instigator and participant in a new wave of positive development in human

consciousness currently taking place. The main principle of the **Healing the Museum** series being; to enliven the Museum once again back into action, so that the Musuem can re-take its proper place; as a cultural space in which new advancements in art, audience participation and art education can affect wider society and life for the good of all beings.

More info on the shamanic performances can be found on <http://www.gracendiritu.com/>