

LETTER FROM JOHN TO THE RN ARTISTS

by John Hoyland

1

Artists live in the real world, but most of the time they are invisible. We live in a world of information, surrounded by a remorseless torrent of rubbish being poured daily into our minds advertising, fashion and greed. Publishers who manipulate their readers, art dealers masquerading as collectors, rigging the markets, self-important museum directors involved only in power, looking for the main chance under the guise of education and the torch bearers of hype, the music and Hollywood.

Ethics and business are usually uncomfortable bedfellows.

Art is about making ethical and poetical judgements and of developing discerning taste (and by this I don't mean "good taste"), in order to bring together a number of generalities to a concrete formal conclusion, which the artist hopes will make a bridge between him and his audience. Art is about making transformations.

There is also desire made concrete.

2

I approach my work in a vaguely dialectical way through a form of criticism, trying to investigate a mixture of logic, imagination and empirical accident, trying to break the logical mould.

Over-valued reason is like political absolutism. Reason sets boundaries, wishing us only to accept the known and live in a framework as if we were sure how far life can extend. The more critical reason dominates, the more we are impoverished. Spontaneity is less about the unconscious and more about inventing new forms, new structures, in which hopefully can be embedded the spirit concealed within the image.

I would like to make archetypal images of wholeness and have tried to broaden my work over the years, to stretch abstraction, giving it a human face, incorporating the radiance of Matisse and Rothko, the plastic construction of De Stael and Hofmann, and the evocation and innovation of Miro and Picasso and I'm the first to admit it's a tall order.

3

Britain is visually uncultivated, cultivation being fine as long as you stick to gardening and you'd better keep it neat. I want an art that has a spiritual dimension, but spirituality or the metaphysical cannot be built to order.

We live in a secular, mass culture surrounded by cliché ridden so-called advanced art that has become decadent and entirely commercial and silly, a new Academy. Making art for art's sake is the only way that honesty can be

achieved. Finding the images that lie behind emotions produced by the mind, hand, eye, memory and heart.

Sometimes I hate my anglo-saxeness, the clodhopping, dull mongrelness.

Perhaps this is why I cling to other cultures for sustenance – the exotic in art, places, people and music. I never believed in the dominance of European culture. I want more magic, more drama, black or white but not grey. I am sick of accountants, bank managers, computer programmers, trade unionists, hairdressers and media personalities.

4

I feel swamped by the saturation techniques of the advertising men who more and more have taken over from the artist, the poet and mad man. I want the spiritual and the sub-conscious blended with the external world.

I have also wanted for a long time to make art that would communicate directly across racial, social, political and linguistic barriers and to pursue an open discussion with art, both old and new, in a diverse cultural context.

Here one has to consider whether one's own culture contains the models one needs in order to create new hybrids. Many artists in the past have been indebted to non-European cultural models and in the 21st century, it would seem to me to be logical that this should occur.

Perhaps I might take the liberty of offering some advice to young artists:

Look at things until you can see what else they are, or might become.

Try to develop a pattern of awareness by creating in your minds, gardens of pictures.

Tune into their rivers of association, fragments of association can become the tools of mysticism even with all its inherent dangers.

5

Imagine if one could bring about an experience in others from atoms, suns, space, time, light and darkness, and most of all colour and avoid all doctrines.

Paintings are a seduction, one develops a relationship with these inanimate objects which becomes a bond like a living person, a mirror, a realm of elusive power. Art plays a game of structural truthfulness it becomes alive. It contains and understands ecstasy through colour as light. There is no place for cynicism only Joy, passion and wonderment, clarity and eagerness. Painting should be made to look easy. Painting as the embodiment of what it is to be human. Paintings are a kind of dream language, and like music they, simplicity can give them their greatest power.

Painting proposes a new reality

Paintings float high above the pitfalls of reality, they can embrace the informal and the irrational, together with the spontaneous and the unknown. Artist must jump into the dark.

In my own work I am trying to accept the forces of nature, and the power of the human spirit, they have allowed me to experience a view of both the simplicity and the overwhelming complexity of nature and man.

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In daring to imagine there are no straightforward answers, perhaps it's an illusion daring to dream but this is what makes art so exciting.

Nature, its beauty and the power of its elements and man alone with his joys and sorrows his courage and his fear. Praising nature and childlike in the presence of it's awesome majesty, afraid of the unknown but always searching for it.

Trying to create a sense of magic, trying to transform the commonplace into the real, to make paradise.

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