

# Why Realist Art Matters

BY KARA LYSANDRA ROSS

In the Epcot Center in Disney World last year, the Innovations Center had a computerized survey that had been taken by thousands of people. The survey asked what broad issues or groups the participants thought were going to be the most important and influential in the next 20 years. Art was near the bottom in terms of importance.

The importance of art is ridiculously underestimated.

Many people view art as a luxury, something to decorate a home with or simply something to view or create for fun or relaxation. In truth, art lies at the core of human existence and has the power not only to influence an individual's thoughts or beliefs but also to actually shape nations.

As some of you may know, I write a monthly column in The Epoch Times, which is a large international newspaper that publishes in 35 countries and 19 languages. This newspaper was founded by Chinese expatriates who fled China due to persecution.

One of the founders of the newspaper, Dana Cheng, told me that the Chinese regime believes in two kinds of weapons. The first is arms, such as guns, bombs, and tanks, and the other is art and culture. It is as possible to destroy a society by stripping away its art and culture as it is to do so with conventional weapons.

This is why, in the 1960s and during the rise of Chairman Mao in China, all books on traditional Chinese culture and art were burned, and paintings and art objects themselves were destroyed. This period is known as the Cultural Revolution, and over 10,000,000 people were killed, many trying to protect their heritage.

Today the practice of Falun Gong is banned in China, and those who practice are imprisoned and in some cases tortured and killed. The spiritual practice of Falun Gong, which is widespread with about 100,000,000 practitioners, was introduced in China in 1992. Like Buddhism, it is nonviolent and is deeply founded in meditation.

Paintings depicting Falun Gong images and those that show the abuses of Chinese citizens by the Chinese government are banned. Some artists who do not wish to stay silent, paint images that are banned in defiance of the laws. They know that if they are caught they will go to prison or worse.

The winner of the most recent NTD Television art competition is one such example. The painting depicts a Falun Gong practitioner being tortured, and the work already is showing signs of cracking from the conditions required to smuggle the painting out of China.

Realist art and literature have the ability to communicate, shaping beliefs and therefore societies, which is why many governments view the arts as something that they must control.

Nothing says more about a culture than the art it idolizes. It represents what it values, what it thinks about, and essentially what it deems worth remembering. Art is the representation of a people, encapsulating its essence on every level. By attacking the art of a culture, you attack the culture itself.

China is not the only country that has banned art for this purpose. It has been said that the English banned the Scottish bagpipes in the 1700s as a way of attacking their heritage.

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The Polish press was liquidated, the libraries and bookshops were burned, and their paintings and sculptures destroyed by the Nazis during WWII. In addition, we are told over and over again that many Arab countries view the spread of American art and culture, such as film, painting, and music, as both a threat and an attack on their beliefs and society.

Art is indeed a power of its own; otherwise it would not be viewed as such a threat.

**The Modernist Creed: Destroy** Much of modern art, such as abstract expressionism and Dadaism was intended as an attack on society because at its essence, it says that the human form, our hopes, dreams, and fears, are not important, that they are not worth painting or sculpting.

An article titled “To Create = to Destroy?” put out by UCLA, states, “The idea of destruction was built into the ideology of modernism: old culture and its arts have to be destroyed to make room for the new: modernism wants to begin from ‘tabula rasa,’ or ‘point zero.’”

The idea of destroying the old was already present in cubism (Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque); their paintings and collages destroyed the Renaissance tradition. “...” And the modern movement of futurism was “a passionate attack” on “bourgeois society and its values.”

Modernism has claimed that its intent was to attack the wealthy, but in actuality it attacked humanity as a whole. You need a lot of “education” to understand and appreciate an abstract expression-



“Persephone,” by Ardith Starostka, oil on linen, 30 inches by 20 inches.

ist work, but anyone can recognize and sympathize with an image of a grieving mother or a painting of a beautiful garden. Those things are universal to the human condition.

Modernist leader F. T. Marinetti, who in 1909 wrote the First Futurist Manifesto, stated, “We will destroy all museums and libraries, and academies of all sorts; we will battle against moralism, feminism, and all vile opportunism and utilitarianism.”

Today most modernist works take a fraction of the time that a realist one does and therefore the galleries have a larger inventory to work from. In addition, modernist works bring much higher prices at auction than those by the artists they claimed to be opportunistic.

In an article recently published in the New English Review titled “The Tyranny of Artistic Modernism,” Mark Anthony Signorelli writes: “Nothing is so important to the spiritual and mental flourishing of a people as its art.”

“The stories they tell, the buildings they inhabit, the public spaces in which they gather, the songs they sing, the fashioned images they gaze upon, these things shape their souls more permanently and effectively than anything else.”

“We live in a time when the art all around us accustoms men to, and insinuates into their souls, the most erroneous and degrading ideas imaginable about themselves and their world. A humane society can hardly be expected

to grow out of such an adverse cultural environment.”

**Art: Agent of Positive Change** On a more uplifting note, there are also many examples of how

the creation of art has impacted societies. In 1793, Jacques-Louis David's “The Death of Marat” became the symbol of the French Revolution and rallied men to battle against the Reign of Terror.

## MORE ABOUT ART RENEWAL CENTER (ARC)

ARC provides education through scholarships and the support of approved atelier schools.

Online ARC supplies articles, artist biographies, an ARC Living Master's gallery, a database of over 80,000 images by artists throughout history and an Annual International ARC Salon.

ARC is accepting entries for its 2012–2013 International Salon Competition through Dec. 31.

Upton Sinclair's “The Jungle” played a role in improving working conditions in factories. Elizabeth Thompson's battle paintings spurred military reform. “Uncle Tom's Cabin” helped bring about an end to slavery. The writings of Dickens and his counterparts among painters and sculptors such as Auguste Mulready, J.G. Brown, and William Bouguereau helped bring about awareness of the need to help the poor, to name a few.

Remember, artists play one of the most important roles in our society. And for those who do believe in a higher power, is not the earth or the universe God's artistic creation?

Today, realist artists are shaping our nation and the world into a better place, where once again freedom of thought and real communication can be disseminated through a canvas. With their diligence and effort, a picture is once again worth a thousand words versus needing a thousand words to explain it.

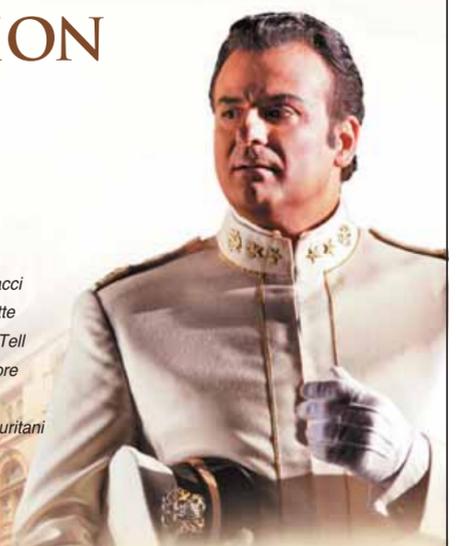
For more information, visit [artrenewal.org](http://artrenewal.org)

Adapted from Kara Lysandra Ross's speech at the 7th Annual International Guild of Realism (IGOR) Exhibition. Ross, the director of operations for the Art Renewal Center, is an expert in 19th century European painting.

## NTD TELEVISION INTERNATIONAL VOCAL COMPETITION CONCERT

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- E. CURTIS: “Tu Ca Nun Chiagne”
- R. LEONVACALLO: “Stridono lassu” from *I Pagliacci*
- W.A. MOZART: “Come Scoglio” from *Così fan tutte*
- G. ROSSINI: “Pour notre amour” from *Guillaume Tell*
- G. VERDI: “Tacea la notte placida” from *Il Trovatore*
- G. BIZET: Chanson du Toréador, from *Carmen*
- V. BELLINI: “Ah, per sempre io ti perdi” from *I Puritani*

\*The program is subject to change



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COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

“Checked Past,” by Randy Ford, oil on hybrid panel, 36 inches by 48 inches.