

The Life and Transient Nature of Art – by Maddie Hana Fontaine

Art is a living being, just as you or I. Art evolves in the same sense that humans evolve. A blank slate represents potential, and the mind is art's womb. The first cracking open of new paint is the birth, and the initial drop of color is art's first breath. As the painter manipulates the lines, shadows, colors, and depth, art is growing. It is experiencing its first steps and first words while the form is coming into focus. Its first day of school comes and goes, and before long, it has reached its adolescence. This stage is the period in which art is its most vulnerable and most fluid. New ideas may strike the page, and old ones may be erased. Art is now becoming a more solidified form. When young adult-hood strikes, details are added, and soon, depth, as art matures and takes its first steps out into the real world. Critiques are on the rise, as art dapples in grownup job interviews. Unexpected changes may be made, and finally, the job is earned, maybe even a family. During this stage, the art may stand still for a while, it may even think of itself as complete; a finished product. But then, a new job is on the horizon, maybe even a raise, and art earns an elegant frame. It may even be presented in a local showing or just viewed by family and friends. Art is beginning to grow wiser and earn itself a personal story to be told to the newer generations, as it moves up in the work force, but things eventually begin to slow down. As art continues to mature, some chips in the paint may form, but one stroke of a brush can fix it right back up. However, eventually, art's time in the limelight comes to a close, as its spirit leaves this world. Fortunately, its legacy will live on, as newer generations discover old photo albums and marvel in its personal history.

I have explored the idea of art being a life form in my first session of my class I am teaching at Eagle Heights. I started with an original plan in mind for how the art would evolve, but the kids were really the true sculptors: they gave me ideas for the project that I hadn't

thought of, such as including a certain line pattern to make the tree more closely resemble that of a banana tree. The one particular girl with the idea knew this detail about banana trees since she had grown up around them, and I on the other hand, had not had such intimate experiences with them as her. After the project was finished, we wanted the tree to continue to grow as the people of Eagle Heights translated their own ideas and experiences onto our own.

To symbolize the tree's life even further, I decided to use oil paint. Colette Lousberg, an inspirational artist who specializes in oil paint, was the one who originally told me of the livelihood of oil paint. It is unique in that it is easy to blend and mold into something new. The interesting part is that the original design remains somehow underneath, but is now visible in an evolved form. As the oil takes a while to dry, it allows the artist to evaluate and critique his or her piece. I wanted to know more about the life within the paint, so I inquired Colette. "The oil dries by the absorption of oxygen: It takes several years for the oil painting to be dry at heart. Some paintings by Nicolas de Stael are not yet dry heart: he died in 1955." Underneath the outer shell of the oil paintings lies the preserved liquid heart of the piece of art. This part will eventually dry up as the painting matures, but I was astounded to discover a painting to still contain this fluid heart after nearly 60 years.

The vivacity of the oil paint reminds me of that of murals. Murals are a group effort with countless evolving ideas. They say it takes a village to raise a child, but this saying holds true for murals too. Each and every voice has a huge impact on the final unified product. As the mural grows, it livens up the space in which it occupies. It provokes much thought in both admiring and non-enthused gazes. The non-enthused gazes are those that the mural fears, as they can mark certain death of such a work of art. However, even in passing, the mural's legacy continues to inspire and evolve into new inspirational ideas. The temporary nature of murals reflects the

impermanence of human life. We must take murals into our own in order to not fear our imminent end, which is not really an end. The human spirit, as the spirit of any work of art, can carry on through multiple lifetimes, evolving and changing the lives of others in its wake. Taking this into consideration, how can we as humans deal with the impermanent nature of life? More specifically, how can artists expel such incredible amounts of time, effort, and resources into something that may be destroyed?

Buddhist monks are known for their beautiful sand mandalas. The monks spend a whole week straight tediously working to create this masterful piece of art. When it is finished, they have a ceremony in which they toss the mandala into the river to send good energy out into the world. How can someone expend so much energy into a beautiful piece just to have it ruined as soon as it is created? Colette believes that it is not the time spent on the final product, or even the final product itself, but the message it is conveying. “Sometimes, art is just trying to make people aware of the speed at which life is running, like sand between the fingers or water from the river” (Colette Lousberg). Sometimes, impermanence is just an aspect of a work of art.

A further question must be asked: How does an artist not get attached to his or her own work? When a piece is complete, the artist normally shows great pride, just as a mother would for her new born child. As attachments form, even the mother must understand that her work of art does not belong to her, but “becomes the property of the world” (Colette Lousberg). The purpose is not in the physical matter, but in the emotional and the spiritual. When we view a piece of art that is very striking in a gallery, we do not rip it off the wall and claim it as our so as to keep whatever impact it had on us; the impact is already ingrained deep within our souls. We do not always need a physical reminder of it. Therefore, an artist can be contended with the

emotions felt during the creation of the piece, the art itself by the impact and beauty it served its viewer, and human life by its memories.

Coming back to the tree, I am aware that it may only stay on the wall for a few months or maybe a year. Some kid may claim it as his or her own or decide it would be funny to vandalize it. Maybe there will be a need for a new poster to go in its place to announce an upcoming event or showcase a new work of art. The important thing will be the life that the tree has had, from conception to death. The experiences and growth it provided both the kids in my class and I were its initial purpose, and once it has reached adulthood, it's purpose will be to provide the community a unique means of communication and collaboration- a bridge between their individual lives. Once the tree is gone, its aesthetic beauty may not remain, but its impacts on those who shared its short life will remain and live on.