

Maybe it is an unfashionable word to use but I think there is a yearning in society and a yearning in ourselves that is the hunger of the soul.

It is so deep and fundamental to us that words alone cannot convey it, but it is completely pivotal to us. Perhaps because it is unquantifiable, immeasurable, unspeakable we seem hell bent on denying its existence with all our rational, economic rational, scientific and acquisitive might, I almost feel, among artists of all people, that it is an embarrassing word.

I believe that we all have the hunger, because although we are intelligent people we chose a path that is notoriously financially 'risky' to put it mildly. Our hunger was so great that the need to satisfy it was greater than desire for security, comfort or anything else. Some have even forgone core emotional needs such as the maintenance of relationships or having children. Why do we do this? How else but through something unscientific, something immeasurable, can we express the sheer huge magnificence of the experience of life. We have been given hands, eyes and minds with which to truly express ourselves, and we truly feel alive when we do so. Next we have spent our education and our careers searching for the voice through which we can express ALL that we have to say. Even though our voices are many and different, I feel at the core we all draw from the same yearning.

I don't know if this is true for others but I spend my time constantly struggling in my ability to convey this and constantly daily being reminded of my own ineptitude. This is not false modesty but the truth, with all the sheer marvellousness of all the world's great art, past and present.

But the rewards in seeing something that we dream of coming into being, are such richness to us, and we are so very privileged to live a life in which we can do that. It may sound silly but when I look at my work, however much I didn't arrive where I wanted to go – I feel there is a point to my being around. Precious little space is now made for this in the rest of the world – once even to make a nail was someone's own product – a satisfaction, a personal contribution to the scheme of things.

This lack of ability to leave one's mark, a natural desire in all of us, but especially in the young, really worries me. Raising a son, I've been reading books like Steve Bidduif's "Raising Boys" and "Manhood" where he refers to the fact that we have the highest youth suicide rate in the world, and draws a correlation between it, and Australia's complete lack of major cultural role models outside of sport.

In his Flinders University talk last year, Michael Leunig said something like – We think of our eyes being the windows to the soul, but we forget that our eyes are the windows our soul look out of – What do our young see? When I was young and even more naïve, I failed art school. I had a crisis of whether I should continue or not. I was in the middle of so much confusion when I overheard two women at the market, endlessly debating which cheese to buy, from this shop or that shop. I suddenly panicked and thought I can't live my life out like this – there has to be more to life than choices between cheese. What I felt was an overwhelming numbness, a deadness from them which was probably in hindsight, much more about me and my needs than anything in them.

Life is so joyous, but it is also so hard for us all at one time or another, and it is easy to lose touch with it's beauty, to let that "aliveness" that we brought to it as children just become a remote memory, yet it is latent within us and we always yearn for it. And then we see a work of art. Deep calls to deep.

It is no accident therefore that exhibitions such as Hossein's have been hugely popular and with people from all walls of life. His voice and symbols are accessible to us all. It is like being thirsty and finding water. Both its potential weakness and the potential enormous power of visual art is in the

fact that unlike music or film its wholeness doesn't take place or evolve over time. I think that because of this it can take you by surprise – it can sneak in the back door of your brain, it almost knocks or shocks you – because you realise all of its immense completeness all in the one instant. The depth of it calls to the depth of you just like that.

I haven't meant to single Hossein out. There are many other great Australian artists that have remained working in Adelaide – while their practice takes them interstate and overseas.

While there is the lure of bigger markets elsewhere, South Australia is richly fertile soil. When overseas in Paris I tried to come up with ideas for work. I came up with quite a few. But when I got home I saw them as trite and facile. Europe was like a great big noisy party and any noise I might make wouldn't make any impression on the din. But back in Adelaide it was like a quiet room. Even a whisper makes an impact.

South Australia has originated many great initiatives. Being small, we tend to collaborate on things and work collectively to get things started. Group studios began in South Australia with SAW, and established an Australia wide trend. The Experimental Art Foundation began out of collective need, setting a precedent also.

The CAC has continued here since the 1940's. We all should be proud of these achievements. Single artists have set up places for tuition, public studio exhibition spaces with nothing but sheer determination. My husband Rod Taylor set up Adelaide Central School of Art, a place I work in and love. It began and survived on so little but the efforts of everyone concerned. I can remember us all painting classroom walls made out of pigeonpood bits of scrounged masonite.

The Helpmann Academy is another South Australian initiative where the amazing fact is the 3 art schools actually collaborate together. Apparently this is unheard of elsewhere.

Paul Greenaway has launched both his widely respected gallery and instigated this wonderful acknowledgement of us all in SALA Week – which I understand is now beginning to be emulated in other states.

The Adelaide Festival of Arts, The Jam Factory, other firsts – this wonderful gallery – showing retrospectives of very much living local artists like Sarah Thomas' curating of "Chemistry" a slice of artistic life of the previous decade all help to give us a feeling of significance. I think this is what we all in society crave, that feeling of significance. We have great potential in our way of life to offer here. Instigations like the Arts precinct, seeing the rehabilitation of the East End, brought on by cheap rents and consequent artistic activity are an inspired way of helping to realise the city's potential. But even more importantly, I think we have to build an awareness in our education systems of the culture in our society – I was surprised to hear from a well respected colleague that his first exposure to the state gallery was as an adult doing an assignment at art school when he suddenly discovered this magical place.

We are in an enviable position here, given all our collective efforts, to prove that something big doesn't necessarily mean better and to build something "other" into the fabric of our world – where that "other" can make a difference: For it is through our art that we can best share that "other" – the secret, sacred "aliveness" of what it means to be human.

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