

# Art, Education, and the Bomb: Reflections on an International Children's Peace Mural Project

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Tom Anderson

On August 6, 1945, at 8:15 a.m., a United States bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, that instantly incinerated at least 70,000 people. Another 100,000 perished due to atomic poisoning by the end of 1945 (Weale, 1995). On August 9, 1945 another bomb, dropped on Nagasaki, killed an additional 40,000 people. Shortly thereafter, on August 14, Japan surrendered and World War II ended. Dropping the bomb was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. The *New York Times* declared that one "cannot understand the twentieth century without Hiroshima" (Kristof, 1995, A-1).

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and the end of World War II, Abe Toshifumi of Osaka Women's College sought my assistance to develop an international children's peace mural exchange. Professor Abe's idea was to "build a bridge of peace" between the United States and Japan through this project. Initially I thought that this was a wonderful idea. My second thought, however,

was a question. How does art begin to address what has been called the defining moment and event of the twentieth century?

As a community muralist (T. Anderson, 1985) and contextualist I believe that the purpose of art is communication from one human being to another about things that count (R. Anderson, 1990; Dissanayake, 1988; Lippard, 1990). This does not mean that we disregard the aesthetic component—the “wonder”—in an artwork. Rather, it implies that the aesthetic serves an extrinsic function beyond its supposed *raison d'être*. That function, which is usually both prosaic and symbolic, is to serve as a marker that in some way defines the people who make, use, and view artworks or aesthetically framed objects (R. Anderson, 1990). Art is something people do to give them a sense of themselves, both as a result of the product and the process. Thus, we may use artworks as vehicles for understanding human nature through their displayed visual qualities, the forming process, and their social context (T. Anderson, 1995).

This paper follows from that premise. I will consider the reasons for the peace mural project, the processes involved, and the murals' compositions and stylistic qualities as manifestations and means of initial ingress toward understanding the cultures and people from which they arise. My belief is that peace rests on intercultural understanding and one way to approach such understanding is through art.

### **The Bomb: An Absence of Presence**

It may be appropriate in the postmodern age to begin this account by describing how the purpose for the mural was visually absent from the mural, and how the bomb's absence was a source of the project's power. There were no depictions of the bomb in either the North American or Japanese children's murals. This was framed consciously by both adult mural team facilitators, to accentuate the positive. While the atomic bomb was not depicted that does not mean that it is not there. It has the weight and mass of a black hole not only for this project, but for life on Earth. And like a black hole, the gravity of the bomb affects the way all things look and act within its sphere. It is the bomb that can destroy life, thus in some sense defines life on this planet. We live in the nuclear age, the age of the bomb, and it is the bomb itself that gives this project its guts.

The bomb has had an effect not only on those against whom it was used but on everyone, everywhere. For example, at that developmental point in life when kids fear ghosts and monsters, I and many of my friends feared the bomb. We did not like to talk about it. It was too overwhelming. It was a faceless anonymous threat before which we were powerless. Like one of those bad dreams where you sink into quicksand or can not run fast enough to get away, the omnipresent power of the bomb seemed inevitable.

With increased temporal distance from Hiroshima and the lessening of East-West tensions in recent years, it is my perception that perhaps children have gone back to worrying more about monsters than the bomb. The problem, however, with forgetting the bomb in favor of the monsters is that many of these monsters are not real. The bomb is. And though (or maybe because) it has sunk to lower levels of consciousness, it is still dangerous.

### **The Peace Mural Exchange Process**

Professor Abe, in partnership with Yasuda Tadashi of *Art Japan*, an arts and culture network, initiated the project and asked me to collaborate on the Project Statement. Our three member team stated its hopes that through remembering the horrific results of the atomic bomb, such devastating warfare could be avoided. We facilitated an intercultural exchange of peace murals by children from both Japan and the United States. Each mural was executed on canvas the size of *Guernica* (about 25 feet by 12 feet). Two teams of adult facilitators asked children in Japan and the United States to envision how they could promote peace as citizens of their country and the world, in a locally and culturally specific manner. Children, in the mural workshops, explored the concept of peace, not only in abstract universal terms, but also in concrete and specific terms.

This paper concerns the mural exchange between the United States and Japan in which children in Tallahassee, Florida created the first mural.<sup>1</sup> Their mural was sent to Tokushima, Japan so that a group of Japanese children could respond to it through the creation of their own mural. My analysis is derived from the process of this exchange and from viewing the completed murals displayed together in both Japan and the United States.

As articulated in the Project Statement, we recognize that the children and sponsors of this project have distinctly different cultural backgrounds, yet also shared certain universal human drives and concerns. One such desire that we expressed was to live safely in peace, free from war or the threat of war. We also believe that since art is an instrument of culture, the children of different countries participating in this project would express these universal concerns differently, each according to their local cultural norms. Finally, we believe that the power and potential of the project would come from our unity of purpose and diversity of approach. By examining the multiple paths taken to reach common goals, it is our hope that understanding, tolerance, and respect for one another would grow. As expressed in the Project Statement, we hope that the mural exchange would be a path to world peace.

We decided that cooperative community mural making was a natural vehicle for this project since community murals are instrumentalist in nature, and focus on social or community-related issues (T. Anderson, 1985). We felt that an emphasis on group identity and cooperative problem solving was particularly significant for the peace mural exchange. This aspect, in fact, became a key factor in my own examination of some similarities and differences between Japanese and United States society.

### **The Tallahassee Peace Mural**

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<sup>1</sup>As the project evolved it became apparent to all of us that peace in the world is not simply a United States-Japan issue. Consequently, Professor Abe and *Arts Japan* brought France, Korea, Papua New Guinea, India, and Nepal into the project and I recruited teams in Kuwait, Canada, Australia, and other parts of the United States to participate. We continue to recruit sites as of this writing. The first mural, executed in Tallahassee, Florida, in July, 1995, was exhibited at Space Gallery in Tallahassee and then was sent to Japan as a stimulus for the workshop there. Then both murals were displayed at the Tokushima Museum of Modern Art before being sent on to Korea where adult leaders used them as stimulation for a third children's workshop. All three murals were displayed in Korea, then sent on to Nepal, and so on. The final destination for the murals will be at the Hiroshima Museum of Modern Art as part of a children's international peace festival in 1998. If readers would like to get involved, I invite you to view the *Art Japan* web site for information and images at <http://www.express.co.jp>, and then to e-mail Tadashi Yasuda at [yasuda@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp](mailto:yasuda@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp)

To execute the Tallahassee mural, I recruited an adult mural team consisting of artistic director Linda Hall, an established community-oriented muralist, and four undergraduate Florida State University art education majors. The children's team consisted primarily of fifteen mural painting veterans recruited from the *Fourth Avenue Cultural Enrichment* (FACE) program directed by Jill Harper. These children, between the ages of nine and fifteen, had created several inner city murals already. Completing the core team were five children representing socio-economically privileged lifestyles. With the cooperation of Director Gay Drennon, we were also able to gain participation from the week-long *Very Special Arts Florida Festival* at the *621 Gallery*, where the participants painted the mural. Thus, about 75 to 100 *Very Special Arts* participants also contributed to the mural. In this sense, the Tallahassee workshop was consciously inclusive, community-based, locally specific in its design, and directed to socially instrumental purposes. We wanted to provide empowerment and validation to as many types of children as possible through this project. To borrow an over-used cliché, it was our philosophy to "think globally and act locally."

We began the workshop with a presentation to the core mural team about World War II and particularly about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Beyond the obvious point of wanting the children to know what we were doing and why it was important, we also wanted them to know who else was participating, to whom they were sending the mural, and for what reasons. Toward that end, Maruyama Yasushi, a native of Hiroshima, told the children about the effects of the atomic bomb and about Hiroshima then and now. Ide Kumiko, a native of Tokyo, described to the children about what life is like for a child in Japan, and particularly what the children to whom we would send the mural are like. We discussed war and peace and their causes, what Japanese children like to do, and how they spend their time. To illustrate a popular Japanese belief and activity, Kumiko led an impromptu lesson on how to fold an origami crane.

At that point, through cooperative interaction between the children and adult mural team members, the theme of the Tallahassee mural began to crystallize. We decided that we could only achieve peace when we understand one another. What could we do to help the children of Japan understand who we are and what we like to do? We decided we could symbolically send gifts to the children in Japan that would help them understand what we value. To portray who we are, we decided

to paint self portraits holding the things that we care about most. These would be our gifts of peace. *A Gift of Peace* became our theme and title. In another discussion we generated a list of possible gifts that described our character, particularly through objects and activities that the children valued. Further discussion centered on how we would send these gifts to Japan. One adult team member suggested that the children could fly, like in the book, *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). Many of the children knew this story and agreed enthusiastically. Children then rendered themselves on paper, taking off and flying, carrying gifts which included, among other things, peace signs, fried chicken and French fries, a chocolate milk shake, skateboards, a rap C.D., kittens, U.S. flags, sports equipment, Nike tennis shoes, and a *Sweet Valley Twins* novel.

We painted the mural over the course of about a week, during which time children with special needs visited the *621 Gallery* workspace and engaged in mural making and in other activities. Inspired again by Faith Ringgold, the adult mural team decided to use her quilting device as a compositional structure to give everyone equal access to expressing themselves in the mural, and to create a product of high aesthetic quality. The solution was to give each special arts student a square of his or her own which together formed the border around the main composition. Many of these exceptional needs children executed symbolic gifts to send to Japan including peace signs, a steel drum [sic] C.D., kittens, the U.S. flag, a lizard, and flowers.

The Tallahassee mural process, then, was one in which an adult mural team provided the broad theme of peace, the media, some of the conceptual foundations, and some of the compositional structure. Children, in cooperation with the adults, developed the specific theme and title, *A Gift of Peace*, and the specific content and imagery that fit the theme.

The opening exhibition at the *Space Gallery* was accompanied by West African drumming and dancing, celebrating the *FACE* team's African-American roots. The Tallahassee mural workshop was a process that celebrated the multiple identities, abilities, and cultures of America, and the empowerment of each in the pursuit of the universal theme of world peace.

Professor Abe came from Japan to videotape the Tallahassee workshop for his research. In addition, *Art Japan* hired a professional

video crew from Florida-based *Seminole Productions* to provide raw footage for a future documentary on the project. I slowly became aware, as I will discuss later, that this desire for documentation was a higher priority for the Japanese than for the Tallahassee group.

### **The Tokushima Peace Mural**

At the invitation of *Art Japan*, I took the Tallahassee children's mural to Japan, where I joined and observed the Japanese children's peace mural workshop. The workshop was held at the *Tokushima Museum of Modern Art*. I found the facilities and resources mustered for this project impressive. The working spaces in Florida, a classroom at *Florida State University* and the non-air conditioned space at the *621 Gallery* in Tallahassee's *Railroad Square Art District*, paled in comparison to workshop and display space in the gleaming, almost new, *Tokushima Museum of Modern Art*. Support for the Japanese Children's Peace Mural Project was remarkable. The *Tokushima Museum of Modern Art* provided an air conditioned, 40 foot by 80 foot workspace, three museum staff members, a full-time curator, and two assistants. The entire floor in the *Tokushima Museum* workshop space was covered with blue plastic tarp. The museum supplied a canvas that was cut and professionally sewn to the right dimensions at a factory, and provided state-of-the-art brushes and supplies. *Sakura Corporation* supplied paint for the entire project. This was in sharp contrast to the Tallahassee experience, which many art educators in the United States will recognize as typical (i.e., scrambling for everything and working on a shoestring). The resources directed to this project in Japan, and to Japanese arts and culture in general, I perceived as phenomenal.

The process of the *Tokushima* workshop differed from the Tallahassee workshop in interesting ways. For example, the adult mural team members spent considerably more time consulting and achieving consensus than the Tallahassee team. In Tallahassee, Linda Hall and I met a couple of times before the children's workshop to talk about format, theme, and strategy. We discussed the mural a couple more times on the phone. We assigned the rest of the adult mural team, consisting of the Japanese presenters and four art education students, their tasks. Working from a bare-bones conceptual foundation, we made many of our decisions about content, form, and strategy spontaneously and "on the fly" during the course of the week-long workshop. That choices were made in a spontaneous, open-ended manner meant that the final form and content of the Tallahassee mural was not known

until the mural was completed.

The Tallahassee process was open-ended in terms of participants' roles. Certain members of the adult mural team were more interested and involved than others and took on more central roles. Likewise, children became more central or more peripheral depending on their level of interest. This fluid definition of who would do what and how much affected the outcome. For example, the borders that we had reserved for the use of *Very Special Arts* students were partially painted by core mural team members who wanted to do more, and the main composition was partially painted by special students who had the skills and the desire. This open ended and divergent process at times resulted in a rather chaotic process, but we believed that it also gave everyone more opportunity to contribute and to take ownership of the mural. Probably the mural workshop process would not qualify as Banks' (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1989) fourth stage or Sleeter and Grant's (1987) fifth stage, in which the students construct the issues. But certainly Banks' third stage and Sleeter and Grant's fourth were utilized in that students were led through a pre-existing problem to recognize and respond to intercultural issues such as identity, prejudice, and empowerment (Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1997).

In Tokushima, the process seemed formalized and deliberate. Both adults' and children's roles were more narrowly defined than in Tallahassee. Everyone knew their roles in the project at the onset. These roles remained constant. The process of consultation was almost ritualistic. The adult mural team met frequently, and at some length, every day before the children came and after they left. All adult team members had the opportunity to contribute and to inform the consensual decisions that the group made on all significant aspects of the project prior to action. The children were also integrated into the consensus building and decision making process in a much more formalized manner than in the U.S. workshop. Unlike the workshop in Tallahassee, there were formal sessions that began and ended each studio experience in which the children expressed their opinions about what the content of the mural should be and how that content should be expressed. In short there was an attempt to gain consensus from the workers at each stage of the process. Over time, I understood how important these meetings and full attendance was to the practice of consensus in Japanese society (Davidson, 1993; Nakane, 1970).



The Japanese children's mural proceeded in an orderly fashion. With the help of translators, I observed that the major structural components as well as the processes were formulated in advance. Every step was planned through group consensus. Individual spontaneous decision making in the heat of the process was neither a desirable nor an accommodated behavior. The mural team did not welcome surprises in form or process. Innovation during the mural making process required group consensus. The Tokushima team was more aware than the Tallahassee team of how one change affects the whole. These impressions were later verified by research on Japanese culture (Crump, 1989; DeMente, 1993; Kerr, 1996; Nakane, 1970).

The Japanese children worked more cooperatively than the United States children. They worked in groups while the children in the United States worked either singly or in pairs. Other studies support my observation of cooperation and obligation as highly valued among Japanese people (deMente, 1993; Nakane, 1970). For example the United States sense of individual ownership was expressed by one Tallahassee child when she said to another child about her self portrait, "This is my picture, don't touch it." My limited Japanese language skills prevented full confirmation, but I did not detect this attitude expressed by the Japanese children. Their postures, interactions, and words (translated by my interpreters) suggested that the children were familiar with cooperative group work. Although individual Japanese children did initiate images and ideas in the planning sessions, it was the norm during the actual painting process for children to work on components of the mural together. The only time Tallahassee children worked on the same section was while painting the background, a task that the children acted as if it was a bothersome necessity to be dispensed with before they got to the "real stuff"—their own individual expressions of self.

Another marked difference between the Tallahassee and Tokushima mural projects was media coverage, which was more important to the Japanese team. While my impressions may be skewed by the fact that *Art Japan* was the primary sponsor of the project, my perception was that in the Japanese project the media coverage was as important or possibly more important than the event itself: almost as if there were no point in doing it if it were not broadcasted on television. Several times, for example, I, as well as others, had to move or stop engaging in what we were doing on the project because the video crews felt we

interfered with the media coverage. An elaborate ten foot high video stand was installed for aerial shots of the children working. *Art Japan* spent many thousands of dollars on videotaping the mural making events in Tallahassee and in Tokushima. At times it seemed to me that documentation was a primary purpose of the project for *Art Japan*.

There also was a different attitude toward and by the commercial media in Tokushima than in Tallahassee. I experienced a sincerity and earnestness in the Japanese media that was unlike the more manipulative United States commercial sound bite-and-visual-overload strategies of minimal substantive content. In Tallahassee, the team viewed the arrival of the local news crew as an annoyance, a necessary evil, and a slow-down of the work at hand. The news team seemed to be looking for a quote with "punch" and a sympathetic image of a *Very Special Arts* child rather than trying to convey the purpose of the project. Their 15 minutes on the scene resulted in a 30 second segment on the eleven o'clock news. I watched it but did not videotape it, and was surprised that this disappointed Mr. Abe. In Tokushima, three network teams were there for the entire workshop over a period of a week, and there was extended coverage in primetime. There were so many cameras and media people that I was surprised that they could videotape the event without filming each other. Every nuance was filmed and refilmed from numerous angles. The crew interviewed everyone involved in the project. In fact, it turned out that one of my primary responsibilities in Japan was to be interviewed! *Arts Japan* orchestrated it all. The commercial media had to ask permission to film. I sensed the power that *Art Japan* held not only over the other media but over the project itself. The media coverage was, in a sense, constructing reality not only in the ephemeral world of electronically produced light and sound, but in the real temporal and spatial world of people and canvas. Perhaps for the Japanese, the video documentation helped to prove that the experience existed. (But then maybe this paper and the presentations I have given on the peace mural project serve a similar function in North American culture?)

### **An Analysis of the Murals in Their Cultural Contexts**

With the exception of the continent of North America and the islands of Japan, the largest and most dominant elements in the Tallahassee mural are the individual children's portraits. These portraits,

flying with gifts, serve as the compositional focus of the mural. Many portraits are life-size, and through their very size, dominate the area around them. Overall, the mural gives a sense of being one composition, tied together by the horizon line, contracurved banner, figures flying all one direction from right to left almost as though in formation, and by the quilt-like frame of squares. (See Figure 1.)

The Japanese mural consists of five dominant compositional elements: a half globe, a giant rainbow repeating the Earth's curve, a partially visible red sun in the top left corner, an immense tree with its roots extending down into the ocean, a hot air balloon with an Asian and a Caucasian child in it, and a large yellow banner with a message of peace in Kanji script. There is no empty space in this mural. Every inch is packed with imagery. The mural has multiple foci, compositionally created by repeating curved structural components that center the eye alternately in different areas of the composition, none of which dominate the others long enough to hold the eye indefinitely. There is not one line of movement or one primary area of focus that stands out above the rest. The detailed content of the mural reinforces this, providing the eye with many choices. The overall sense is one of density in which no individual image dominates. The multiple images seamlessly mesh into one unified decorative design. (See Figure 2.)

The most obvious difference reflected in the processes, imagery, and compositions of the two murals is a Japanese collectivist versus United States individualist sensibility (DeMente, 1993; Hendry, 1986; Nakane, 1972; Tames, 1993). John Dewey described an American sense of society when he said, "society is an organic union of individuals . . . [and] the individual to be educated is a social individual" (McDermott, 1973, p. 445). Embedded in this belief is the Cartesian, Humanist notion that the rational individual is the center of social authority (Bowers, 1987); is free to make choices in the personal and social spheres according to his or her own inner, felt, rational decisions; and should remain uncompromised by external social restrictions. It is within this philosophical context of Liberal Humanism that Dewey states, "the child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education" (McDermott, 1973, p. 444). The welfare of the group is best served, according to Dewey, not by the application of external social convention on the developing individual, but by the application of that individual's freely developing powers to the problems of society. Although Dewey recognized that we are social animals, he believed, and American society and its educational institutions have largely

integrated his beliefs, that education should begin with the individual, rather than through “forced and external process” that subordinates the “freedom of the individual to a preconceived social and political status”(McDermott, p. 444). Variations on this theme are echoed in both the conservative and liberal camps in North American art education. For example, in his introduction to the *Educational Imagination*, Elliot Eisner (1995) questions whether the one-size-fits-all sensibility of the *America 2000 Goals* is appropriate for a nation as diverse as the United States. Likewise, Peter London in *No More Second Hand Art* (1989) extols the virtue of centering instruction in individual student sensibilities.

The Tallahassee children’s mural and the process of creation reflect an individualist reality. In the Tallahassee mural, each representation was chosen and executed by an individual and represented that person’s content choices, stylistic sensibility, and level of skill or talent. Likewise, the theme itself was individualistic. It may appear egotistical from a non-North American point of view to present personal, favorite items to help others understand who we are as individuals. Visually, the individual portraits which dominate the mural are separate and distinct, and stand starkly against an otherwise almost empty background. Yet collectively, in their individuality, they define a group sensibility. Individual expression is highlighted while still adhering and contributing to the collective theme and composition. Overall, then, the U.S. mural had the spirit of a collection of individuals cooperating within a loosely agreed upon structure.

This sense of individualistic treatment is enhanced by the varying levels of talent and differing developmental stages evident. Some sections, particularly some of the border squares, may seem inadequate under classic “school art” criteria (Efland, 1976). The Tallahassee adults welcomed the children’s individual expressions, whatever their content or talent level. We assumed, possibly naively, that each child was doing his or her best, and, thus the image represented the child’s participation and empowerment as an individual. Unless it was severely detrimental to the mural’s final form and purpose, all images were allowed and individuals were free to express what they willed. The resulting unevenness, rather than a detriment, was seen as an authentic representation of the process and a validation of children’s art accounting for multiple developmental and talent levels. The adult mural team saw it as less directive and restrictive in nature, and as representing a democratic process in which each child participated.



Figure 1. The Tallahassee Mural, *Kids' Guernica*, 25' x 12', July 1995, The Florida State University, USA. Reproduced with permission by Art Japan Network.





Figure 2. The Tokushima Mural, *Kids' Guernica*, 25' x 12', August 1995, The Tokushima Modern Art Museum, Japan. Reproduced with permission by Art Japan Network.





Helping children recognize a global concept of peace was our achieved goal. However, individual and local outcome were also valued. The most highly valued local outcome was that children from the inner city, from privileged suburban lives, and those with special needs were united in purpose by the act of creating an international peace mural. They learned to work as a team, and with the adults, and to experience individually the cooperation, difference, and compromise that is so critical to individual relations as well as peace between nations. Artistically, the children learned to make design and color choices and to alter those choices. The most difficult lesson for many of the children was the occasional sublimation of their own individual creative and compositional drives and choices. The Tallahassee mural process primarily exhibited individualism. It should be noted that this concept of rugged individualism held dear by U.S. citizens and personified in the Tallahassee mural holds only to a point, beyond which it becomes a caricature or stereotype and breaks down. Certainly cooperation is necessary in all societies.

On the issue of stereotype, my first uneducated impression on viewing the completed Japanese mural was that it was also stereotypical, but in a different way. It seemed conventional in its images of balloons and flowers and wide-eyed, "Keene-like" children swinging from rainbows and holding hands, too cute for my taste, and too evenly controlled to be interesting. At that point I was seeing Japanese imagery through unsensitized North American eyes. Further reflection, however, has led me to modify my assessment. From the Japanese perspective, convention is a highly desirable quality, the result of doing something correctly and according to form (deMente, 1993; Mura, 1991; Nakane, 1970). An analysis of form and the process of forming illustrates some of these differences between educational norms rising from the cultures of Tokushima and Tallahassee.

### **Education and Culture in the United States and Japan**

Japanese and United States citizens hold almost opposite views of the relationship of the individual and society (deMente, 1993; Hendry, 1986; Nakane, 1970). As in most traditional or indigenous societies, the ultimate source of social authority for the Japanese lies not with the individual, but with the group (Bowers, 1987). In spite of a feudal history that ended only 50 years ago, Japanese culture is highly articulated in social roles, hierarchy, specialization, and is complex by world standards

(DeMente, 1993). On the other hand, due to their geographical isolation and separatist proclivities, they are the largest homogenous culture on Earth. In this sense they are a tribal international power. Japan is one of the most interesting anomalies in the world: a complex, modern, world class society permeated by the conservative, authority-oriented, and tradition-driven values and mores of indigenous societies.

### **Shikata and Shitsuke: Two Japanese Perspectives**

A useful perspective to understand the Japanese mural process is represented in the *shikata*, one of the most important concepts in Japanese culture. *Shikata*, or *kata* for short, literally means “way of doing things” (DeMente, 1993). It refers to the proper form and order of doing things with an emphasis on people serving and supporting one another, particularly as determined by hierarchical social structures that have been in place since feudal times. As novelist Abe (1964/91) stated, “Obligation is a man’s passport among his fellow men” (p. 127). I suggested to a Japanese graduate student that this collective obligation might be the source of the collective wealth I observed in the *Tokushima Art Museum*. Agreeing enthusiastically, she suggested that it was also a factor in less individual wealth among Japanese people than among United States citizens.

According to some cross-cultural scholars, the Japanese do not have a philosophy in the Western idealist sense (Bouvier, 1992; DeMente, 1993). However, *shikata* might be the Japanese version of epistemology. The inner order (the individual heart) and the natural outer order of the cosmos are connected in Japanese metaphysics through appropriate “form” or actions on the part of the individual. This form, the *kata*, then, is the means through which individuals connect to society. According to DeMente (1993), the challenge for each individual is to know one’s true heart, or *honshin*, and to act in accordance with it through following the *kata*. Over the centuries doing things the right way, utilizing the various *kata* as guides, has been sanctified, ritualized, and equated with morality. Not following the *kata* is a moral offense against society. Form thus becomes ethics, and policy (i.e, a way of doing things) becomes principle (DeMente, 1993).

Education in Japan, then, centers on the primacy of the group, not the individual. The Japanese word for child rearing and early training

is *shitsuke*, which refers to the passing of customs and correct behaviors (Hendry, 1986). Interestingly, also embedded within the Kanji character designating this concept is the idea of the human body and of beauty, the aesthetic component implying that one's correct action or form is beauty. This attention to aesthetically framed form as philosophy is the quality that makes some observers think of the Japanese as the most aesthetic people in the world (DeMente, 1993). This beautifying of both the body and the heart through correct action also signifies the valuing of mutual dependence (i.e., *amae*) in Japanese society and education, as opposed to the Western emphasis on independence. In Japan, the most highly prized qualities for students to attain are compliancy and harmonious behavior. Overall, *shitsuke* embraces the belief that the societal expectations shape the child. The individual is to serve and be subservient to the group. Thus the goal of education in Japan is to raise children to be ordinary or average, and similar to other people. The Japanese have an adage that illustrates this: "A sticking up nail should be knocked in and a bent one straightened" (Hendry, 1986; Tames, 1993).

This same tendency is in Japanese art. Mura (1991), in critically analyzing Japanese Noh theater, observed that one element does not stand out above the others. Mura generalized that "Japanese culture eschews a center of focus. The Japanese mode of perception is more amorphous, more intuitive than that of the Westerners, fluid, not fixed" (p. 209). This avoidance of a center of attention in the arts and in educational practices reflect a cultural tendency in Japan to be a part of the group and to not stand out above the others.

Finally, an emphasis on form may be seen by many North Americans as Japanese aestheticism, what Mura (1993) describes as "an aesthetics of surface, of outside appearance" (p. 20). According to Mura, the Japanese "place far more value on surface beauty and appearance, than the depth seeking and morally conscious Americans" (p. 35). This emphasis on form, however, does not imply a lack of rigor or depth, only a different focus. It is not a shallow and superficial concern with form as might be interpreted from a Western perspective but a deep and abiding sense of form as substance (DeMente, 1993). In addition, the traditional concern with form required that each vocation or skill was reduced to basic elements that were classified or labeled in relation to their role in making up the whole. Learning, then, consisted of incorporating the mastering of basic components in a codified order and manner. In this

*kata* the goal is not minimal functionalism, but absolute perfection.

Mason's (1994) analysis of art education in Japan confirms that many of these qualities are integrated into the curriculum. Standardization is institutionalized through The Ministry of Education's national curriculum for all grades. According to Mason the curriculum stresses composition in painting and the understanding of formal elements, as well as observation and the proper use of tools. She also confirmed that the exacting nature of studio process and level of expected technical competency are at the heart of the art curriculum. Self expression is a secondary concern that is only acceptable in the proper form and at the proper level of skill. Japanese educators do not accept free expression that is not technically of high standards. Texts describe the "right" way to do things. Knowledge and skills are formally presented toward the group rather than individually oriented. Teachers expect that tasks will be performed correctly rather than creatively.

Seen in this context, the Japanese children's mural is an excellent paradigm reflecting the values of its genesis. In terms of its general structure and composition there is greater uniformity in the Japanese mural, the whole appears more homogenous, and of a more collective mind than the American mural. The theme and treatment of the theme are collectively rather than individually oriented. The imagery and composition conform to the *shikata*. There are no sloppy passages. There is a uniformly high level of skill in composition and rendering. There are multiple, mutually reinforcing centers of interest, none of which dominate the others, and there is conventional imagery that will not call attention to itself above other elements. This is reinforced by a lack of individual portraiture, each figure being relatively generic, proportionately small, and in a sense stereotypical—meaning that they are conventional and standardized in type, rather than individualistic. Rising from these qualities and from the density of content, one perceives a sense of uniformity—a collective equality. In short, there are no nails to pound down.

From a Japanese perspective, then, the uniformity that I initially considered "cute" was remarkably accomplished children's art in the Japanese context. It represented a uniformly high level of skill and in physical and procedural form it followed correctly from master paradigms. Ironically, one of the paradigms used by the Japanese team was the U.S. mural project. I wondered what they thought of the

pre-schematic scribbles on the borders of the Tallahassee mural. The Japanese copied many qualities from the mural done in Tallahassee, but not that. I suspect now that certain of our practices and compositional features must have left them aghast.

### **Shikata and (Selective) Imitation**

The Japanese are frequently thought of as the world's greatest imitators (deMente, 1993). It only follows that if correct form is of fundamental importance, then the ability to copy would be a highly desirable and refined skill. But as Tames (1993) suggested, we only need to look at the uniqueness and complexity of Japanese culture to recognize the stereotype of the "copycat Japanese" is superficial and artificial. Not that they do not copy. They do. Bouvier (1992) and Tames (1993) report on the Japanese' first encounter with the Dutch in the 1500s, seeing their first gun, and having reproduced it six months later. That in itself is remarkable, but what may be overlooked is what the Japanese did not copy. They took what they thought would be useful, and eschewed the rest. They had no use, for example, for the Christianity that the Dutch were so eager for them to adopt. That the Japanese freely admit to being a borrowing culture tends to overshadow that they assimilate consciously, selectively, and intelligently. It also obscures that they make their own what they borrow. They have modified Chinese characters to present uniquely Japanese concepts and Korean ceramics became the famous Japanese pottery. More recently, they copied German cameras and American automobiles, which the Japanese made into *Nikons* and *Toyotas*, products which were distinctly better than the models from which they were working. Bouvier (1992) described that the Japanese expansion in the Pacific, resulting in World War II, was patterned exactly on what they learned from the colonial practices of the European powers.

In an art museum in Wakayama, I pointed to a work that both Professor Abe and I thought was Italian Futurist. When we learned that it was created by a Japanese artist, I commented on the Japanese talent for copying. Professor Abe agreed, then self deprecatingly said, "Like a monkey." Perhaps neither the Japanese nor many outside observers recognize the Japanese creativity in adapting what is borrowed and improving on it to meet their own needs. It is not like a monkey at all. Their relentless pursuit of excellence in form becomes a source of innovation, not rising from individual creativity as in the West, but as

a result of a collective focus on the perfection of form itself, through *shikata*. Their creativity as McRorie (personal communication, 1996) stated, lies in the refining moment rather than the defining moment.

This quality is readily apparent in the children's peace mural project. The Japanese drive to "correct" (as opposed to innovative) form led Professor Abe to me, a mural expert according to the vita he had seen. In the workshop that he directed, he liberally and unashamedly copied many elements of the form and process, but also left much out—notably the philosophical underpinnings and individualist approach he knew was unsuitable in the Japanese educational context. Making the mural process and product suitably Japanese resulted in technical as well as procedural innovations, and in a smoother, more polished final product. The technical and procedural aspects that had at first seemed superficially "merely" form, I now recognize as deep content that expresses a cosmology and epistemology.

### **Lessons To Be Learned About Peace and People**

What broader implications and/or lessons can be drawn from this toward the project's end goal of peace through understanding? "The Japanese see themselves largely as Westerners see them—polite, loyal, hard-working, conformist and not profoundly inventive" as well as clean, kind, and with a refined aesthetic sense" (Tames, 1993, p. 1). They also see themselves as warm, impulsive, and sentimental. They perceive Westerners as cold, calculating, and unfathomable. Huh? Wait a minute, that second part is all reversed! Isn't it? I have heard many times a North American describe the Japanese as coldly inscrutable, two-faced, untrustworthy people who will tell you anything and never keep (the principle of) their word. Or is there a different driving principle involved? The Japanese follow the harmony principle called *wah* and will not directly say "no" to a request. In the month or so that I have spent in my two trips to Japan, I never heard the word "no." It just is not used. It is improper form. But that does not mean that your request has not been denied. (And from the Japanese perspective, how could you trust someone who does not even understand good form?) The point is that, as Lacan (Sarup, 1993) stated, the language (culture) that speaks the individual rather than the individual that speaks the language. Understanding each other's forms of expression is crucial for the deeper understanding that can result in peace.

On my last night in Japan, the core mural team was riding the train back from Tokushima to Osaka. We were discussing what we all believed to be core differences between Japanese and North Americans. "We Japanese believe in loyalty." "So do we," I said, and added, "We also believe in honesty and integrity in keeping your commitments." "So do we in Japan," and so on until we all just stopped and looked at each other. We could not find any deep, fundamental value on which we disagreed. Finally one of our team members said, "Well maybe we're not as different as we thought." The sense of "Otherness" was gone. Having worked together for weeks for the common good, across cultures, and in spite of many false starts and misunderstandings, we really were, in fact, a team.

It would be easy to conclude here that we are all alike under the skin, but I do not want to end this paper with some sort of saccharin platitude, because we are definitely not alike. But we are all people. And we do have, it appears, some universal impulses, like loyalty to the group and honesty and integrity, and the drive to make art. These impulses take different forms in different circumstances and in different cultures. That's the rub. It's the form that counts after all. We take on the ability to engage in (Sarup, 1993; Wilson, 1988) and understand (R. Anderson, 1990) symbolic communication by being embedded in a particular culture. Beyond substance, it is the manner in which something is presented that allows us access to the inner life of the other. Or keeps us out.

A major difference between the United States citizens and the Japanese is in the sense of how things are done (deMente, 1993; Mura, 1991; Nakane, 1970). As two of the greatest powers in a shrinking world where many of the missiles of destruction are still aimed, it is vitally important that we understand and respect each other. It is important that we recognize that we are distinct cultural types, maybe the most extreme opposites in the world. I believe it is also vitally important to understand that the extreme stereotypes of belief that pit one cultural group against another, tribe against tribe, are no longer a survival mechanism, but a detriment to the survival of us all. Art has been instrumental in focusing group attention through aesthetic means on those values, mores, and ways of doing things critical to a group's survival (Dissanayake, 1988). Understanding a culture's ways through making and examining artworks interculturally, then, may indeed be a bridge to world peace. Or maybe it's too grandiose to think of this

project as a bridge of peace. Maybe it is a plank or a nail. But the idea of intercultural understanding toward world peace is a worthy goal. Maybe the fiftieth anniversary of Hiroshima is as good a place to start as any. Can we hope that in hammering this sticking-up nail we will bind two of potentially many planks on a bridge to peace?

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