



THE MISSING PEACE
Artists Consider the Dalai Lama

Signs of the Times

by artist Seyed Alavai as part of *The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama*

An educational activity is presented on the back of this poster. Recommended age range: high school and above. May also be used for middle school. Digital copies are available for free download at www.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp

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High School Educational Activity

related to artwork from

The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama Exhibit



Signs of the Times

Syed Alavi, 2005

Special thanks to Emery High School and the City of Emeryville for making this project possible

Artist Interview

Meet Syed Alavi (www.tmpp.org/artists/alavi)

What kind of art did you do as a child?

As a child, I used to enjoy drawing. One time, I looked at a pattern of steam that was gathered on the window—it was just dripping down. I started drawing it as a pattern. It inspired me to draw. I also did crafts. I made things like slippers, hats, and different toys that I invented for myself. I would make things with cardboard and sticks and thread, things like that.

What kind of art training do you have?

I think that art training, in general, is really whole-life training. To me, art is the process of refinement. It is the process of being sensitive to life as it happens. I use the term “life” in the general sense, as it applies to all sorts of experiences, like sensory experiences and mental interactions with the world around us. Everybody is an artist, and everybody has that process of refinement in himself or herself. When I look back, being tuned into the world was very important to me.

What formal education do you have?

After receiving my bachelor’s degree at San José State University, I studied art and consciousness at John F. Kennedy University in Berkeley, and then received my master’s degree from the San Francisco Art Institute.

Do you have a piece of advice you would like to give to young people?

Question everything. Question, not in the sense of opposing, but question in the sense of getting to the root or foundation of everything and anything, regardless of what it is. Go beyond the surface of something and get to the essence of it.

Motivation for This Work

What influenced this collection?

I looked at the utility boxes that control stoplights, and I looked at the pedestrian stick figure that is associated with the crosswalks. The idea was to use that stick figure to create the artwork.

What was your motivation for this artwork?

In a very general sense, what motivates me is basically the same thing that motivates scientists or philosophers. At the bottom of it is: What are we doing here? Who are we? What is life? That is the foundation of my motivation.

What is the major concept behind the artwork?

This collection consists of 17 utility boxes located around the city of Emeryville, CA. Each one has a different concept. The project was created through a collaboration with eight high school students. We met once a week for one semester. We talked about the big questions (what are we doing here, who are we, what is life). Then the students played with different stick figure drawings about those concepts. We did a lot of drawings, and then we started refining them. We went through the drawings, we talked about them, we selected them, and we altered them or composed them to come up with these different images.

Please explain some of the symbolism contained in your artwork.

There is a difference between personal symbolism and formalism. Formalism is something that is accessible by everyone, regardless of nation, ethnicity, age, etc. For example, a chair is for sitting on. Everybody can see that. Personal symbolism is something that has personal meaning to someone, like if I have a particular memory of a chair that reminds me of my grandfather. Nobody else has access to that symbolism.

Having said that, take the image of the person juggling. One time you may look at it, and you say, "Oh! This person is juggling balls." The next time you see it, you may say, "What if his head is also a ball?" He doesn't have a head, or he's juggling his head. Either way makes sense. You could say, "He's so involved in juggling the balls, that he doesn't have a head—he's not thinking." Or you could say, "He's juggling his head because he is so busy in life." You may further notice, "Hmm. He's balancing on something that looks like a ball, or maybe a head. But it's hollow, and it has numbers on it. Perhaps it's a clock? Is he balancing time? Or is he trying to keep balance on time?"

Techniques Used in This Work

What techniques did you use to create this artwork?

The utility boxes were originally gray. I painted the boxes with flat yellow paint. Then I took the students' drawings, turned them into Adobe Illustrator® files, and sent them to a sign company. The sign company created vinyl stickers from the figures that were applied to the boxes.

What materials comprise the artwork?

They are made of paint and vinyl.

How long did it take to develop the pieces?

The process of working with the students was about four months. It took two months to install the pieces on the boxes.



Utility box designed by Seyed and students



Utility box designed by Seyed and students

Introduction

This activity may be used in conjunction with a visit to *The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama* exhibit, a visit to the website at www.tmpp.org, or as a stand-alone activity. Please see the Educator's Guide for additional background information and activities. The Educator's Guide and other resources, including this poster, can be downloaded at www.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp.

Student Activity

Overview

Students will interpret a piece of art, read an interview of the featured artist, explore symbolism, engage in discussion questions related to the concepts presented in the artwork, and then create their own artistic masterpiece using their personal symbolism and ideas to promote awareness of a chosen topic.

Engage

1. Introduce *The Missing Peace Project: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama*. Background information and resources may be found in the Educator Guide or at *The Missing Peace* website, www.tmpp.org.
2. Display the poster and reveal its title.
3. Ask students to consider the art and reflect on possible interpretations. What does this piece suggest? What might the artist be saying with this piece? If students struggle, point out specific elements of the piece and ask for possible interpretations. Accept all answers. There is no right or wrong interpretation.

Explore

1. Photocopy the appropriate panels of the poster so that students can read the Artist Interview. This includes three sections: Meet, Motivation, and Techniques.
2. Use the following discussion questions to lead a discussion of the artist's message. All of the artists are trying to raise awareness about something.
 - a. Think about a group you belong to. This could be a group of friends, a sports team, your family, or a club. Think of a symbol (image, phrase, clothing, jewelry, greeting, color, action, handshake, etc.) that your group uses and has an "inside" meaning that only members of this group understand. Share.
 - b. The symbol your group uses may be a formal symbol understood by others, but you have assigned it a different meaning. Can this human tendency to assign different meanings to the same thing create conflict? Think of an example in which this might occur.

Explain

1. Students will now have an opportunity to create a piece of art with their own message to the world. Their artwork is a vehicle to discuss and promote an issue with others. Possible topics to explore include: love, peace, empathy, forgiveness, compassion, respect, and embracing diversity. Brainstorm other possible topics relevant to teens. The objective is to make the audience think about the issue/topic chosen.
2. Once students have completed their art, they should compose a one-page Artist Interview that follows the same format as this poster: a brief biography with a description of the motivation and techniques used to create their artwork. Optional: As an extension, students can create two discussion questions they would like others to consider about their message.

Extend

1. Just as important as the creation of the artwork, is the opportunity to share it with others. It will give students a chance to formalize their ideas and practice communicating their message with others.
2. Arrange for one of the following:
 - a. Class Presentations: Each student makes a 2-minute presentation of their art to promote their message. These presentations could be grouped by theme for a more powerful impact. Thematic groups could work collaboratively.
 - b. Art Show: Choose a theme and show title. Invite students, parents, and members of the community to attend. Require each student to stand by their artwork and engage visitors in a dialogue about their message.
 - c. Share With Other Classes: Create a meaningful cross-curricular activity in which members of your class present their work to members of another class/subject area.
3. We invite you to visit us online at youth.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp where members of your class can share their experiences related to *The Missing Peace* with other students around the world.

Evaluate

1. After students have shared their art, ask students to reflect on the experience of creating and sharing their own artwork as a vehicle to discuss and promote an issue with others. Did they feel like their message got across? Were there challenges? Frustrations?
2. *The Missing Peace* curriculum is an ongoing project. Your participation is welcome! We invite you to share your experiences, outcomes, insights, and suggestions with other educators at www.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp.

The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama

Eighty-eight contemporary artists.

Eighty-eight disarming works of art.

Eighty-eight ways to think about,
talk about, experience, and create peace.

This project involves a diverse collaboration of some of the world's most respected and innovative artists from twenty-five countries creating entirely new works of art designed to start a renewed global dialogue about peace. A travelling exhibit of the artwork is being shown in museums around the world.

The Missing Peace
(www.tmpp.org)

is a project of

The Dalai Lama Foundation
(www.dalailamafoundation.org)

and

The Committee of 100 for Tibet
(www.c100tibet.org)