

Old School, New School: Or, how the study of art, heritage, and history suits that of expanded consciousness :)

I mentioned earlier that I got my MA in Art History and Visual Culture. I've always been a lover of most things related to the past, but didn't give that much credit until my third year of undergrad. With an open time slot on my class schedule and a humanities credit to burn, I dipped my toes into a survey art history class, was inevitably sucked into a whirlpool of centuries' worth of stories, and never looked back. Because that's what those early lectures felt like to me, the most glorious sort of storytime, a growing intimacy with people who came before, complete with illustrations. And art and culture have come to mean more to me than I can fully articulate. Though I'll take a crack at it.

Art is our never ending narrative. The cultural records we have and continue to shape are utterly unique to humanity's eons of being on this planet. Already brilliantly colored and multi-faceted, it's all a testament forever morphing into something new, bearing witness to each passing age's utopias and ironies, forever crystallizing our creative powers and emotional responses. Forever invoking later generations' passion and expression too. Artmaking is an act of remembrance that always results in something revolutionary. In any form, art is a special kind of cathartic manifestation that brings what's within us without, by asserting its presence and demanding examination and interaction. And by demanding new ways of thinking like nothing else can. Art is a crazy powerful transformative force; culture shows us who we are and who we can be.

I may have also mentioned that straightforward situations in the art world either felt to exist only in the ether or...lackluster. The competition, privilege, and numberless unpaid internships that keep some such circles afloat are well known, and even once you're in, things can feel shallow and restrictive. I mean zero offense by that, since I am the first to say that museums, galleries, auction houses, every single art professional out there -- from the artists, curators, conservators, and researchers to transporters, guards, and ticket sellers -- does crucial work for society. And often for long hours, little pay and even less gratitude from people who find their doings a frivolous accessory to life.

I was the fussy, starry-eyed idealist always scratching at a weird career-related itch. I learned it was something of a cosmic itch all along, when my spiritual side unfurled itself more. It's said the information that needs to come your way will, right when it needs to. It sure does. And time, synchronicity, quantum physics, and meditating to better know myself have certainly taught me, in a major way, that there is more to this life, and to culture, than what we see, feel, and think.

For starters, I believe we're more than our physical bodies suggest. We're beings of visible light, specks of universal, creative source energy, absolutely eternal ourselves in one state or another. Literally everything, *everything*, is made of indestructible energy. Do you remember from your science class days, how the Law of Conservation says that energy cannot be created or

destroyed, that it just changes form? Call it God, the universe, whatever you please. I often call it source or the divine. Science has also proved that this energy, humming at different frequencies, makes up every atomic particle. It permeates this entire world, and, I believe, forms many layers of reality, many realms, dimensions, and timelines where infinite possibilities play out. Some of the endless expressions of this energy vibrate higher and faster, and feel more pleasurable, some lower, slower, perhaps sadder; but all that is, is connected, it all has the same foundation.

Everything is one in source energy. We are forged from it, and we are sacred and multidimensional too, so it's nothing to be freaked out by. We have higher aspects of ourselves than our earthly selves, our souls, which we are always connected to. We can deepen that connection by remembering our inner spark of the divine and the underlying ties that bind.

And as proponents of string theory would have it, we create the layers of reality we experience ourselves, each instant, through our own moods, our conscious and unconscious thoughts, our belief patterns, intentions, and, well, how we're vibing on any given day. Our energetic condition dictates the actualities of our lives. Quantum physics has a tough time nailing down the ultimate truths of our existence. Though the search itself readily demonstrates the impact our minds have on matter. This brings personal responsibility, but also huge possibilities.

The universe is alive with intelligent consciousness. I see it to be expansive, imaginative, curious, and bountiful. It's all divine energy, taking on so many different forms. And so are we, and our doings and happenings here. We're all learning. We're all enough, as bits and pieces of source. If all is one, then all simply *is*. There's no duality or judgement; not a thing to prove, just to be. Knowing so sets you free from picking others and yourself apart. Because being yourself is literally why you exist at all. To allow the universe to encounter itself through your matchless, one-of-a-kind lens. You're also a unique energetic vibration, no one can be like you can be.

As diverse equals in energy, we all deserve empowerment, lifestyles we love, to shine in our idiosyncrasies, and to indulge in good self-care. But it's up to us to make the choice to see ourselves as more, as divine, as worthy co-creators of reality. The world and its abundance is not just for people you somehow think are more special than you, it's yours to shape, and it's the honest to God fundamental nature of things. Of course, it all requires the ditching of victimhood, deep-rooted issues, and any guilt that accompanies living out your full potential, but it's worth working on minding our minds, to realize that how we view things is so important that it actually shapes things around us. There's no denying life that life has its particular cruelties, but it's how we handle and surmount the twists and kinks in our life path that define us moment to moment.

Whoah, lady. How the hell does that relate to art and heritage? Stick with me. I see the notion of non-duality to be super applicable to cultural history. Everything is one, everything just is. I'm all for equality and inclusivity on all fronts, but the past is a gruesome, sticky beast. As the author L.P. Hartley wrote, the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there. Records tell us lots of awful things happened and we've got lots of beautiful artifacts to show for it. The truth is,

lots of awful and beautiful things did go down, things we now conceive of as villainous and virtuous for the common good.

But we will never have the full story, not even close, and we really should not judge what was, or the people who were, with too much severity against what is for us today.

It also kinda means there's no good or bad art. There's art that's gorgeous, so-so, provocative, or tacky to you, but the art just is. And if you say you can make it yourself, I say give it a go.

Anyway, feel free to think of those notions of yesteryear, today, and tomorrow somewhat loosely as well. For sanity's sake, I will be discussing time in linear terms. Though since it's all connected and energy never dies, I reckon there's more to our ephemeral concept of time too.

I've heard time likened to one everlasting moment that we dance around from many shifting angles, and that the "present" has a reciprocal effect on existence in the quote on quote past and future. It's hard to wrap the old brain around, you can only listen to what resonates, and no one can say for sure, but such lines of thinking have at least made me aspire to savor the now, and treat my daily life and decisions with more consideration. It's also showed me that the cultural past has plenty to offer us still.

I'm convinced we don't have to settle for dry, detached study of art and history. For real, as the immortal human chronicle, we ought to be able to make it personal and meaningful, to overcome that longing separation between us and other eras we feel an affinity for. You shouldn't have to wait for time travel to happen or to wallow in the idea that life was so much better during the candle lit nights of that period piece film you're streaming. You shouldn't have to stop short at the sense of propriety and security barriers that keep you from fondling artworks in an exhibition space. That's not to say you should fondle art in exhibitions, please don't actually fondle the art, lol. I mean you can connect energetically, directly to intriguing times and places, simply by quieting your mind and intending to tune in.

Energy goes on forever. And as everything's interconnected, energy is always accessible to us on the quantum level. So know you can get meditative wherever you find yourself, allowing your energy and consciousness to flow into those masterpieces, personalities, customs, and events of bygone times, because they're not bygone at all, but are still tangible vibrationally.

Viewing art or buying antiques opens gateways to long ago, but absorbing images online, and the mental images we create, can achieve the same ends through our own conscious choice. By simply acknowledging the past hasn't really passed on to some extent, we can engage with it and relate to it as never before. We can open up the cultural sector to everyone who wants a piece. We can heal what's gone stale and envision future opportunities for individuals and societies by revisiting our mutual inheritance.

In this immense universe, in which creativity clearly abounds, and change comes hard and fast, I cannot underscore the importance I see in inspiring new ideas and modes of expression with symbolism, philosophies, and muses that have swayed people for ages. The lives of our forebears, their accolades and follies, offer endless fodder for innovation and enlightenment. For deeper self-knowledge and solidarity when we need it most. We're all creators, connoisseurs of something, we're collectors of memories, and curators of complex lives. We always have been and always will be. With some curiosity and mindfulness, archaic tales and imagery can serve up lots of fresh discoveries and help us seek new reasons to celebrate our shared humanity.

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