

# Don't Cry Over Spilled Paint

What wars were waged over art? Why even care about what the next Shakespeare has to say? Or what the next Picasso will paint? Would the impending sense of doom we've all grown to live with really go away if the next Steven Spielberg were to bring our wildest dreams to the big screen?

The answer is no wars have been waged over art. Maybe love, greed, passion, or hate...but funnily enough, not the very thing that is capable of simultaneously encapsulating all those emotions.

Now, it would be insanely naïve if we were to pretend that art could cure us through the power of love and friendship.

So why bother? If only reserved for those who've been lucky enough to have achieved all 5 levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, what could art offer us? What could we offer it?

Before going any further, I'd love to make sure you and I are on the same page in terms of the actual definition of art. However, that discussion could very well be its own essay. I will tell you about an experience of mine, though, and I hope it gets the message across.

It was a dark, winter evening in Istanbul and I was walking home from the metro station I take every day. The apartment I lived in was on a quiet street, it was an old school apartment building. It, along the other buildings on that street, had none of the modern fancy gating or architecture. Just a simple buzz button security system that only worked half the time, but that never seemed to bother anyone, as it was an easy-going neighborhood. This particular walk home was different, because I'd forgotten my earphones that day, so I didn't have a distraction to keep my mind from wandering for those 15 minutes until I'd get home.

I had never appreciated any of the scenery, as it wasn't much, and even on that day it didn't hit me or inspire some newfound love of nature or architecture that wasn't there before.

However, as I was waiting for the pedestrian crossing sign to turn green, I looked down at the pavement and noticed the most curious thing. The cement paver bricks were individually engraved in an almost beautiful pattern. As beautiful as a cement paver could be.

It wasn't just the arrangement of the cement bricks. Someone had taken the time to engrave these pavers for the viewing pleasure of passing pedestrians.

Now, it's very possible that these pavers were mass produced by a machine, but is it crazy to wish they were engraved by someone who intended those pavers to instill the feeling that I felt in that very moment there? Even more curious, is it crazy to think those pavers alive, in that moment?

Not in the sense that they had a soul, or that they were able to feed, survive, or reproduce. But in the same sense a crumpled plastic straw wrapper and a ring of coffee stamped by the bottom of a mug are alive, left behind by a couple who enjoyed a quiet afternoon together. One of whom preferring a smoothie, with the other opting for a cup of coffee.

Of course it's crazy. If I were to say this to my great grandfather, who had to flee Palestine during the Nakba of 1948 and restart his life in a brand new country, he would disown me on the spot. If my mom were to read this essay, she'd call them the ravings of a demented woman, who was an obnoxious artist in her youth.

There is no 'but', in case you were waiting for one. That's it. It is crazy and obnoxious, and dare I say pretentious-even.

See, I'd like to make a confession.

Earlier on in this essay I typed the following words; "I hope it gets the message across", right before I started the story of the pavers. Well truthfully, I don't quite believe that phrase was necessary. Actually, I knew exactly you would get what I meant. Which is what made the risk of me coming across as mad, seem worth it.

See, I know exactly that you have felt the feeling that I am talking about, whether you know it or not. I can't say for sure what exactly it was for you, but it could have been anything. From the shavings of an eraser left on a classroom desk by a student who rushed for recess right after hearing the bell ring, to a seemingly insignificant paver.

So back to our original dilemma, why fight for art? Why waste countless hours pouring priceless human brain power over our next great piece that we hope to inspire generations to come with, to continue the legacy of creating when we have more existential issues to prioritize? Better yet, why even care to put any effort in, when I just told you about how the indomitable human spirit will find the simplest, least significant mundane objects meaningful?

Okay, enough with the rhetorical questions. Let's answer some, shall we?

Now, it would be a great disservice to opt for the lazy way out, and say, "it's up to you!" So, I'll leave you with a little bit more than that.

I can't do anything about the millions of people starving in Yemen. My recycling and reduced use of single-use plastic products can only do so much. It would be irrational to think I, alone, can even make a dent in the systemic social issues our society is plagued with. I'm definitely not curing cancer with some painting anytime soon. But what if the next thing I create somehow makes its way onto the path of someone who read a horrible news headline that day, and needed something- anything- to assure them that there is life alongside despair.

You cannot help but find it sad that we turn to inanimate objects for signs of life when everyone else seems to be flat-lining. But allow me to offer a slightly different perspective.

I think it's the reassurance that the scratches around a café charging outlet provide, rather than the scratches themselves. Knowing that the person who was previously sitting in your seat in that café was struggling with the same electrical outlet- for some reason or another, makes you feel good.

I have posed so many rhetorical questions that may seem like I have the answers to, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to pull the ol' "up to the reader" trick.

Before you throw whatever device you're reading this essay on across the room, humor me with one last thing.

Whilst trying to tackle the impossible questions poised, that might as well include "what is the meaning of life?", create. Create something and share it. Who knows? Maybe you *will* discover your meaning of life along the way.

Good luck, friend