

## **Art and Peace at IPRA 2004**

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### **Celebrating People, Creativity and the Arts in a Chaotic World: The IPRA Commission on Art and Peace (IPRA-CAP)**

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#### **Introduction**

This year again, violence has reigned supreme on our planet. The brutality of the war on Iraq, the way it has been imposed on the world community, and the chaos now reigning in the “cradle of civilization” are only the tip of the iceberg.

At the same time countless people have continued to celebrate life, to create works of art, to dream about a better society and to promote a more humane world. Despite the fearful image of ourselves created by the mainstream corporate media, we need to continue asking how we can change the world for the better, if we are to survive at all as a species. One aspect of this search is to find out the role of the arts in this process.

In this paper I would like to introduce the new "Commission on Art and Peace" of IPRA (IPRA-CAP) which will offer its first panels and workshops during IPRA 2004 in Hungary. The work of this commission is supported by the research and human resources of the Transcend: Art and Peace Network (T:AP), which will also be described briefly.

#### **Violence in 2003**

On August 20th a car bomb destroyed the UN Headquarters in Baghdad. The former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Hans Von Sponeck (2003), showed no surprise during an interview with Democracy Now: “We have seen oil installations being attacked, water facilities blown up, electricity facilities disabled and we’ve had this terrifying blast at the Jordanian embassy just over a week ago, and now the United Nations, it isn't a surprise.”

Nine days later a bomb exploded near the Tomb of Ali, one of the holiest shrines for Shiite Muslims, killing Ayatollah al-Akim and many other civilians in Najaf.

The occupation of Iraq is a complete disaster. The real motivations for the war itself are now being questioned more and more openly. Did the current spiral of violence really start on September 11, 2001? Very few still believe this fable, and to understand how it all started, we need to go back to the training of anti-Soviet warriors by the CIA in Afghanistan, to the abject dynamics of the Cold War, to the causes and effects of the Second World War. Who threw the first stone tens of thousands of years ago?

A more constructive approach is to decide what kind of world we want in fifty years, and what kind of actions we need to take today to get there. When we adopt such a hopeful, forward-looking strategy, it becomes obvious that the elevation of the human spirit becomes a priority. How can we promote nonviolence, mutual understanding, effective and peaceful conflict transformation today? The arts have an important role to play in such a humanistic and long-term endeavour.

### **The Roles of the Arts**

Take a look at Picasso's "Guernica", and you have a good starting point to learn about violence against civilians in the 20th century. Now make a reproduction of "Guernica", hang it in the UN building in New York, then cover it up so Colin Powell can sell a war of aggression to the public (February 5, 2003) and you have all you need to learn about violence against civilians in the 21st century, but also about media manipulation, as well as government and corporate lies. This is one of the roles of the arts, to make us think about the situation of our world, to make us establish a difficult but necessary diagnosis. Take a movie like "The Day After" and you have a prognosis of what the aftermath of a nuclear war might look like.

Fortunately, the roles of the arts do not stop here, and proposals for effective therapies are also available. The magazine "New Internationalist" has devoted its August 2003 issue to the power of music in promoting peace. Actually the potential of the arts in the reduction of direct, structural and cultural violence, and in the promotion of peace, is so huge that specific research into the links between art and peace has now become necessary. That is one of the main reasons why a new commission was born during IPRA 2002 in Korea.

### **The Commission on Art and Peace of IPRA (IPRA-CAP)**

It is during the 2002 IPRA conference in Suwon, South Korea, that IPRA-CAP was born. The aim of the commission is to promote research concerning the links between art and peace, exploring the ways in which music, cinema, painting, sculpture, literature and all other forms of art contribute to the reduction of violence in all its forms. Numerous panels on this theme had successfully been offered during IPRA 2000 in Tampere and IPRA 2002 in Suwon, under the generous sponsorship of the Commission on International Human Rights (CIHR). This new commission will benefit from the work of the Transcend: Art and Peace Network (T:AP), a group of about 50 researchers, artists, activists and students from all continents who have developed a website and network based on the following mission statement:

*To T:AP into the human potential for peace  
by promoting creativity and the arts*

Over the last three years, T:AP has participated in exhibitions, conferences, concerts, courses, workshops, and has organized a session at the UNESCO Conference on Intercultural Education in June 2003 in Finland. You are hereby invited to explore the T:AP website at <http://tapnet.info>

### **An Invitation to IPRA-CAP in Sopron, Hungary, July 5-9 2004**

What kind of art do you like? Do you enjoy watching movies, reading novels, or playing music? What about painting, drawing or cooking? Do you have good ideas concerning the roles of the arts for peace? As convenors of IPRA-CAP, Maria Elena Lopez Vinader and myself would like to invite you to attend our sessions during the IPRA conference in Sopron, Hungary. Since this is the city where Franz Liszt has started his career before moving to Vienna, you can expect some sessions about Liszt and peace, including some piano performances. Representatives of the Roma nation living in Hungary will also be invited to perform and speak about their hopes and dreams, now that the world is learning why they should not be called "Gypsies". Moreover all kinds of topics concerning art and peace will be considered. If you are interested, contact us at this email address for more information: [olivierurbain@yahoo.com](mailto:olivierurbain@yahoo.com)

### **Conclusion**

Looking at the world situation today, and the way it is represented in the mainstream media, it seems that social Darwinism has triumphed and that brute force is the most fashionable way to get one's desires satisfied. In the international jungle, the one who strikes first wins. Is there any hope that the voice of the people who are longing for a more civilized way to govern society, a less violent way to transform conflicts, will one day be heard?

The history of jazz music might provide some encouragement. Born from the suffering of the poorest members of society in New Orleans at the end of the 19th century, jazz has developed and spread despite discrimination, racism, and prejudice. Jazz musicians never gave up their passion and continued sharing the joy of music with more and more people, triumphing over very harsh circumstances. Today jazz is heard and played all over the world and gives hope to millions of people every day. Peace researchers and activists need to learn from this winning spirit if they are to survive in today's world, and herein lies one more link between art and peace.

### **Reference**

Von Sponeck, H. (2003) in an interview with Democracy Now, retrieved from <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=03/08/20/1513210> on 5 September 2003.

(To view the whole IPRA Newsletter Vol.2 #3,  
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