

# Discovering the Role Art Plays in Creating Social Change

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## Where It All Began

The welcome area of the Tambo International airport in Johannesburg, South Africa, was under mass construction, with fiberglass and plaster everywhere. Despite its appearance, the area was full of people anxiously awaiting loved ones to arrive. I entered this area having never before met my welcome party. I would not be embraced like the families and friends reuniting after weeks apart, or the lovers that stood at the elevators to go check in, giving each other one last kiss before separating.

I clearly remember thinking, “What am I doing here?” as I waited for Kim Berman, the woman with whom I would be staying and director of the organization for which I would be working, to pick me up. I had entered this country alone, with only questions that I hoped the next two months in South Africa would answer. I was about to go to a printmaking studio, something that I knew relatively little about, still very much questioning what role art was to play in my life. Could I make change with art? Could I touch people’s lives with paint? My canvases seemed small compared to the larger world: how would I make my voice or image matter?

I went to South Africa in search of answers to these questions. The country’s rich, turbulent and tragic history has given way to a culture that uses art as a tool for re-growth. Apartheid, defined by the United Nations as racism made into law<sup>1</sup>, took hold of the country in the 1940s, giving the white minority the authority to discriminate against the native black majority. This legal system was officially abolished in 1994, when Nelson Mandela (Madiba) was elected the first black president in the first democratic election held in South Africa’s history. Although this took place eighteen years ago, the legacy of apartheid remains in the fabric of society. It will take generations to be able to undo the decades of discrimination, and the country is now in flux, trying to rebuild.

My time in South Africa has shown me the power of art. It has allowed me to see the many different ways that it affects peoples’ lives, from the family at Artist Proof Studio and its ability to inspire people through art, to conversations with Kim Berman, the founder of the studio and a committed

artist for change. I also witnessed the capability art has as a therapy tool, observing how children use it to process the horrors that have placed them in refugee camps. I am now trying to use art in all of these ways: as a tool to empower people, as a positive message calling for change, and as a way to process the world around me. In those first moments in South Africa at the airport, although it may not to have appeared to be all that foreign a place, I was unaware that I was stepping into a completely new culture, a culture that I now carry with me and hope to bring wherever I go.

## Art Heals Scars of Violence

In Johannesburg, the city I called home for two months, I could still see the marks of apartheid as I walked down the street. I experienced the racial tensions that exist by the way people looked at me, a white American woman, walking down the street. This is something that most white South Africans recommend not doing for fear of being harassed or robbed. Most of the time, as I would walk from the bus stop to work each day, the only white people I would see were those sitting in the comfort of their cars. The divide between who walks and who owns a car is only one of the many divides between this country’s black and white races. Each day, I’d see and understand more of these divisions. Blacks seemed to be relocated into white suburbs to work for grocery stores and other similar businesses, to hold positions that were almost exclusively filled by blacks. Even with wealth redistribution, whites still control the majority of the country’s resources, and it will take time for the wealth to be shared more equally.

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Despite this society's scars, a community has emerged that is using art as a tool for healing and creating change. As someone studying to be a painter, I know from experience that creating an image is a personal process; it requires self-reflection. It causes me both to look within myself and to comment on the world around me. The process of making art is therapeutic, allowing me to process what I interact with on a daily basis, and think about what role it has in a larger context.

In response to such a tenuous culture and history, institutions such as Artist Proof Studio, a community printmaking studio in Newtown, were established to offer hope to a nation that was desperately searching for it. The studio was founded in 1992 by two artists, Kim, a white woman, and Nhlanhla Xaba, a black man, proving that art can be a unifying force that crosses racial boundaries. They founded the studio with the belief that students could be empowered through learning the skills of printmaking, having art create change on the individual scale. Nhlanhla, asleep in the studio, perished in a fire that destroyed the studio. The studio continues on in his memory in a new building through the lives that the studio continues to touch every day. Today, Kim still sits at the head of the Artist Proof table, facilitating everything else that takes place around her.

Art functioned as a tool of rebellion during the struggle to end apartheid, and this legacy continues in using art in current attempts to rebuild the community. Kim Berman and Stompie Selibe, a former teacher at the studio, have collaborated in writing *Artist Proof Studio: A Journey of Reconciliation* (a working paper of Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts). It is the story of how South Africa's history extensively feeds in to this need to create art. They state: "The joint vision and commitment to this new society produced a kind of magical energy in the studio, in the common belief that art could play its part in imagining and creating a better life for all of South Africa's citizens (4)." The traumas that the nation underwent during the years under apartheid remain very much in the forefront of the communal mind. Art is a tool helping to heal these wounds.

### **The Family Table - Art for Empowerment**

In an octagonal shaped room that sits right off of the kitchen stands a round wooden table. This table is like any other, made of wood and held up by four posts. Yet this table is special in that it holds countless memories of my childhood. It is the gathering place where, after a long day, my parents, siblings and I come together. The focal point that brings us all around the table is always food, a concept passed down to me through my Italian heritage. Each of my family members sits down with their unique perspective. Although normally there are only five chairs for the members of my immediate family, other chairs are scattered around the room, waiting for the inevitable moment when others join us, sharing in our family ritual.

Thousands of miles away from my home in Providence, Rhode Island, sits another table, this one long, white and rectangular and far from the traditional conception of a kitchen. At Artist Proof Studio, this table stands parallel to a row of printing presses on the second floor. Taller than most, reaching about halfway up my torso, the table is somewhat pushed into the background because of everything around it, yet stands out because of the constant movement that encompasses it. This table has the unofficial title of the "third year students' space." Although it may be their space at the beginning of the day when formal classes are in session, by noon, when lunch breaks out, the space becomes the watering hole for everyone, young and old.

During the first weeks of my two-month internship at Artist Proof, I admired this table from afar, never getting too close. There were people constantly gathered around it, either conducting mini critiques of artwork, working on etching a plate, sketching in a sketchbook, or simply eating their lunch. Since all the chairs already at the table were usually taken, I did not feel comfortable enough to pull another one up to join those already sitting there. Maybe I felt ill at ease to join the table because I am still learning to become an artist, or because the art that I am being trained to do is painting, something very different than printing. Also, all the students at the studio were older than me, compounding

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my feelings of inadequacy in critiquing their work, or even to vocalize opinions beyond the generic “oh, very nice. I like it.” Whatever the reason may have been, it took me a while to pull a chair up to the table.

Other gathering areas, such as the table where the first year students congregated, were a different story. Although many students were still older than me, I felt more equal to them because they were still just beginning to learn the skill of printmaking, and I was not as far behind them in comparison to the other advanced students. Also, this area is far removed from the center of the studio. Whether or not it was true, when I first arrived I felt that my race and nationality separated me from everyone else. In my constant effort not to appear as an imposing foreigner, I did not allow myself to sit at the table, and because of it remained separated from the community.

Unlike my family where food is what calls us to the table, at Artist Proof the food is art, specifically art used to inspire and to create change. Because of the unusual height of the table, tall stools were scattered all around it. Each chair is a welcoming beacon to the diverse members of the studio

community. Every person has their own history and story, and yet all share a place at the family table through the common goal seen in their work. The passion and drive to make something of themselves is the force that compels them there, yet it is different for each person.

**The passion and drive to make something of themselves is the force that compels them.**

Sitting on top of the table, Maria, with her fake plaid Burberry hat, has a different story from anyone else. This twenty-one-year-old with wide eyes and freckles scattered across her cheeks has earned a seat in order in

order to make something of her life. Shy and quiet compared to many of the other characters, she lives with her mother and feels somewhat isolated from the rest of the Artist Proof community. Her art speaks of hidden pain, consisting of shattered images of youth and innocence. Her art expresses what her silence cannot. All at the table have different paths that have led them to Artist Proof; hers is not more unusual than anyone else's, just different.

I think it was Maria's quietness that first got me to talk with her. I felt less threatened when approaching her than some of the other students, perhaps because she had a calm nature about her. She has a smile that literally stretches from ear to ear that welcomed me to take a step closer to the

table. It started when I looked from afar, admiring her art as she worked. Slowly, I started to feel comfortable enough to walk directly up to her working at the table and talk with her, not yet sitting there by myself, but heading in that direction.

The studio itself is very much a table, a sturdy framework in which different parts come together around one collective idea. In this context the goal is art for social change, and each chair provides a different way to reach that goal. The chairs symbolized the multiple functions that the studio has, all gathered together and connected by their identities as different ways to create change through art. One chair holds the role of uplifting individuals and changing their lives by giving them the tool of art to hopefully make a living for themselves. Walking into the studio, I saw this passion in all of the student's eyes. Each student, whether a second year who is thirty-two years old and trying to straighten out her life after having two children, or an eighteen-year-old first-year student fresh out of high school, all are determined to succeed. The atmosphere is laid back here, exemplified by the loose definition of time; I learned very quickly that if I wanted someone from the studio to be anywhere at a specific time, I had to add a half hour to the time I actually wanted them. Despite this fact, the students were driven to make something of themselves, and art is the mode through which this happens.

At another chair around the table, holds the practice of creating change through a different type of education: AIDS awareness. Separated from the three-year teaching program that consumes most of the studio, the Paper Prayers program invigorates women affected by HIV/AIDS by making felt animals as a means to an income. The program also runs workshops teaching about the dangers of AIDS and how to protect oneself from it. There is also the chair that is the gallery, helping to empower young and upcoming artist by promoting their work and getting it into the public eye.

One of the most recent and last chairs to be added to the table was community outreach. The studio has several outreach programs, one of which started because of the xenophobic attacks against foreign Africans in South Africa. Murals were designed and painted all over the city, depicting different images around this subject. Refugee camps were also established around the greater city limits, and the studio set up an art therapy program at these camps.

This last chair was my chair. My first real assignment at the studio was to coordinate the efforts working at the camp, and this provided me a seat at the table.

With the help of people like Maria, I learned to use my role of coordinating volunteers at the camps as my way to integrate into the vibrant community that is Artist Proof. Needing to ask all the students if they wanted to participate in this endeavor made me physically approach the table and talk with the students, giving me a role in the larger institution. It allowed me to get over some of my initial fears about being inadequate to judge artwork, because my stool had nothing to do with that. This helped me in the process to overcome the cultural barriers that separated me from folding into the Artist Proof community.

### Kim Berman - The Power of the Image

Artist Proof Studio exists today thanks to Kim Berman, co-founder, current executive director, and for most of my trip, also my landlord. If you were to meet Kim while in a store, you may not turn your head or think twice; at a glance she blends in with her surroundings. She is a white South African, and although whites are in the minority here, they still make up a sizable portion of the population. She stands around my height of 5'7" and has dark brown hair with just a bit of a gray. The streaks of gray do not make her appear old, but rather, as I'd like to put it, "experienced." Her wavy hair is neither short nor long, but at that in between stage where it falls just touching her shoulders. Her bright blue eyes pop out from the mainly dark palate of clothes she usually wears, ranging from black to dark blue, with the occasional bright blue jersey that her partner Robyn buys for her to wear to a photo shoot. Physically, Kim's appearance does not represent the wonder that she is. She can blend into the crowd, but absolutely nothing else about her is ordinary. Kim is one of the most extraordinary women I have ever met, and she is making a name for herself using art as a vehicle for create change.

Similar to the table that sits in the studio, the center of Kim's house is the kitchen table. Situated in one of the suburbs of Johannesburg, the kitchen is the last room in the house, requiring you to walk through the entryway, living room and dining room before walking through a door to get to a typical rectangular wooden table. Surrounding the table are walls full of artwork, paintings or prints. Small figurines, beautiful woven baskets and thrown pottery are scattered across a built-in shelving unit, taking up one full side of the room.

During my time in South Africa, Kim gave me a chair at her kitchen table. In providing me with a chair, she made me feel like a part of her family. This gesture reminded me very much of my own family table, for similar to my family, each of us had a specific spot. Kim's chair was at the head of the table, her back to the kitchen; Robyn, her partner, sat to her left, and I sat across the table from Robyn. In many ways, I felt that the three of us were a family, each having our own

responsibilities, mine normally included clearing the table and doing the dishes. When I arrived, Kim told me of bad experiences she had had with other American interns in the past. In the first few days, I tried to shatter that impression. This manifested itself in several ways, one of which was trying to appear to be as helpful and non-imposing as I could, taking on the role of doing the dishes not because I was asked, but to feel as if I was being useful. Eventually, this became ritual, as it came to constitute my nightly "chores" in many ways.

I have heard that all works of a good artist, no matter their subject matter, act as a self-portrait. The finished product says a lot about the artist; choice of color, subject matter, use of light, shading, size, medium and composition are all conscious choices that an artist makes. This hold true for Kim. Looking at her work, you can start to get a picture of who she is. She is a printmaker, but does not limit herself to just one form of printmaking. She combines monotypes with dry point or other combinations of printmaking techniques. She is unconventional, challenging what has been established as truth and rethinking it.

Although Kim has explored many different subject matters, she has recently focused on landscapes. Her print "Through the Wire: Lowveld Fire II," done in 2003,<sup>2</sup> is an eleven color lithograph, an extensive process that I am currently learning to do with one color and cannot imagine doing for eleven.<sup>3</sup> The litho is an image of a field after it has been rampaged by a fire; the smoke rising up over the burnt stalks left standing and a barbed wire fence that stretches into the distance. The image speaks of the history of South Africa, specifically apartheid. Fire is a devastating force, yet it leaves room for and even encourages re-growth. In other words, South Africa needed to experience the devastating aftermath of apartheid in order for the country to start creating a new type of society where race was not a divider.

This image does not say anything more about who she is than any other print Kim has made; rather it shows her involvement as an artist in her artwork. The history of apartheid is very much invested in all that Kim creates. I attribute this to her background. While growing up, she was privileged by being white in Johannesburg. Despite this race-driven privilege, Kim had a sense of moral responsibility. She left South

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Africa for the United States so that she could go to school. Kim did not want to take part in the discrimination that was taking place back in South Africa and describes her refusal to go back as self-imposed exile. It wasn't until seven years later that Kim felt the need to come home to South Africa to help rebuild the community. Nelson Mandela had assumed power and Kim wanted to contribute to the re-growth of her nation. Her subject matters are just one of the many ways she demonstrates her passion for her country. And it is through this medium – art – that she hopes it will reach its fullest potential.

Sitting around the Berman family table, whether at breakfast eating granola and yogurt, enjoying some tea in the afternoon, or eating a dinner of homemade soup and chicken curry, I leaned just as much, if not more, than from many of the other things I did. Dinner conversations would range from how each of our days were, to the frustration with one of the several job titles Kim holds; full-time lecturer at the University of Johannesburg in printmaking, executive director of Artist Proof, and acting director of Phumani Paper, an organization that promotes change through income-generation projects for women making paper across the countryside. Frustrations would vary from the annoyance of someone not showing up for a meeting on time when Kim's day was completely full with no extra time, to people resigning from positions and not giving enough time to find replacements for them.

And when it was just Kim and I sitting around the table, our conversations were about art and change. Working with one of her graduate student's thesis, Kim would vent on how the review board did not understand how he was going to measure the "change." "I can't get it through their heads, they just don't get it" was the extent of her frustration. A lot of what we discussed had to do with the mechanics of the various ways that art was making change, meaning talking about the specific projects Kim and I were working on. There was a period where several of the students at Artist Proof were not showing up for classes, which are free for the students, although they have to be accepted into the program. Kim would say: "I don't think some of these kids understand the opportunity they have here. ... We are giving them an education and some of these kids are not taking advantage of it," in between bites of her dinner.

Kim dedicates herself to her students, and although is very hard on them, she wants each and every one to succeed. In her paper, Kim writes: "Many of our students [at Artist Proof] find their way through learning on the street. We are giving tools for youth to make different choices. ... How does teaching art provide the tools for an alternative choice? How far can these tools recover ubuntu?"(15).

Ubuntu is the South African notion of the interconnectedness that exists between all people. Kim quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu in describing this concept: "We believe that ... my humanity is caught up ... inextricably, with yours. ... The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in belonging"(6). This is an overarching ideal throughout South Africa, and a principle that the studio tries to encompass. Through providing students with alternative ways of learning, they are helping to empower the next generation. In Kim's article, she asks the question, "How does giving the tools of art get these students to make different decisions?" She does not offer an answer to this question, but through conversations I had with her, and frustration with several of the students lack of initiative at the studio, I understand why she asks the question. The majority of the students have drive and initiative, and learning the skill of printmaking does in fact help them make better decisions, but there are always a few people who take longer to catch on.

We talked about the studio, everything from the constant financial problems, to excitement or frustration in some of the student's work. The studio is the combination of everything else that Kim is doing, and is a vessel for truly empowering the South African people through art.

Beyond just giving me a seat at her family table, Kim introduced me to her full and extended family, who welcomed me to join their table as well. Her mother, Mona, set a place for me at their Shabbat dinner on several of the Friday nights, greeting me with open arms to her table. During my time in Johannesburg, I got to know Mona very well, taking walks with her and her dog Dee Dee, or going to her house to watch movies. She made me feel welcome, opening her home and making me feel like family. Mona is an author, and while I was there, had a launch party for her latest book, *E-mails from a Jewish Grandmother*. Kim, Robyn and I went over early, to help her set up. As guest arrived, Mona would look to me as if I were another member of the family, saying "Go see if there are any more wine glasses." As people filed in, I did not feel out of place, but at home.

### **Art Therapy - The Personal Side of Art**

A large part of the transformative aspect of art has to do with the physical act of creating it. When I am painting, I personally get into what I call "the zone." In this state of mind, I am removed from the rest of the world and have the ability to concentrate on myself. It is in this way that art is very personal, for it is a reflection of self. This is the idea of art therapy.

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A majority of the work I did while interning at Artist Proof involved coordinating volunteer efforts at refugee camps around the greater Johannesburg area. The camps were set up as a response to the xenophobic attacks that were happening all over the country. Immigrants from other African nations were being killed – their homes destroyed, and lives torn apart by black South Africans out of a feeling of resentment. Immigrants from other parts of Africa are coming into the country mainly because their homes have been destroyed by genocide or political unrest. South Africa is seen as a land of opportunity, not unlike the US. Because of the emphasis on trying to rebuild the society post-apartheid, an influx of immigrants entered the country. Those committing the violence act out of resentment. They view the foreigners as illegals, many whom are here without paperwork, stealing their jobs and lowering pay scales. Regardless of the reasons behind the attacks, it is the children that are being affected, and yet they have no say in the matter.

The first time I entered one of the camps, I was struck by how different the picture was from what the American media had painted. I envisioned a village of huts or tents separated from the rest of society, in a barren land of constant dust, with lots of unrest and tension at every turn. This image may exist in other parts of Africa, but not in Johannesburg. During that first visit, I was shocked by how connected it was to the rest of the community. The camp sits an hour outside of Johannesburg in a town called Boxburg, only a few miles from the main international airport. It looks very much like a strip mall town with a few main roads littered with big businesses from car dealerships to chain stores. The land is flat, and the roads seem to go on in every direction, the only end in sight being the very distant hills surrounding the area.

The camp is only slightly removed from the rush of traffic through a barrier of open space and a few brick buildings that appear to be abandoned. There is a small pond that looks as if it could be a waste dump because of the murky brown color of the water. On Saturdays when we would go to this camp, there was a distinct calmness, as if its residents accepted their place here and go on with everyday life. Within the camp, there are many wide-open spaces and wide corridors between the dozens of rows of tents. The camp appears to be a crop field of semicircle shaped white UNHCR<sup>4</sup> tents acting as the crops. Since I first stepped foot in the fields, the crops have grown laundry lines accessorizing the small tents, establishing a home in a place of impermanence. We walk along a row of homes to our workplace, the ominous big, olive green tent that lay in the background.

Art therapy was something that I had only heard in passing before this summer. There may be several methods in which it is performed, but my knowledge is limited to what I have

observed by watching the counselors. We try to create a safe space where the children from the camp feel comfortable to create, and then, as a group, unwrap the package that lies within their artwork. On this Saturday, we brought paper, paint and strips of scrap leather, and asked the kids to paint what it was that they missed most about their home. Once they were finished, the group came together in a circle and the counselor from the Art Therapy Center, a group that we worked with in executing this project, helped facilitate the kids sharing their stories. Each of the counselors had their own group, separated by gender and each occupying a different tent. Here, there were no tables to work on or meet around, but the floor became the gathering point where this group came together.

One child explained the story of what led her family to end up at the camp. Sitting in the circle, she appeared to be slightly arrogant when others were describing their pictures, but when it was her turn, she broke into tears and the superior front disappeared. Her family was loading their truck with their belongings in hopes of leaving just before the mobs came. This girl who could not have been more than 11 years old, and her family were chased down by the mob who beat them, burning their home and taking the truck with all of their belongings. They never did finish packing and were lucky to leave alive. If you look at this girl's picture, you would have never gotten this story. It looked like a beautiful house with some flowers outside on the lawn.

In general, the children depict beautiful images, but they have such sad and awful meanings. As one of the counselors said, "We take the pain away." We ask the children to give us their artwork, for although on the surface they may seem to be just beautiful hearts and flowers, they are full of a hidden pain. Art therapy in this context is about getting that emotional pain out, even if it's depicted in a beautiful flower, and then learning how to deal with it. Under these circumstances, we try and take the pain away with us, physically removing the picture that represents this awful day in this girl's life so if even for a day, we relieve some of her pain.

Observing this, I am amazed by how this girl still has the ability to stand and tell her story. I have lived almost twice as long as her, yet this young girl has already experienced more in her life than I probably ever will. Although I can try and connect with these young girls, there are many barriers, language being one, which makes it difficult. When we were finished going around in a circle, the girls solemnly got up and scattered, joining the other group outside and disappeared into the rows of tents. All the counselors regroup at the end of the sessions to debrief, acting as a support system for one another to talk about the day. Everyone was moved and those working in my group were all extremely

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touched by this one girl's story. When it was my turn to share, I started to choke up, by the end a few tears dripping from my eyes. Although the process of art is wonderful in providing a space for people to express how they feel, in a situation like this, there needs to be another step. Before we got into the taxi to return to Artist Proof, the last words from one of the counselors was: "OK, now let us all promise that we are going to leave all of this emotion and feeling here." For most of my experiences at the camp, I was able to leave my emotional attachment at its gates, for it would have been too much for me to handle if I always carried it with me. This day, however, I was not able to keep this promise. I continue to carry her story with me.

### Trying to Harness the Potential of Art

My final week at Artist Proof was the only time that I actually was able to make a print. Despite spending eight weeks at a printmaking studio, life was always too busy for me to sit back and try to make my own art. Kim was on my case about it, joking that she was not sure if I was a real artist because she had not seen any of my work, and convinced me to make a print in my final days. Rhoda, a friend of Kim's who works at the Museum School in Boston, came to run a three-week book-making workshop. As all of the first years were congregated around their table talking about the project, Rhoda said: "Not all art is happy. It's OK to make art that not everyone can understand. Public and private have two different meanings and it's OK."

Art functions in these two spheres: art for oneself and art for others, and they do, as Rhoda said, have very different meanings. Her words continue to play over in my head now that I returned to the United States and to Brandeis. Upon my arrival at school, I was most excited about going back to our art studio and getting to work with paint again; it is my language of communicating and processing. The studio here has virtually no large-scale tables or main congregating area, only large rooms full of easels and small tables barely large enough to fit my paint pallet on. The physical environment in the studio is very different from Artist Proof; it lacks the communal gathering place where artists come together to share their failures, challenges, and accomplishments. Despite this, there is still a clear sense of community within the walls of this studio, and as all studios should, it acts as my safe space where I am freely able to express myself.

As my intermediate painting class began and we had to start thinking of concepts and ideas to paint for our first piece, the only images that came to my mind were from the camps in South Africa. I thought they most adequately described the poverty and discrimination that I saw. I began work on

an image of a child alone on a hill with a woman walking by holding twigs on top of her head, set in a refugee camp with rows upon rows of tents. I got very caught up in what it was I was painting. I wanted it to speak to everyone who viewed it and have the viewer understand instantly what I experienced this summer. This is an unreasonable expectation for any image, yet I pushed. I wanted my canvas to scream something, but in trying too hard, in many ways I muted it.

When my class was asked to move on and start a second painting, images of the camp were still all that I could see. My second attempt was for me. Although I wanted others to see meaning in my work, I am still processing the experience I had this summer, and probably will for several years, but this painting was my real attempt to try and start that process.

In a piece entitled *Hung up to dry* (48in x 60in), a cloth line is suspended between two tents with clothing on it, a pair of jeans, and red and yellow shirts. Tents line the background with other clothes drying in the far distance. In conceptualizing this piece, I did not want to depict any figures, but try and depict the way that society has treated this group of people through the clothes just hanging there. Regardless of whether anyone who views it makes that conclusion I made it for myself. My professor in commenting on the work said, "Well this piece is a lot more interesting than your last. You are not as concerned with the actual subject matter;" I was able to put more of myself in it. As he said: "No one can look at this painting and not be intrigued by it." In realizing that the personal and public meaning of a piece can be different, I was able to release myself from the need to scream, and now I feel like my piece does, in fact, say something to others.

### How to Measure Change

For a long time, when thinking about the role I wanted art to play in my life, I had a difficult time justifying to myself that it would make a large enough impact. How can you tell? My paintings may speak to me, and my professor may be able to see something in them, but what type of impact or change is that creating?

How can someone measure change? Specifically how can one measure the power that something like art can have? Most people need some kind of metric to understand change. Death rates in this country have dropped to this percent, and crime or unemployment rates have decreased this much are just a few common examples of ways our culture views and measures change. With art, how can you do this? It is not measurable by statistics so how could I devote my life to this type of immeasurable work?

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This summer I witnessed it. I saw the way that a child was able to use paint to convey a message that words could not. I saw individuals who, without art, would have little or no shot of making a name for themselves. I saw artists committed to the power that their images have and who live in a culture

where others also value it. I needed to see it so that I can now proudly say that I am going spend the rest of my life devoted to the quest of using art to create social change, of answering the questions that are still unanswered and putting into practice everything that I have learned.

What makes the South African community in which I worked so dynamic is its ability to overcome the barriers put in place by apartheid and to use art in order to rebuild society. Now I ask myself whether

this art community can exist outside of South Africa. Many communities around the world have experienced hard times and vast social injustices are not confined to any continent. Can this idea of community be recreated outside of Johannesburg? War-torn areas like Iraq are full of violence. Although art alone cannot solve everything, what if institutions existed that promoted the use of art to cope with the trauma that they have experienced both as a way of life as well as well as therapy. The process of creating art cannot hurt a society, especially when the alternative is war and violence.

My time in South Africa provided me a glimpse into what a new society that uses art to promote change can look like. The last two days I was in Johannesburg, I was constantly on the verge of tears, like a pipe that could burst at any moment. I was leaving my new family and the environment where my eyes were widened to the role art will play in my life. Now and forevermore, I have a permanent seat at the Artist Proof family table. In time, overcoming the barriers that separated me from the table was a process of getting to know the institution and the people and culture of South Africa, and them getting to know me. I now, as has been said to me several times during my final weeks there, was not an American in their eyes, but a South African, officially proving that I have gained my place in their family. Once you get a seat at this family table, it never goes away. It only sits in the background waiting for the moment when you can return and join in again.

## Notes

1. <http://www.un.org/av/photo/subjects/apartheid.htm>
2. <http://www.artprintsa.com/kim-berman.html>
3. Lithography is a type of printmaking that concentrates on oil and water resisting each other. A plate or limestone is prepared so that specific areas are ink receptive, while others are water receptive. A different plate is required for additional colors, meaning that an eleven color litho would require eleven separate plates
4. United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees, the branch of the UN devoted to addressing the issues of displaced persons

## Works Cited

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