

Using art for personal transformation

This week, we asked some local creatives how art can change you as a person

We all know it's hard enough to create something that entertains or adds beauty to the world, and many would say that's enough. People are buying your books, CDs, or paintings? Excellent. You're obviously touching on something important, that has value to others.



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Let's go a step further: doesn't that art change you as a person? And should that be something you actively pursue? I talked to a few locals about this and, as usual, they had interesting thoughts.

How has your art served as a means for personal transformation?

Steve Gootgeld, artist: "One of my passions is to explore quantum physics and existential thought. It challenges the idea of who we think we are and reduces the ego's hold. Those newly discovered ideas or bits of knowledge fuel the creation of an original artwork or unique program."

Catherine Massaro, artist: "A life in the arts allows you to surround yourself with questioning and problem-solving minds, which contribute to keeping your eyes and mind open to unique points of view on just about everything."

Susan Mihalic, writer: "Writing allows me to embrace my weirdness. When you're a shy, introverted kid, it's painful to be different ... (and) writing was a source of solace. It helped me develop a rich interior life, (and) over the years I've become able to own who I am and the choices I've made, and I know this is because I identify so strongly as a

writer."

Tenney Walsh, musician, actor, and writer: "Acting was an outlet for me to express emotions I might not have felt comfortable with in day-to-day life. My music has been a more personal means of transmuting my observations and experiences and communicating them to an audience."

How have you used art to work through personal struggles?

Gootgeld: "If the artist's personal process of struggle can move, healing occurs."

Massaro: "Art has been the anchor for every storm that came along. Art orders my mind and answers questions that I cannot seem to understand or communicate effectively any other way. I let myself become overwhelmed with my struggle or question. As uncomfortable as it may get, I embrace the horror of a situation and that allows me to create my way out of it."

Mihalic: "Regardless of how devastating an experience is, I always find something in it I can use, even if it's just marking how god-awful it feels so I can draw on that feeling later. The experience itself rarely makes it into my fiction, but the emotional truth comes through, and knowing that I'm going to use it later gives me a path through it."

Walsh: "My one-woman show Watermark has been a way for me to talk about the effects of memory and trauma using monologues, songs, and humor."

Did you have a specific process?

Gootgeld: "About the only socializing in my life is with small groups of people for whom I have high respect. Our gatherings are about exploration and sharing of new ideas and projects, lots of support, and always exciting."

Massaro: "I love the conception of an idea. Finding one object or sentence, and using it as the inspiration to develop the larger story. I don't do sin-



gular pieces much anymore, I like the body of work that allows you to really investigate an idea."

Mihalic: "I'll make notes about an experience in an effort to make sense of it. Some of it will be a release of frustration or anger or pain, sensory detail, and how I felt about what happened."

Walsh: "Free-writing is a good way to prime the pump. I've also found it helpful to write in a group setting, and when I'm at the point where I need to work on my own a change of locale is helpful. I need to maintain a balance of hearing my own unique voice and not falling into a collective style."

Any recommendations for others?

Gootgeld: "Let go of what you think your gallery, collectors and museums want. The decision to follow one's path can be terrifying at times; again, it challenges who we think we are. On my last birthday I decided that nothing was going to stop me from what I really want to do. Things started rolling at that point."

Massaro: "Embrace the horror! Let

your art challenge you, and don't be afraid to try something way out of your comfort zone – you'll make new discoveries about yourself along the way."

Mihalic: "Devoting yourself to the practice of your art is an act of transformation. You don't necessarily need to say, 'I'm going to write my way to being a better person,' although mindfulness is rarely a bad thing. But doing the work, losing yourself in it, allows you to grow and become who you want to be."

Walsh: "Merely feeling an impulse to create something may not be a strong enough reason to share a work of art. (It) doesn't always translate into something meaningful for an audience. A vision of one's work having meaning beyond one's self can open up a path where other people can be transported by sharing your journey."

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