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The Artist

The artist has been a mystery to many of us: unexplainably driven in his work; seemingly unconcerned with any other aspects of his life; often oblivious to the world around him. The artists in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful," Barbara Pollack's "Stitches in time," and Carl Jung's "The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature" represent some or all of these characteristics. I decided to base this paper on these readings because I found the ideas presented in them interesting and worth exploring.

Jung writes a very interesting piece that examines the artist's source of creativity. He dismisses Freud's claims that art stems from the personal experience of the artist. Jung believes that the true essence of art grows from the "rising above the personal and speaking from the mind and heart of the artist to the mind and heart of mankind (para 156)."

Hawthorne also expresses this idea through his protagonist Owen Warland. Warland overcomes his feelings of frustration and rejection from society to complete his creation and express his ideas. Through his "beautiful" (his creation) he is finally able to show what occupies his mind and heart. Warland's audience - Robert Danforth, Danforth's wife Annie, their little son and Annie's father Peter Hovenden - is amazed

Warland has finally completed his “beautiful.” The reader experiences similar amazement with “Stitches in Time:” it is amazing how women who have little or no formal education, who spend most of their day farming, toiling and caring for families, can create such magnificent quilts from scrap material.

Quilting for these women is not a job or a chore but a necessity and an outlet for relaxation and expression; it is meant for their own pleasure and the pleasure of their families. Because these women and their families live in poverty there are no materials set aside for quilting. They use mainly worn-out work clothes and produce many ingenious patterns and styles. Unlike Warland they do not have to prove themselves to anyone and work without pressure, willingly and happily on their quilts. This does not mean, of course, that Warland viewed his art as a chore. By no means! It was time consuming and intense work but something he was determined to pursue and accomplish.

It is important to note the distinctions between the artists. Hawthorne's and Jung's artists fit perfectly the perceptions presented in the introduction while the women of Gee's Bend are the exact opposite. For the women, art fits into their day; for Hawthorne's and Jung's artists, life has to fit into their art.

Jung states that “an artist [he] is nothing but his work, and not a human being (para 156).” For Warland this is true. He fluctuates between periods of intense activity working on his creation and periods of deep brooding and greatly diminished drive and zeal. He often needs a reminder to rekindle his interest in making his “beautiful.” Whenever Warland was involved in his work he became the epitome of Jung's artist: his art seizes him and makes him his instrument (para 157) and he pays dearly for his

“divine gift of creative fire (para158)” through his diminishing health and the frustrations he experiences while trying to put some form to his ideas.

For the women in Gee's Bend their work represents them: their struggles, their lives their special brand of creativity. They incorporate their art into their day to day living, “making something from nothing (para 4)” using quilting as a form of self expression and pleasure. Arlinozia Pettway, one of the older quilters, states that “the power” of the quilts come from “the spirit in which they were made. 'These quilts we made in our own homes, with our minds, our eyes, and our hands. We made those quilts in our own image and we made them exactly how we wanted them to be' (para 8).” As Jung would put it, this creativity “arises from unconscious depths-we might truly say the realm of the Mothers (para 159).” Here Jung refers to the Gods as the Mothers who can be thought of as the source of everything, in particular extraordinary gifts.

Warland draws his creativity from nature and the mechanisms of things. He also turns to nature when he is in his time of depression and this source of inspiration often pulls him back on track and gets him all fired up to work on his vision after a slump. Warland also draws strength from Annie who he secretly admires. She triggers the last bit of energy he needs to complete his creation. Warland and the women at Gee's Bend draw their energy from different places but this source can be identified as one: a predominately creative force which propels the artist along the path to discovery.

Of course the artist is not appreciated by everyone and Hawthorne gives a good example of this in “The Artist of the Beautiful.” Warland's previous boss, Hovenden, although a watchmaker himself, condemns the occupation in preference for one where “main strength and reality, [and] to earn one's bread with the bare and brawny arm of a

blacksmith (para 9).”is a more favorable way to make a living. Society admires what art it can see and the art of the watchmaker pales in comparison to the art of the blacksmith. They both provide different services but needed services nevertheless, so should not both be equally appreciated? Jung notes that an artist “can be understood [as an artist] only in terms of his creative achievement (para157).” For many it is much easier to see and appreciate the work of the blacksmith and pity the watchmaker. Warland does not let this bother him. He either focusses on his work and puzzles over the problem of creating his minutiae masterpiece or dissolves himself into his work as watchmaker while harboring depression over his lack of progress in his creation.

Hawthorne also addresses the purpose of the artist: “the artist may not content himself with the inward enjoyment of the beautiful, but must chase the flitting mystery beyond the verge of his ethereal domain, and crush its frail being in seizing it with a material grasp.” Jung expresses a similar view of the artist, “so that ideas flow to him- he knows not whence; he is driven to work and to create - he knows not to what end; and is mastered by an impulse for constant growth and development - he knows not whither (para 157).” Both ideas view the artist as a being unsure of the source of the power within him but aware of how to use it. The artist must not be content with the beauty that surrounds him; he must go out and create more! The artist must create and move on, not forming any bonds with the art he created; simply appreciating the beauty of his work and the manifestation of that which started only as a dream: “When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality (“The Artist of the Beautiful”).”

Such a feat requires the artist to separate himself from the world as we know it and immerse himself in his art. Jung points out that the artist must sacrifice “happiness and everything that makes life worth living (para157)” in order to truly reach his potential, hence he may experience problems adapting and communicating with others. On this last point I agree with Jung. My view of artists and the “artsy” types, which aligns with the views of many people, has generally been persons who have some sort of problem with themselves, their family and/or their sexuality. Jung notes that the artist cannot have time to develop his human side for he must focus on his artistic side for “these are nothing but the regrettable results of his being an artist, a man upon whom a heavier burden is laid than ordinary mortals. A special ability demands a greater expenditure of energy, which must necessarily leave a deficit on some other side of life (para158).”

All three pieces portray artists who are driven to create, be it to fulfill their destinies or simply for pleasure. I believe the artist, like the women of Gee's Bend, should not separate himself from the world around him but immerse himself in the wonder that is life and draw from it the energy to create.