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ARTFUL LIVING

By Scott LaFontsee



Art has become more important in light of September's tragic events. The museums in New York City opened their doors free of charge in the weeks following the attack, and they were filled with people looking at art, trying to find beauty, peace, and understanding.

Artful Giving

In the weeks following September 11th, 2001, the museums in New York City opened their doors free of charge and were filled with people looking at art, trying to find beauty, peace, and understanding. The directors of these museums call the offer "Sanctuaries of Respite and Contemplation." People are looking for a place to escape the outside world, if only for a short while. A friend told me that listening to music has a greater impact on him now, allowing him to find his center and helps him get in touch with himself. All of the arts offer that respite, a place for rejuvenation. We have seen this first hand at the gallery as well. Many of our friends, artists, and clients have been stopping by the gallery to view art and reflect, looking for a place to wander and rest from the thoughts that seem to plague all of our minds, and to possibly find some inspiration.

Inspiration is sometimes difficult to find, whether we're looking for artistic inspiration or just the inspiration to go on, to forge ahead, of to help others and ourselves. Gift giving and the holiday season can tax our inspiration levels, but can be the most fun and rewarding if we choose to enjoy the time with family and friends, and give to each other because we want to and not because it's expected.

This is an attempt to look forward and to see this approaching holiday season as a time of possibilities for sharing ourselves in artful

giving. As we prepare for the winter and for the holidays, we organize get-togethers for work and play and we plan parties and decorate our spaces. Gift-giving this holiday season carries more importance to me than in previous years. I'm thinking more carefully about the people around me, their connection to me, and what's important to them. I can think of a few ways to give thoughtfully and artfully at the same time.

MAKE ART:

There's nothing like receiving a gift that someone took the time to make. You don't have to be an artist to be creative. Write a poem or story, paint a painting, make ornaments for their tree, or knit a sweater. The time and energy spent making gifts has great rewards, and taking precious time to make a gift says a great deal about how much you care for that person. Also, being creative and making time to spend on artful projects will be just as rewarding to you as it is to artists that create on a regular basis. The process of making art is one of the main reasons artists work. Just remember not to bite off more than you can chew. If you plan on making gifts, give yourself plenty of time and be realistic: too much work making



presents at a busy time of year may cause more stress than is necessary.

GIVE SUPPORT:

Another way to give artfully is to help others make art. This doesn't have to cost anything. Give an encouraging word to someone who shows interest in wanting to be creative or is working on being creative. You can give support by supplying materials and equipment or help inspire them by simply

taking them to see art. There are many wonderful programs planned for this time of year: museum exhibitions, musical concerts, dance programs, and theater productions. Giving tickets to these events is a wonderful way to get out and enjoy the arts. Season tickets can be found for many series at affordable prices. Gallery exhibitions are in full swing, and the Third Friday gallery tour is a great way to get a taste of what is new and alive in the visual arts in West Michigan. Help someone take a class that supports their creative side. Many colleges have diverse classes in all mediums and fields including dance, painting, printmaking, photography, writing, and music. Taking a class not only provides invaluable instruction but requires someone to set aside time to create. For some media, classes provide access and use of facilities and equipment, such as kilns to fire pottery or printing presses for printmakers. Instruments are provided in music classes for those without. If the college environment is not for you, try a non-traditional venue like The New School, which has art classes in many media for all ages. Also, some artists may give personal instruction to individuals or small groups.

A trend that's been growing in the past few years is going or sending someone to art camp. An art camp for adults is a gift that will never be forgotten. This adventure in art is the optimum experience in making art and has become an annual retreat for many. The experience of having no obligations except to be creative in an environment that is conducive to creating with as much or as little instruction as needed or wanted, is a great way to replenish our creative side.

BOOKS

Many people desire to make art but have a hard time getting started because they are confronted with fear. There are many excellent books written to help. Some aid in getting started while other address the excuses we make for ourselves that prevent us from making art: *Art of Fear*, *The Artist's Way*, or *Taking the Leap*. "How To" books help with everything from watercolor painting or learning to draw to woodcarving or metalworking.

A wonderful gift idea and a good way to incorporate art into your life or a friend's are coffee table books about art. There is an unbelievable selection of books of art, photography, design, and architecture



available today, and most are printed with exceptional quality. As this market has expanded in recent years, the prices have also become more reasonable, especially considering that a good book will last forever. There are also many art books published with the budget-conscious in mind.

GIVE ART

Gift-giving can be the culprit of many headaches this time of year. Art can be a solution! The fallacies that "art is too expensive" or "I can't afford art" stand to be corrected. There are many galleries and gift shops that have small works and handmade crafts that are surprisingly affordable. An advantage of living in West Michigan is the exceptional quality of art available that is priced much more reasonably than what you would find in bigger cities.

Giving art together is a trend we have seen grow in the past few years. Combining the gift-giving pleasure allows you to purchase more expensive artwork together and get something you both really want.

FRAMING

Framing old and new family photos as well as photos of friends, trips or special occasions is a great way to preserve history, share events and remember good times. Framing can be elaborate or simple, from custom-made ornate frames to less expensive ready-made frames that you can put together yourself.

As you can see, the best way to give a meaningful gift doesn't rely on spending a fortune but making the time to give thoughtfully. This holiday season, let's all reflect on what's important, make time for ourselves and others, and give artfully. *Happy Holidays!*

