

CULTURAL PRESERVATION VERSUS LIFE

There is a new movement of art rippling through the global village. Art has long been associated with an individual's self expression, but a growing number of artists are approaching their creative talents with new fervour. Rather than focusing on purging their own emotional baggage, they are using their artistic abilities as a tool to raise awareness for global concerns. Drawing their inspiration from a sense of responsibility to serve society rather than indulge art for art's sake. It is known as Activism Art.

Photographer Tasha MG Hakeem has been traveling the globe extensively since 1994 when she graduated from high school. During her travels, she has witnessed many worldwide injustices which struck a nerve within her. "I have had my own share of injustice and know what it is to come from a place of feeling hopeless," she says.

The nerve she tapped sparked a passion to learn more and research the issues at hand. Tasha started photographing her trips, which she refers to as "research trips." The documentation

of what she saw became a record for her to share with others, as well as a method of understanding the issues with greater depth. "There is so much more to researching specific issues, it is about living with people, in their culture and in their mindset," the artist explains.

"I see photography almost as my ticket into another culture, another life," she continues to say, "not just to take their photo, a ticket into a long term relationship that I am able to walk with someone to see them come to a place of understanding their true value and worth."

"The specific issues that I have researched and travelled to understand so far in my work are the honour killings in the Middle East and homelessness in Hawaii," she says. "In Jordan I focused on understanding their honour and shame mindset which brings a lot of understanding to the motivation behind an issue."

Her current issue led her to South America's Brazil, where she researched "cultural preservation versus life." The result of her trip is a series of photographs exhibiting at Strega Café. "This exhibition is to further expose a human rights issue between Brazil's government and their idea that the preservation of a culture is more valued than the life within the Amazon Tribes," Tasha says.

Her photographic style has a documentary rawness that captures a moment as it is. She couples this with a digital effect of enhancing colour to heighten attention to specific areas of focus. For example, a series of close up shots of Amazon women's hands with blazing fire engine red nail polish that is beginning to chip. It appears that she is pointing out the juxtaposition of two cultural perspectives, a traditional tribal culture along with the polish of another culture.

The intentions behind her work, as she says is, "To challenge, to provoke, to stir dialogue, to move people into action, to challenge some of the elements of our mindset within our own culture."

Without knowing her intentions, I wonder if it would be as impactful? Would the images communicate this on their own? Or is it necessary to include words to fully capture the girth of the issue. In order to ensure the viewers receive the artist's desired intentions, of understanding the issues in Brazil, it might be more effective if each image toted a question or statement of thought provoking insight for the viewer to associate with each image. The danger of activism art is to become swept away by a pretty picture and lose sight of the purpose for the image.

Tasha is hoping to raise funds from the sales of her photographs to put towards issues and causes that are meaningful to her. "Artists of many mediums have a powerful tool in their hand and I think activism is for sure a role that any artist can take into their work," she says.

[LAURA HOLLICK]

VISUAL ART 'DIGNITY: CULTURAL PRESERVATION VS. LIFE'

Tasha MG Hakeem
@ Strega Café
19 King St. St. Catharines
Opening December 7 8:30pm,
artist talk 9:00pm
Show continues till: December 31