

Introduction to the Company of Ideas Forum

– Presented by Jeffrey Rubinoff –

I have been asked two important questions about this year's Company of Ideas forum: "What does war have to do with art?" And from my friend and artist Susan Cain: "How do your ideas manifest themselves in your work?"

In answering the first question, I have stated that artists map the human soul. I consider the soul to be the sum of all human knowledge. The artist works at the limits perceived to be the extent of that knowledge in a given time.

War has so permeated the ten thousand year history of agriculture and dominated the five thousand year history of civilization that it is impossible to map the human soul without navigating it. Navigating the hazards of war itself is the intent of this forum.

The second question is somewhat more complicated. I have argued that original art is not limited to a reflection of culture that is contemporary to it. During the Age of Agriculture—until liberated by the Enlightenment (and then only in measured steps)—the extent of all human knowledge was controlled by the privileged. Only the elite few were literate. The priesthood set the limits of the extent of human knowledge. The narrative of culture was both prescriptive and proscriptive. This served to perpetuate the rule of the warrior class very well.

For my generation of artists, culture was defined by marketing. The art market defined originality as novelty. I realized that to make original art with artistic depth I would have to return to the lineage of the ancestors—the history of art by artists. So began a dialogue with the ancestors, artist to artist via the work itself.

What I learned was that to be able to measure the inherent value of an artist's work is to be able to accept each artist's perception of the extent of the sum of all human knowledge in that artist's time. Original art is created beyond the limits of that extent and informs rather than reflects.

Consequently, original art itself becomes located on the map of the human soul and in so doing adds to the sum of all human knowledge. Original art and the human soul evolve together.