Research and Praxis for Social Engaged Arts Education in Southern Europe, Balkan and Mediterranean countries

Introduction

Why did we start InSEA seminars and how did it work?

The world of art education has been concerned with the ongoing global issues such as poverty, climate change, cultural diversity, inclusion, migration, political radicalization, marginalization, artificial intelligence, digitalization, posthumanism, eco-justice and postcolonialism. Although the field has been established as important subjects of school curriculum, the advocacy endeavors continue to take place all over the world. The advocacy attempts stem from the global financial crisis that threatens the funding for education, as well as the accountability that is connected with the market jeopardize the significance of the skills that an individual may develop when they engage in art practices. Eventually along with the advocacy attempts, a new interest arises for the usage of arts as a therapeutic and integration tool in marginalized communities (e.g. poor, immigrants, refugee communities). Also, an increased need rises about how education and arts education may support the cohesion of the society over the political radicalization.

Therefore art educators and other cultural workers are seeking for alternative modes of critique and collective action through the arts. This publication is an outcome of the InSEA seminar held during 16-18 July 2018 at the School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece. The roots for this seminar can be traced in events and actions created by art educators, artists and researchers from countries in the peripheral western south coast of Europe: The Iberian Peninsula, where the survival kit for art education was created by the members of the activist art education group C3. The group C3, coordinated by Cristina Trigo and Mª Jesús Agra-Pardiñas is an educational and artistic resistance cell proposing alternative ways for research and praxis in art education. The survival kit presented in the European InSEA congress in Lisbon 2015 suggested a slow pace way of living, promoting pauses and the creation of spaces to think/feel, to slow down, to restrain, and to make. The idea to start InSEA seminars followed the same logic: we wanted to create a possibility for encounters where art educators can be together, share their practices, inspire each other, and initiate conversations by making things together. Spaciousness was the main flavor of the event - we tried to offer not only counter-narrative to linear and goal oriented passes of time, but to create fertile intervals that sometimes provoke confusion, but also can be a potential for play, creation and learning.

Furthermore, it became a common sense to claim that knowledge production is certainly not neutral - the process is instilled with norms and values, which are being passed on through academic action. It is based on epistemologies that seek to confirm western hegemonic structures (Thielsch, 2019). Within the European framework, knowledge production is taking place in the “centres of Europe” reflecting the existing imbalance of power between East and West, North and South. What is considered to be socially engaged art education among scholars is often based on Western European concepts such as relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) which is considered as a door-opener for community participation, collaboration and collective actions. The purposes of such efforts mirror the main European
values – participation, diversity, civic engagement and democracy, and socially engaged artistic practices are seeing as a possible catalyst for change, although sometimes being very costly and elitist projects. Furthermore, different events within the academic context are happening inside the logic of hegemonic knowledge production, and often they reproduce inequalities and confirm imaginary differences between European center and periphery. Not forgetting the relevance of symbolic realm, this is also a consequence of the huge disparity in available resources and support that academics and students receive within their context. Certainly, there are efforts to transcend those divisions by suggesting different conference fees for different countries depending on their GDPs, or offering bursaries for PhD students. Still, these measures did not manage to overcome inequalities and those events where discourses are produced and reproduced are still dominated by Western European institutions. As the organizations of the academic conferences is a very expensive endeavor, big events often take place in developed countries, making it even more unattainable to “the periphery”.

After the financial crisis hit Europe, austerity measures were introduced to Southern countries and their image was constructed as a kind of a teenager who was incapable of taking good care of the future, recklessly spending money guided by the principle of instant gratification. These European children were seen as “unable to organize their lives democratically without guidance from another” (Buden [2009] in Petrović, 2014, p. 10). The somewhat infantilized representational position, transforms these geographical areas into objects of knowledge production. “The role of the periphery is to supply data, and later to apply knowledge in the form of technology and method. The role of the metropole, as well as producing data, is to collate and process data, producing theory (including methodology) and developing applications which are later exported to the periphery” (Connell, 2014, p. 211). The Balkan region specifically is constructed as a field of study: Yugoslav studies, post-communist studies, post-conflict etc., thus making a geographical area into a research one without agency.

Other European countries can also be part of the peripheral map, specially when we talk about art education. Models of cultural agency, education and art education coming from North Europe and North America had been a great influence upon curriculum development, teacher training and research in art education. The global art education landscape is characterized by the centrality and certain invisibility of geographically marginal practices and knowledge mainly because of the dissemination of academic publications in English language in journals with high impact factor, texts that are largely distributed in universities. A rush for number of quotations and publications with ‘impact factor’ is undermining the universities; carrying out a multinational business model of distributing information. Maybe is time to start to react against the model.

Another interesting factor is related to the places and types of congresses and conferences art education researchers use to attend. Normally in universities of Northern countries with very traditional formats of displaying information such as lectures by keynote speakers, presentations by participants and some workshops. Even if in the InSEA European congresses from the last eight years we can observe a move to more dialogic formats, we still need to enlarge the focus, the scope and the places.

We urge to consider how academic praxis and intellectual work produces place and what kind of critical-creative endeavor is needed as a counter action. Therefore, we see the seminar Research and practice of socially engaged art education as a proactive response to hegemonic knowledge production as we tried to take into account social, political and geographical context of knowledge making, talking, and writing. The seminar took place in Thessaloniki with the
attempt to create space for gathering and sharing that was organized beyond regular conference logic that follows rigid structure. The model of the seminar was dialogical and non-hierarchical, including interactive sessions where everyone had an active role, workshops and performances reminded us the crucial role of the body interaction in communication. Making things together, walking together, performing together removed participants from their comfort zones of written and spoken languages creating spaces for emotional conversations. Due to the small size of the seminar the dialogue was fruitful and everyone got connected overcoming linguistic difficulties and cultural differences. In the difference we reached connections and constructed links. We were able to be attentive to the small details, to perceive the subtle varieties of art education in its many forms and contexts, without judging from the academic gaze, but trying to understand through the slow pace of making together the small nodes of collective actions.

‘As long Thessaloniki exists; everyone will have a homeland’ wrote the Byzantine scholar Nikiphoros Choumnos in 14th century. The majority of the participants came from Balkan and Mediterranean regions, but the seminar in Thessaloniki also welcomed people from some Northern European countries, Brazil and Japan. The InSEA seminar took place at a crossroads of social transformation throughout history. Since ancient time Thessaloniki invited and offered shelter to many different groups and communities that eventually flourished. As a consequence these circumstances gave prominence to the significance of its location. In our days, Thessaloniki is still a solidarity center even if it has suffered from the contemporary financial crisis. The topic and content of the seminar was a response to a contemporary need for collaboration and creative exchange in Balkan and Southern Europe in order to foster interdependence of the several communities and prevent hostility.

Why socially engaged art education?

Contemporary artists have been eliminating the boundaries between the arts and the audience, creating relational forms for human communication and knowledge construction. They opened up completely different perspectives on levels of interaction between things and people proposing diverse roles for the arts in the society and providing tools that can be most useful in educational settings involving image, sound and movement as ways of knowing and interconnecting people. Globalization phenomenon caused a sense of fragmentation, loss of social bonds and alienation in many population groups in the world. Engaged artists believe that close working relationships among artists, arts organizations, and the broader community enable better living conditions for all and create a more sustainable environment for the arts, claiming a return to a social function of the arts and a non compromised role of the artist in the society. Some cultural workers point out the need to merge art in collective experiences often performative and political. Activist movements are growing in all the continents, raising critical interventions, provoking situations and creating collective situations to raise urgent issues and polemical questions that are often hidden by the hegemonic media discourses. In its many variations, such as “relational art,” “participatory art,” “community art,” or “socially engaged art,” these manifeststions often facilitate collective situations and promote greater participation and cultural agency (Emmelhainz, 2016).

Socially engaged arts education (SEAE) began as a pedagogical direction which purposes the civil engagement of participants. Whether it takes place in educational institutions or in the community, the evaluation of the projects depends on the ethical responsibility on the social concerns that the members of the action undertaken. In educational settings and especially in
public schools the aim is to shape the students’ civic role. Arts are seen as a means to enrich the experience of the participants with playful and creative ways. Yet, the interdisciplinary character of the SEAE is obvious in order to foster a dialogue and a direct social change. Whether this is only a short-term change, marking the difference with the goals of traditional politicized art, or a more enduring and influencing process, time will tell (Emmelhainz, 2013). The processes usually include collaborative and interdependent activities that make visible the individual perspectives and how the location affects the critical responses and thinking. As a consequence a sense of “community” is created through the elimination of conflicts that the SEAE evoked. Further, SEAE evokes a radical reappraisal of the modes, purposes and context of arts education. Schlemmer (2017) draws the pedagogical implications of Socially Engaged Art practice that foster a hybridized space beyond formal instructions. Art practice is encountered as an educational experience and vice versa. The critical and reflective actions as perquisites of an educational space become traits of art practices that are formed through an aesthetic process.

The participants

The seminar attracted many valuable contributions, also from other regions than the Balkan and the Mediterranean regions, but the majority of the articles submitted for this publication were from the latter. The focus on the Balkan and Southern European countries in this seminar gave space to certain topics to appear in the fertile intervals. Some might also appear in other places, others are site-specific.

Public space is seized by art education, stimulating energies and possibilities that sprout from the locations and, if needed, giving people alternatives to respond to a dominant way in which space is organized. In Czech Republic the grassroots art association Trafčka (2006-2014) initiated street art activities for young people and worked together with teachers to pass on techniques. This led to the new concept of ‘Public Pedagogy’, as noticed by Kamila Karagavrilidisová. In Serbia installations in the form of windows or portals were put in public space inviting people to paint their vision. Jelena Joksimovic explains that the aim is to express and then combine different feelings and understandings of educational practices. Vanja Zarić and other students of adult education at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade reveal that socially engaged art in liminal spaces has a great potential to initiate the transformation of individuals through the processes of participation and learning, as well as social practice and reality itself.

The senses play traditionally an important role in art education and in the Thessaloniki seminar the use of senses was stimulated in a specific way. They caused individuals to be more aware of the body and its surroundings. Antonio Félix Vico Prieto presents the idea of “turning vision into sound” which involves a technique of recording audio that reproduces the real conditions of human hearing, to show how a visual image may be transformed into a soundscape. María Lorena Cueva Ramírez presents ‘My hands tell you’, a practical proposal to work with hands, gestures and paint to get the message across. Her workshop has benefit from the cultural and linguistic diversity of the participants. Without oral language they are able to communicate messages, concepts or sensations to other people only using colors and hands. Another way of communicating without speech was developed by María-Isabel Moreno-Montoro, María Martínez-Morales and Nuria Lópeón-Pérez, in a system of body expressions. Ideograms that represent concepts are proposed in a performative act with a technical basis of action and documentary recording. Also Katia Panqrazi shows art as a common language in the project ‘Art
Lab x Kids’. The project was developed in Italy but the aim is to create a "travelling place" of creativity and knowledge, experimentation, discovery and learning through play. It is a place for educational meetings, training and collaboration. A space to develop the ability to observe with eyes and hands and to learn to experience reality with all the senses.

Myriam Romero Sánchez, reviews the dualism of standardized and real beauty and explores its socio-cultural consequences. She makes a distinction between divergent bodies and convergent bodies and then she explores those typologies with a large installation with an empty face in which the participants may temporarily transform. Melissa Lima Caminha uses embodied inquiry that is based on feminist and queer theories in order to uncover perspectives of the social construction of gender and sexuality. Combining video and photography with drawing made it possible for María de la Paz Barrios Mudarra to carry out artistic investigation of daily experience. With those means, sensations you have while doing routine actions in your house can be intensified as in the work ‘Invisible Woman’ is shown.

The artistic, nature, ecology and the social came together in new projects in Spain and Brazil. Carmen Andreu-Lara, and Rocío Arregui-Pradas describe a new Masters degree of Art at the University of Seville intertwining ecology, art and social contexts, as in the concept of ‘ecosophy’ by Guattari. The authors acknowledged the connections created by Spanish, Moroccan and Latin-American students in their curriculum. In Brazil Rosana Gonçalves da Silva also involves ecology in social contexts of learning - a tripolar process of self-learning, learning from others and learning from the earth expressed in Poetic language to raise the principles of the Earth Charter. In a public elementary school located in Brasilia she developed an experience of artistic ecoeducation/ecoformation and sensitive experience in school routine.

In Cyprus and Greece, socially engaged art education is also about war and refugees. Spyros Koutis started his artistic research dealing with war from a personal question: what is my responsibility as an artist in regard to war? With use of ‘Agonistic arts practice’, a form of arts based research, which explores the potential of art to have political impact through process of disruption, subversion, and participation, he developed socially engaged art projects-workshops related to Syrian war and refugees. He carried out the projects with children at a primary school and with young adults at the Birmingham City University.

Martha Christopoulou describes the project “depictions of a refugee’s journey” which aimed at (i) enabling primary school students to critically assess information provided by the mass media (ii) enhancing their understanding of empathy and (iii) increasing compassion and empathic behaviour towards distant strangers who face extreme circumstances in their lives. All the students that participated in this project managed to locate, identify and label the different facets of migrant-refugee crisis, in a way that was meaningful for them.

Cultural regional traditions often are defended in war contexts with different population groups. In this seminar very interesting art educational projects were organized concerning local community and cultural traditions. Maria Letsiou describes socially engaged art education (SEAE) in which the primary goal of art learning is students' involvement with the community’s concerns and issues. She delineates how studio-oriented learning is enriched by the collaborative learning experience and by students' meaningful participation in the process and content of learning. Antonia Batzoglou describes practical applications of the praxis of Mythagoria: an interdisciplinary praxis that draws from mythology, the educational art of psychagogia, as defined by Socrates, and the therapeutic and reflective qualities of performative storytelling. Socrates describes psychagogia as the educational art of leading the psyche towards dialectical examination of the good. In mythagoria, myths are the tools that
enable an embodied experience and dialectical reflection of social and personal themes. Ismini Sakellariadi presents the results of a project carried out by 15-year old students of the Experimental School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who used art to research and communicate a new understanding of their cultural identity and history. They looked at the way the past permeates the present in various ways, studied the multicultural past of their city and discovered untold stories. They then proceeded to communicate their artwork and their findings with the wider community, hoping to help bring about change in attitudes and beliefs regarding history, identity, minorities, multicultural symbiosis, human rights and social justice.

Conclusions and recommendations

Some of the topics, or parts of them, that appeared in this seminar, could also be discussed in Western-European conferences. But the focus on Balkan and Southern-European countries shed a light to different aspects. This publication brings up so many voices, different tunes, different colors but the same concern: education through art, an approach to arts in education that although old - Herbert Read seminal book ‘Education Through Art’ was published in 1943 - is still relevant. More than ever we need to believe in the power of the arts as a tool for making collective actions, as a pedagogical strategy to enable cultural participatory skills. Maybe we are witnessing a recession of arts in schools, we see that art education is not as valued as it was in the twenty century. But through the voices and stories of this book we can look further and embrace the different places where education may be art and art may became education.

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In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis, Art Educator, Cyprus

In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it?

Abstract

17 years after the beginning of the new millennium and it seems that people have not learned anything as hostilities and war continues as normal e.g. Afghanistan; Iraq; Syrian Civil War (Wheeler, 2015). And how does humanity respond? With likes, comments and shares in Facebook. Every day people die but we do not react. That was the trigger that started this project.

Someone has to do something, but who is able to as people had transformed in "modern" slaves; as new forms of "oppression" have recovered everything with gold "ribbons; [...] the badge of slavery (Orwell, 1946, p.13)". Orwell raises the issue of liberty in a rather ironic way. On the one hand, liberty is a fundamental human right that we deserve; people, though, are not usually concerned when they are not personally affected.

But who is ready to do the same; to raise the issue of liberty and war? Who and how? This is the question. Does my identity as an artist oblige me to do it? A query I was sceptical about. What is my responsibility as an artist in regards with war? A question I asked 120 people to answer through my Facebook account, in order to see the public opinion. Although the sample was not big 'but enough to get a general opinion, the only thing that is sure is that the role of an artist in war circumstances is not coherent, but subjective.

Nonetheless, is art actually a powerful weapon? Can it change the world? Is an image so powerful? In order to find the answers it is studied “Guernica” painting of Pablo Picasso, the now-iconic photo of the drowned Syrian infant refugee and the Death and Disasters series of Andy Warhol; by concluding that "The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel" (Warhol, 1980, p.72).
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it; and how could an artist do it?

Hence, finally can art do something? The answer is yes, but in a different way. There is a more direct engagement of art with society. A good example is the “7000 Oaks project” of Beuys (1982); a project that was a step for world social changes (Yang, 2015). Beuys’ work represents a constantly evolving social transformation of art globally. Instead of influencing social changes through artworks, art transforming into a medium of social change through the procedure of producing art (Yang, 2015). These practices usually have called socially engaged art (SEA) or social practice.

Thus, I run SEA projects-workshops related to Syrian war and refugees with students of the Birmingham City University (18-25), and the students of the Greek primary school “Apostolos Andreas” (Year 4-6), in United Kingdom. Result of these workshops was the “creation” of people who created art that encourages questions, provokes questions marks and raises serious issues related to war and humanity.

Art is a constant effort for everyone to contribute to the creation of new knowledge, to the help of change the thinking about the change of circumstances; even with their own small part.

*Key words: The Power of Art, Socially Engaged Art (Education), Syrian War*

*Methodology/Methods:*

I chose as a methodology the agonistic arts practice as it connects inextricably with the rationale of my project. Agonistic arts practice is a form of arts oriented research which explores the potential of art to have political impact through process of disruption, subversion, and participation; something that I will try to do through these methods. “[…] this agonistic approach is particularly suited to grasp the nature of the new forms of artistic activism that have emerged recently and that, in a great variety of ways, aim at challenging the existing consensus” (Mouffe, 2007, para.14). Lastly, its name “Agonistic practices” is not accidental. The word agonistic derives from Ancient Greek ἀγών (agon) which means fight, efforts or struggle (Wiktionary, 2017). It is not easy but you have to try if you want to see “the change”.

But, I did not quit as these workshops were part of my fight, my endeavor and my methodology.

Also, I will use social media (Facebook) in my research in order to have some data from different countries around the world. It is interesting for me to see how people react through social media and how in the real world. “Social media websites offer rich, naturally-occurring
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For example Mollie, a character from the allegorical novella of George Orwell “Animal Farm” (1946), is someone who is oppressed whereas Snowball, another character from the same novella, is someone who is rebellious. “Comrade, said Snowball, those ribbons that you are so devoted to are the badge of slavery. Can you not understand that liberty is worth more than ribbons? Mollie agreed, but she did not sound very convinced” (Orwell, 1946, p.13).

Sometimes oppressed deny to see the truth because gold ribbons shine. Orwell refers, in an ironic way, to the liberty of being as a powerful right that we deserve but as something that we do not want to “hear”. But, without our liberty we would have no right to speak, think or act without obstruction or restriction.

Overall, as Orwell (1946) claimed, “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear” (p.13). But who is ready to do it; to fight for someone else? Especially when is not personally affected. Who and how could he/she do it? This is the question. Me? And “why me”? Does my identity as an artist oblige me to do it? Should it? Do I have more responsibilities than others?

Part two: The responsibility-role of artists in war circumstances and what people believe about that

A query I was sceptical about. What is our/my responsibility as a human being; and particularly what is my responsibility as an artist in regards with war? A question I asked 120 people (from different countries of the world in the age range of 18 to 25) to answer through my personal Facebook account, in order just to see (in general) the public opinion around the world (of people of my time). More specifically, the question was: In the face of war, the artists have an imperative to make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree or disagree and why? If the answer is positive, how could an artist do it?
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it?

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As we can see the answers varied. Some of the participants had got a lot to say and some others not. But most of the participants (21%) who answered to the question agreed that art impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree or disagree with this?
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it? 

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Ai Weiwei, a well-known Chinese activist and artist, is one of them and he has been addressing human rights for many decades (Fehily, 2016). This time, Ai Weiwei recreates the now-iconic 2015 photo of drowned infant Alan Kurdi (See Appendix 3 - Image 2), which washed up on a Turkish beach, by posing as a drowned Syrian infant refugee on a beach of Lesbos (Greek island), as part of projects dealing with the refugee crisis (Tan, 2016). The photo “[…] posted on the Facebook page of Ai’s studio with the hashtags #refugees and #Lesvos […]” and became viral in social media whereas he accepted strong criticism (Tan, 2016, photo caption). For example, “A headline in The Spectator called it “crude, thoughtless and egotistical” (Fehily, 2016, para.6). Lastly, Ai’s idea does not achieve what he thinks he set out to achieve. It was just a meme that got attention (Fehily, 2016).

But why I have referred to these artworks of Ai Weiwei and Pablo Picasso; two different artists, two different centuries 20th and 21st, respectively. Although there is a difference between the image of Guernica then and the images we have access in the 21st century, there is also a similarity; both of them focused on the power of image. But how strong is an image? Can only an image affect the behaviour of people and how does this relate to our century?

In 1989, Andy Warhol claimed that “The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel” (Warhol, 1980, p.72).

“Andy Warhol knew about the numbing effects of a multiplicity of images decades before the internet existed. In his Death and Disasters series, Warhol snatched images of catastrophes from newspapers and reproduced them en masse (See Appendix 3 – Image 3), highlighting how the media’s profligate use of images could desensitise us” (Fehily, 2016, para.13).

And as today we live in the society of the image and every day we tackle so many images, through social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and other resources, about Syria and refugees an image can only shock us for some seconds and then we return to our lives. “No one should be feeling better or emptier now about the status of refugees.” […] “The danger here […] is the very real possibility of diluting a worthy cause” (Fehily, 2016, para.14).

Hence, finally can art do something? The answer is yes, but in a different way.
Chapter four: Socially engaged art

The world history of art has seen a more direct engagement of art with society over the past half-century. In 1982, when Joseph Beuys was invited to make a project for the next Documenta 7 in Kassel, he planned to ask “for the planting of seven thousand trees throughout the greater part of the city” (Yang, 2015, p. 211). When he talked about the 7000 Oaks project he said:

“I rejected the plan to make a kind of sculpture there in this old way […] I told him that my idea would be this time to plant […] seven thousand trees. And to mark every tree with a little stone, so that everybody after three, two, five or six hundred years can still see that in 1982 there was an activity […] This is such a kind of activity during the Documenta, that has to do with the Documenta, but is a real other thing in the conventional understanding of art (Beuys, 1990, p.185).

It is obvious that Beuys was talking metaphorically and literally at the same time; literally because he was talking about the planting of the trees (as the German forest was radically destroyed) as an “activity” (Beuys, 1990). But, what he was actually meaning with the word “activity”? The aim of Beuys was not just the reforestation but the whole organization of the project and the effort for “change” as well as the meaning for the next generation. The

“[…] project resulted in a series of conversations among local community councils, associations, and citizens concerning a variety of issues, ranging from where the trees would be planted […] to […] their impact on city planning […] The event of planting trees also created a stage where people met and communicated with each other” (Yang, 2015, p.11).

Beuys offered to participants “food for thought” via his project. He “planted” the seed of curiosity and knowledge about art and tomorrow “[…] and its ability to effect changes in society” (Yang, 2015, p.11).

Kassel’s project was just the first step in an ongoing afforestation plan as part of a global mission to make environmental and social changes (Yang, 2015). Beuys initiated it and then he let it to grow unaccompanied, enabling to “[…] transforming into collective creativity […]” (Yang, 2015, p.12).

Beuys’ work represents a growing and constantly evolving social transformation of art globally. Instead of influencing social changes through artworks, as it is writing in most chapters of art history, art transforming into a medium of social change through the procedure of
producing art, and the social change is becoming an artistic tool (Yang, 2015). “These practices have expanded the field of art production beyond the conventional venues such as galleries and museums” (Yang, 2015, p.11). They focus on addressing political and social issues that they appear in real social contexts, often beyond the boundaries of the social branches, and they depend on and evaluate the cooperative participation of people in communities (Yang, 2015).

During the last decades these practices changed a lot of names as things were adding and removing from different arts and cultural programs as well as social service organizations and universities (Yang, 2015). Today, we (often) use the term socially engaged art (SEA) or social practice, but there is not only one articulate definition. For instance, Canada Council for the Arts (2012) defined it as: “Actively engaging more people in the artistic life of society notably through attendance, curation, active participation, co-creation, learning, cultural mediation, and creative self-expression” (p.3).

While Pablo Helguera (2011) characterized the most decisive feature of SEA its dependence on social contact as a factor of its existence. “Social interaction occupies a central and inextricable part of any socially engaged artwork. SEA is a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art [...]” (Helguera, 2011, p.8).

Moreover, as I have already referred to above socially engaged art is also known as social practice. For example according Shannon Jackson, social practice is “an interdiscipline that integrates experimental aesthetic movements with the traditions of social science and social theory” (Jackson, 2008, p.136). Thus, according to Helguera although the two terms are often interchangeable, the usage of term “social practice” stresses “[…] the artist’s function as a free agent […]” that involves working with society as part of his profession “[…] instead of the artist’s creativity and self-consciousness […]” in criticism and consequently he wonders if these practices still belong to art (Helguera, 2011, p. 3).

In brief Socially Engaged Art is a trend, fluid and constantly changing in modern art rather than a defined “genre” (Yang, 2015, p. 13). These practices demonstrate the diversity and the contingent nature - under SEA projects vary and differ from each other based on their aims and the working methods (Yang, 2015).

So, aligning my ideas and my knowledge about art and education studies I run some socially engaged art projects-workshops related to Syrian war and refugees with young adults, who were studying at the Birmingham City University, (18-25) and the students of the Greek-Cypriot primary school “Apostolos Andreas” (Year 4-6), in Birmingham (United kingdom).
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis

Chapter Five: My practice: Socially Engaged Art projects-workshops

a) Greek Primary School of Apostolos Andreas (Year 4-6 - SEA School Project)

Aims: to familiarize children with the main events of the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the Syrian Civil War (2011-) and the connection with refugees and the immigration to England. Children must know what happened in order to be able to decide and envision the future of world as the Future Generation. Children will be able to express their thoughts and feelings about these events; and to create art sending their own messages.

Work style: Children work either individually or in small groups. Some activities are run for the whole class.

Activity 1:

- Mixed photos of 1974 and of 21st in Cyprus. Each group puts the pictures in the chronological correct order and presents its choices (justification of them).

Activity 2:

- Recognition of the locations-places of the photos (related to the invasion of Cyprus) and description of them. Reference to the main events of 1974; emotions and thoughts. Dialogue with questions: How Ledras (border crossing in Nicosia - Capital of Cyprus) was and how is it today - What has changed? (borders, outposts, green line, wire mesh)

Activity 3:

- Comparison of the events of 1974 with similar situations of today. Imaginary walk in Syria - Close your eyes and think how you will go in Syria. What can you see there? What can you listen? What can you smell? Who do you meet? Where do you go? Reopen your eyes. How do you feel after this imaginary visit to Syria? Problematization exists about the futility and the horror of the war.
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it?  
Spyros Koutis
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis

4 - Images 1-10), photos that show processes and activities (See Appendix 5 - Images 1-3) and what have been said during workshops.

As you can see from the artworks, children have envisioned a better future for these people. Their drawings depict a better world without war and it is significant to educate an antiwar Future Generation. For example, one of the children had written in his drawing (See Appendix 4 - Image 3) that "No matter who you are or where you come YOU can make a difference” and that is something very important. Even he/she is too young he/she understood that all humans are equal and have the possibility to make a difference, to make a change.

Further to that, the fact that they had the initiative to organise an art exhibition in order to share their experiences and thoughts from the workshops with the public means that the "activity", as Beuys (1990) was calling, was successful. It [...] created a stage where people met and communicated with each other" (Yang, 2015, p.11). Children used their weapon, their voice versus the warfare; promoting political change.

Except the above, considerable is the feedback too. Reflection is an integral part of the whole procedure and it is essential. One of the participants said “Today I enjoyed working with my friends to create a positive war poster” and another one said “I enjoyed today’s lesson and I learnt a lot about the war and how to help” (See Appendix 6 – Image 1). It is significant that participants collaborated and interacted through the activities and they produced art as well as the fact that they involved in the “whole project” and the organization of the art exhibition; as it was a school project between 3 different classes (Year 4-6).

Consequently, the workshop achieved its goals as a SEA school based programme but the fight for social turn never stops. We just planted the seeds for the future.

b) Young adults (18-25), students of Birmingham City University

Aims: to familiarize participants with the Syrian Civil War (2011- ), the connection with refugees and the immigration to England. Participants will be able to express their thoughts and feelings about these events through interaction, reaction, involvement, creation and reflection sending their own messages. As the Today’s Generation, they must be able to think critically, decide and envision the present

Work Style: Participants work either individually or in small groups. Some activities are run for the whole group.
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

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Workshop 1+3: nobody attended
Workshop 2+4: attended

Activity 1:
- Introductory play. Who you are? Why did you come?

Activity 2:
- Mixed photos from different places (before and after the Syrian war). Put them in order and justify your choice. Presentation in groups and discussion. Recognition of the place.

Activity 3:
- Imaginary walk in Syria. Close your eyes and think how you will go there. What can you see; listen; smell? Where do you go? Who do you meet? Reopen your eyes. How do you feel after this imaginary visit to Syria?

Activity 4:
- Presentation of today's images from Syria. Have you seen them again? Where?
- How do you feel? What are you doing about this? Is it your obligation? Is it an obligation of somebody else? (artists) What could we do? What can you do?

Activity 5:
- How could you do this in this SEA workshop? - Discussion about different topics: a sudden event-the bombardment, escape and separation, border crossing, how do you imagine this place and these people in the future?
- Providing art supplies and other material - creation of the artworks through different techniques like stage photography, installation, drawing.
- Observation and discussion about the artworks.

Reflection - Closing
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis

Chapter Six: In Closing

Art is a constant effort for everyone to contribute to the creation of new knowledge, to the help of change the thinking about the change of circumstances; even with their own small part.
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

22. “I agree that artists can help us come together. I think there’s many ways, but perhaps one that is really powerful is if the viewers are involved somehow in the art, and ideally if people would meet other people - strangers - through some sort of art piece. Maybe?”

23. “I utterly agree because artists who are usually designers in this case could design a campaign to wakes people up from their indifference and to make them realize the facts about war. In order to stop war, to change the world for peace, more people need to realize more about the true facts of war. An artist has different unique perspective towards things and is trained to think an effective creative idea that has the power to persuade many.”

24. “I totally agree, because through war we learn the different meaning of art. Through art people come together and show their emotions. Through art People changed.”

25. “Every artist has the potential of having a strong impact on people. This impact hugely depends on the personal experiences that a person has gone through. For instance, people who have experienced war or any sort of conflict are more likely to become influenced by artists’ work. I firmly believe that artists can make a difference and considerably influence our way of thinking. However, the difference that an artist can make can be interpreted in multiple ways. The conceptualization of change might range from raising awareness and compassion to concrete acts of prevention of such violent and cruel events in the future. The point I want to make here is that an artist can hardly predict or determine the impact that his/her work will have on people. In other words, the impact that art can have is not determined only by the creator/artist/producer but also by the recipient/spectator.”

26. “I agree. In times of war it’s necessary to show people the reality of what is happening. The social media hide what really happens in the warring countries for their own benefit. However the artists are more “free” and can show the world the cruelty that is lived. In
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

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Appendix 2

In the face of war, the artists have an imperative to make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree or disagree and why?

In general, I don’t agree with the statement because many artists use art as a medium to express their feelings, for example as an outlet of their stress or their personal opinions or emotional sentiments that they wanna let out somehow. That’s why I think that they don’t have any obligation to make art that will impact us. It will impact one viewer or another anyway, when we can relate to the piece of art, but that doesn’t really have to be the artist’s intention.

1. “I don’t think the artists want to wake us through their art work they may do more so for commercial/purpose, like protesting for peace. I always think they just express themselves when I saw the art pieces in museums. I get to feel “different” or “inspired” because they manage to arouse a similar feeling in me. So it might be the common feeling that matters! But who knows what that commonality in feeling is and who will be the one that feels it.”

2. “I don’t think the artists want to wake us through their art work they may do more so for commercial/purpose, like protesting for peace, I always think they just express themselves when I saw the art pieces in museums. I get to feel “different” or “inspired” because they manage to arouse a similar feeling in me. So it might be the common feeling that matters! But who knows what that commonality in feeling is and who will be the one that feels it.”
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3. “Yes, I agree completely. I even think that it’s their obligation. Cos the artists a public figures as well. With their brightness they should lead people with the ideas or the arts they are creating. It has some positive sides. Firstly, it is the sign that they are not indifferent to the problems community faces which will bring the fame and eternity to their arts. On the other hand it will awake others and impact the way they thinks. Artist can do it by the painting he does, musician can do it by the music they compose and etc.”

4. “I totally agree, without artists’ freedom and new developments, societies wouldn’t have developed as well. It is the duty of the artist to provide a new glance into reality, within its own scope and view. It is the duty of the artist to shake the public as technology and media have transformed us into zombies. It is the duty of the artist to express his/her views without censorship, boundaries or fear without the need of money reimbursement, without the need to sell, but the need to provide. Open windows to the public, with new means of expression, always in respect of him/herself and the viewer.” 😊

5. “Disagree. It is true that the artists are trying to awaken people and mobilize them against the war. In reality, however, the only thing they do is to get positive feedback about their work and nothing above. Minimally organized clusters have been stepped up to support the civilians and fight the war. Their motivation was their ideology and not the art. Of course, ideology is inherent in art, but it is not what motivates real changes in the world.”

6. “I do agree. Artists need to wake us from indifference because I fear media and politics are not always doing it the right way. They are (politics) not telling us enough or (media) telling us the latest bits but forgetting the bigger picture, the story. We lose ourselves in small items, but forget what it is really about. And an artist doesn’t have to tell the objective truth, because that’s not possible. But they can tell us their story which can be representative for a lot of other people living in war.”

7. I agree, I think it is everyone’s duty to wake up actually but artists have ways that others do not, so if they can do something, they should! As to how they could do it... Well everyone is special and their art is special as well. The way you do art would be different from mine because we are different people. We have had different experiences in our
past which have influenced us and still do, we have different backgrounds, cultures, religions... Everybody is unique and so is their art, so I cannot really say how an artist could do it. From my point of view, using shocking images could help make people realize the horrors of war, because that's means to create emotions and we remember better because of emotions. So I would probably recommend making people experience strong emotions. But at the same time powerful images can also be about small but significant details.

It says

"Anybody can react. Anybody can resist. Anybody in their own way"

8. "I do think art but also design, journalistic is trying to break the boundaries of the constricted freedom. So I agree that artists have a task in breaking the constriction. I do think people are aware of the constriction and thereby I don't think artists are due to waking people up, but the artists are an inspiration of the battle to the boundary. The artists are the voice of a free will/ a free society in a battle of power. An artist can give individuals a voice in a time where everything is bigger and has more power than humanity. War is not only restricting freedom of speech and action but will also affect people in their ability to unroll themselves. As in the pyramid of Maslow. The urge of surviving and living in fear is bigger than development of the individual. Artists can inspire people to develop within the restriction of people survival mode."
9. “I don’t know, I think I disagree, because it doesn’t have to be the time of war for the artist - a powerful artist - to make an impact if that makes sense.”

10. “I agree up to point, because in my opinion, art during war really impacts us and wakes us from our indifference but the strength of this impact is not big, unfortunately. Also, art doesn’t have an impact to lots of people. An artist could promote his/her work through social media, so more and more people would be informed about the point that the artist want to promote.”

11. “I think it is a difficult question. I think an artist should relate his/her art to war, but, on the other hand, it should not be obligatory because art should also exist for its own sake. I think art should still be free to serve whichever purpose the artist wants it to. But still, I think it is good if artists try to show current problems with their work. They could create art that criticizes the current state and thematize contemporary problems. (Since I am not an artist myself, it is hard for me to say how exactly they could do it)”

12. “Yes sure. I think artist do have a strong impact in the politics world. For example in my country there is one artist who does a work about the corruption. With the work, is do gives a different view of the government and it also got an international coverage. That make the people question it and without realizing that art is the method to deliver a (certain) message. The artist also have been banned and the got some bad reputation to the authorities because of it action. Maybe his way of showing it is too much. I’m not supporting the artist or the government in this case, but art do trigger something, made them (the people) question about the government establishment itself. For me that’s good enough.” 😊

13. “I agree with your statement saying that art is a universal way of communication that is easily understandable. That’s why artists should use it to express their message against war. Then history showed us that artists have always used art to reach people’s minds. The first example that came into my mind is Guernica from Picasso. He pictured all the emotions of the war, that’s a great example of communication. In modern times another example is Bansky that demonstrates that is message, full of political and satirical contents, can reach even the youngest.” 😓
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis

14. “I agree because it’s a way of expression sometimes more powerful than words. Art is everywhere.”

15. “Yes, I absolutely agree because we can visually communicate what is going on the pain and the frustration as well as the love and compassion for humanity. An artist is a visual communicator and can speak to everyone and relate to them. Before our separate issues differences we are all human first!”

16. “I strongly agree with this opinion. Art is supposed to make us feel something; it is supposed to have a meaning. From the dictionary “art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power” In our society we are so focused on ourselves jobs, life that we often read the news and feel so away from everything we need something powerful to wake us up with social media too. In an era of connection and communication we are so closed to our small world that we need people to impact us and make us think beside our small box and art can do that. It can communicate messages through the whole world with just a picture, a painting a sculpture an artist can do what artists do. Create something that is meaningful that it has a message, he/she can communicate their art to other people make them think take them out of their comfort zone meaningful.” 😊

17. “I absolutely agree with that opinion. People should wake up and artists will achieve through their art that by inspiring not only the world but the whole universe. An artist could do it with various ways. Exhibitions of art pieces in city centers will bring people together to discuss, art seminars also and workshops for the Youth will solve some other issues like unemployment, supportiveness of people with disabilities etc. Artists could also analyze their art in the public so that the viewer gets generally a better and an overall view.”

18. “Yes, I agree, I think it’s important that there are some forms of art that impact us in a way which makes us think and wakes us up from our indifference because that’s what art is also supposed to do. How an artist could do it, I don’t know. That depends on the artwork of course, there’s a million ways he could do it. He could paint something provocative, he could make an art installation, he could do something disruptive in a
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public space, and he could use digital and social media to interrupt people's lives. I don't know? I'm sure there's more creative ways."

19. “Before giving a direct answer to the question of imperative, I believe it is important to define what an artist's role in the society is and, thus, his/her moral and ethical duties. The concept of imperative comes from Immanuel Kant's moral thesis which is based on respecting human dignity. It can, thus, be said that any human, regardless of its role, has to do whatever is best to preserve and respect human dignity (human rights and universal values). I particularly see artists as those people who have the amazing ability to see beyond the surface of things, to reflect their deep understanding of the world in an artistic manner (through music, visual and performative arts). Therefore, good artists always manage to raise signals and awareness regarding critical facts of life through the maturity of their work (either socio-political or cultural). However, there has always been a critical debate around the relation between art and politics, making art for art's sake or taking it close to activism. I think that an artist's duty anytime should be to create good work (in terms of both aesthetics and message) in response to the world and I am sure that this way it will have a beneficial impact on people's levels of awareness and self-reflexivity. It's a very sensitive topic.”

20. “Your interesting question made me reflect a lot. Well, put in this way, and considering that artists could and would still keep working with their art in face of war, I would agree with that. About how the artist could do it is a more difficult question for me to answer. But I would say they could use art that results in more interactions with the people. Like installations and public performances, be them any kind of art: painting, sculptures, music and so on.”

21. “Yes artists have a very vital role in the war to wake us from our indifferences and in many instants the artists have woken up the people to be closer to each other. Many artists often become very big revolutionaries or the revolutionaries are the big artists themselves. I will like to highlight that music and poetry plays a very key role in this. The examples like Bob Marley, Bharat Singh from India wrote poems which were sung and are still sung for the people to motivate them and bringing the most out of them. The power of spoken word is immense. Often the peace days or independence days are
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Spyros Koutis

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the same way, from my point of view, artists use the emotion that is what people need to become aware of the situation.

27. “It is sure that art affects the lives of people, and it has used in some positive and negative ways (for example under the authority of imperialist forces: xitler, stalin...). Today art has an important role, because it can problematize people, remind them the mistakes from the past and awake them from their lethargy. However, it cannot change the world, but it can help in order not to take a completely wrong track... if it will use in the correct way.”

28. “Yes, of course, and as a spiritual person he can influence the public opinion ... through the art he represents. Through a painting he can portray the horrification of the war; through a musical piece he can show the emotion of the war.”

29. “Of course, art is a kind of power that can open the eyes and sensitize people for a better future, for a better (perhaps) human life. I agree that painters and generally those who involved in art, even with the art of photography, is right to act by sensitizing people and showing that problems and decay are not resolved by violence but by discussions and dialogues. They can publish posters, advertisements for anti-wars organization and paint the effects of wars on walls!”

30. “I do not know examples, maybe Guernica shows something. I do not know artworks. I believe that art has a power, but I do not know.”

31. “Yes, I agree with these sentences because Art even if you live in destructive conditions, can give speech to the artists and makes the people to fight for the values that we have as humanity. He/ She can visit bombed buildings and express the peaceful form of art on them, in order to give the message that we are all citizens of the same world. He/ She could represent the ‘Great World Leaders’ in a similar situation of war, in order to show the tragedy and comedy between reality, where the ‘Great leaders’ are in their offices while ordinary people are dying because of their decisions. He/ She spread the peaceful message of the world through simply actions every day and everywhere such as: to help, to share, to laugh, to live and to love!”
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32. “Plato once stated that “Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything”. I believe Plato’s statement reflects the power that art has in general. As far as numerous ideas, messages, ideals and stereotypes are “hidden” in each piece of art, we can certainly state that art impacts us and “shapes” (or at least affects) our beliefs and personalities. Therefore, using Art to fight war and hopefully reach peace, justice and equity is a brilliant idea.

In my opinion, the best way an artist can help us wake from our indifference is to make us feel we are part of the process. Placing ourselves in another’s position and realizing that this could have happened to us or our loved ones, certainly increases our empathy and hopefully reshapes our beliefs. Furthermore, people tend to be more sensitive when it comes to children, especially those who are parents. Having all these in mind leads me to think that a piece of art would have greater impact if it is related to children, and if it requires people’s participation and interaction. A good idea might be a combination of simulation-installation and social experiment, which would help people mentally travel to Syria for example, and see how it feels to lose your home, to being scared and trying to protect your family, and to see your loved ones dying.

Concluding, let me share with you the most wonderful experience I can recall, which has reinforced the faith I have in music education (I am a primary school teacher and music educator). This experience was during teaching one of my music lessons at a Primary School. On the particular class I was teaching, a new student had just arrived. He had come to Cyprus from Syria a few days before. He had lost his father in the Syrian war, he was unable to speak a word in Greek and he was obviously afraid and isolated from the other students. I had asked my students to sit in a circle to facilitate communication between them. The poor boy was able to participate by raising his hand for the first time. He even looked happy as he was laughing and bonding with the other children. He succeeded in becoming a valuable part of the team. This could not have happened without the incredible power music has to overcome boundaries such as language and the ability to bring people together. It is this capacity of music, and arts in general to change the world for the best that I adore and I believe in!”
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33. “I would personally mostly disagree with that statement because in my opinion someone who is an artist should be someone who creates what they create purely out of love for their craft. I feel somewhat that creating art with an aim to give someone a certain opinion on such a serious matter could potentially be dangerous because although it may seem that it draws awareness to a conflict for the ‘good’ side, people who are on the other side can also be impacted in the same way with similar effect. I believe making art with the main intention of having an effect on people takes away from the creativity, which should be at the core. However, I believe that an artist could do this effectively by creating art that has a focus on making the viewer ask questions about a situation, rather than being explicit. By making the scenario in the piece clear, it is more likely it will be seen and forgotten. By making the art striking, but without having an obvious theme or outcome makes the person viewing it ask questions about the context of the art, therefore meaning it will stay on their mind for longer and have more of an effect. A good example of an artist who achieves this is Banksy. His strong and unique style catches the eye, but his common use of juxtaposition (two opposite themes) makes the viewer question what the aim of the piece was (the protester with flowers).”

34. “Art was always influenced by the current political, economic and sociological movement, that’s how many artists transfer their thoughts into art. Most of the times they want to give a positive message and show the people that through art they can find peace of mind and relaxation. Art comes in different forms and no matter what cultural economical differences may people have, it always unites them.”

35. “In my opinion, artists can impact us and wake us from our indifference. My only concern about this question is the word “imperative”. In my opinion is not obligatory for an artist to activate the difference, change perceptions or points of view. The artist can do it, yes, but doesn’t have to do it. I can explain the word “imperative” in terms of implant mission. I believe that artists are born with the feeling of giving. The have the need to serve the society and give something back. Like every person who has a charisma, needs to offer it to others for self-satisfaction. On the other hand, not every artist has this feeling. In addition, some people call themselves as artists where some others disagree. So in order to answer this question we have to define the word “artist”. In my opinion there are several categories of artists. Hence, I will talk about one category which is the “server artist” and has the imperative to make art that impacts us and wakes us from our
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it?

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In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis

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**Appendix 4**

*Photos of children’s artworks*

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*Image 1*
In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive; can art do it; and how could an artist do it?
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In the face of war, the artists must make art that impacts us and wakes us from our indifference. Do you agree? If the answer is positive, can art do it, and how could an artist do it?

Spyros Koutis


**Short biography of the author:**

Spyros Koutis holds a bachelor degree in Primary Education with specialization in Art Education and in Linguistics from the University of Cyprus (2016) with grade Excellent. Also he holds a Master in Arts and Education Practices from the school of Art of Birmingham City University (2017).

Afterwards, he worked in Finland as a Primary Teacher as well as an English Teacher in a Secondary School. In 2018, he started working as a Special Education Teacher in Cyprus and last September he moved in London for his new job as a Greek Primary Teacher.

Spyros has been involved in a variety of projects researching literacy practices and the usage of games and play as effective tools for non-formal education, inclusion and promotion of changes in society. His research work is focused on Contemporary issues in Art Education and Critical Pedagogy. Email: koutisspyros@gmail.com