Cultural Daily

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Why I Joined CreativeFuture (and why I hope you will, too)

Adam Leipzig · Thursday, September 10th, 2015

The Creativity Paradox: the creative work that brings us together is made by people who are often isolated and lonely.

Movies, TV shows, theatre, dance, visual art, music, books, news blogs–all the expressive arts are made to be experienced as a community. Even if you read a book or watch a webisode in the privacy of your tablet, the experience brings you into the community of the audience and allows you to share your reactions with others.

But the people who make these creative works labor alone, or at best, in tiny groups. Writers of all kinds—novelists, screenwriters, journalists—must do that most unhuman thing: staple our butts to the chair and force words through our fingers. Other kinds of artists, such as those who work in film and television, work in small and frequently transient groups.

There is a reason for this: creativity cannot be birthed in a crowd. Yet the side-effect is that creative people, because they labor alone, often feel alone.

In the United States, more than 5.5 million people work in creative pursuits. This is an immense number: more than the number of teachers, attorneys, and physicians in the US—combined. Yet, because we are so isolated in our work process, and largely separated from each other, we creative people do not see ourselves as a gigantic class, which, in fact, we are. And we are an important class, because creativity is the engine of our society. A rich culture lifts all of our lives.

For the past five years, I have devoted myself to forging opportunities for creative people to link together, to gain information to succeed more fully, and to express themselves with power and passion. As a reader of Cultural Weekly, you have been part of this experiment.

So when CreativeFuture asked me to join as their COO, it was a pleasure to say yes.

CreativeFuture is a nonprofit organization that advocates for the creative community. We hold the position of creative people in the public discourse; we believe that creative people deserve to lead sustainable lives and that piracy of our work diminishes our ability to do that. CreativeFuture moves with the same motive we have been expressing in these virtual pages, expanding our reach considerably.

Among CreativeFuture's present and future plans are to mobilize and bind together the creative community through social action, information, and conversations; to enable curricula that expand

education about creativity and creative rights beginning in kindergarten and continuing through college; and to love and appreciate our audiences for their support and reciprocity.

Bottom line: creative people have the right to determine how, when, and where their work should be shared. That is not always easy in the digital landscape.

The digital revolution has not realized all of its promises. Yes, it is easier to create and distribute work today, but, as Jeff Zucker quotably said in 2008, we have traded analog dollars for digital pennies. The studios and major publishers may have found a partial way through this maze – and now may be minting digital dimes instead of digital cents. But by and large, artists are only getting mills. (Trivia point: a mill is a tenth of a penny, and five-mill coins were minted in the US until 1857.)

While the digital ecosystem has up-shifted creation and distribution, it has down-shifted the possibilities for artists to lead sustainable lives. Piracy is a big factor, because when audiences become accustomed to getting work for free, the concept of creative value degrades. By the way, you should know that the sites from which work can be illegally downloaded for free are for-profit businesses – they make hundreds of millions of dollars a year in advertising revenue, so they are, in fact, making money off the hard work of artists who, in turn, are making no money at all.

Some technology-centered companies, like Amazon and Netflix, have been digital boons and have dramatically increased the opportunities for today's storytellers. However, not all Silicon Valley-type enterprises are created equal. Many have attitudes toward artists that are very different. You can tell that by their language: they call our work "content."

Well, we do not make "content." Content is about tonnage and volume: data that number-geeks can analyze. Content is about YouTube ingesting 300 hours of "content" per minute. But what the creative community makes is art: music and movies, television and books, games and architecture, dance and theatre.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom about traditional studios and publishing houses, they respect the artists and make contracts wherein creative rights are clearly defined and protected. I have been on both sides of the studio equation. I've had my rights and income safeguarded and I have had the pleasure of sending million-dollar checks to writers and directors because of box office bonuses and residuals. My current publisher, Macmillan, sends me quarterly royalty statements that are transparent and easy to follow – when they sell books I get money.

Let's be clear and stand up for what we know to be true. Creative work has value because it manifests the culture in which we all live and breathe, and the better our culture is, the stronger and more human is our society.

I'm proud to become a member of the CreativeFuture family. I hope you will join us. Go to creativefuture.org/take-action/ or, even easier, **text *ICreate* to 52886** and get a one-step sign up link. We will send you great stuff from time to time and your voice will be amplified along with others.

I look forward to continuing to serve you, members of the vibrant and extraordinary creative community.

Image: Courtesy of, By and Copyright Icy & Sot, street artists we have profiled in Cultural Weekly.

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