

Rootist Art

by Justin Rivenbark

In 2007, I wrote an art manifesto about a theory I entitled The Rootist Art Movement. In it, I attempted to recount the series of events that led me to developing this philosophical theory of visual art. I described the events and feelings surrounding the conception of the theory because I did not intellectually understand much of the actual theory itself. Almost 12 years later, I want to try and articulate Rootism in its current form- perhaps a mere ghost of the original manifesto, but I believe the soul of it remains unchanged.

The nucleus of the Rootist art theory is a belief that the ability to create visual art, on its most fundamental level, is a distinctly human tool which we all possess and have the capacity to utilize. Furthermore, Rootism explores the possibility that our understanding of ourselves and each other can be shared without the use of language or symbolism. Rootist art is a method to communicate information that cannot be transferred through any other medium. The information being transmitted has nothing directly to do with conveying a narrative, expressing emotion, or utilizing recognizable symbols. Instead, the information contained within a piece of Rootist art reflects the literal *fundamental perspective* of its creator. This perspective traditionally might be referred to as an artist's "style"; something that is constantly evolving but nevertheless maintains a unique connection to its creator. Rootism offers a method to capture that perspective so others might experience it in relation to their own. Each one of us has a fundamental perspective - it is the way we process our reality- and we exist alone with it every day of our lives. But all those individual perspectives are simultaneously, intrinsically, part of the larger existence of the whole (humanity) - where we exist together every day of our lives. So with every perspective that is realized, it is not just information about the artist that is being shared, but there is also information about the viewer, and the whole. The more relationships we have to examine and intake, the more information we have about humanity in its entirety.

There are a few underlying principles of Rootism that are necessary to its success. The first, and perhaps most imperative, is both artist and viewer must be willing to set aside their preconceived ideas of how we view and make visual art. Creating Rootist art does not require any level of artistic talent in the traditional sense, nor any minimum level of education or intelligence. The traditional methodology of creating visual art to convey a narrative, achieve a likeness, elicit a response, express an emotion, or capture beauty has nothing to do with Rootist art. In no way am I suggesting these to be inferior in any way to Rootism; simply they are not applicable. Rootism does require that one be willing to acknowledge and act upon one's intuition. The more trust the artist and viewer have in their intuition and their innate ability communicate visually, the less difficulty they will have engaging with Rootist art.

The second principle of Rootist art recognizes that we all possess the capacity to create Rootist art, however we do not all initially possess the confidence to access that ability. Know that if you empower yourself to believe in your innate ability to communicate visually, then the confidence to participate in Rootist art will follow. However, if one has no desire to be the creator then one must only remember that no role in Rootism is more important than any other; meaning acting as a viewer contributes just as much as creating the artwork. The reason for this is Rootism defines the artist and the viewer as possessing the same ability - which is to innately communicate using visual art. Therefore the measure of importance is not focused on ability, but rather participation. There is no hierarchy of value because, just as we see throughout nature, each part of a system is necessary; not only to perform its individual function, but also to allow the other parts of the system a chance to perform theirs'. So be it as a Rootist artist or viewer, we are all innately equipped with everything needed to successfully participate; the only aspect we must generate ourselves is the willingness to do so.

The third principle of Rootism aims to maintain clarity in the transfer of information, although it ironically may be the most counterintuitive. Do not use representational imagery or

symbols. Images and symbols are limited in their capacity to communicate because they are ultimately defined by the individual viewing them. By surrendering the use of recognizable imagery, the artist and the viewer are able to access their innate tools without being bound by preexisting cultural, linguistic, or religious parameters. Symbols, both visual and linguistic, are ubiquitous in our daily lives; which makes the idea of not using them to communicate difficult for some to accept. It is possible to understand language in real time. With each word we understand, we correlate a symbol or an idea to help us decipher the meaning and intention of what we are reading or listening to. This is how most of us are comfortable communicating, but it is obviously not the only way. We communicate all the time without language using visual signals and movement. These forms can be as overt as a hug or punch to the stomach, or as subtle and seemingly imperceptible as the micro expressions of our faces. Rootism asks people to rely on a different form of communication; one that cannot necessarily be decoded in real time. Rootist artwork is not something that needs to be decoded in real time because the intentions of the artists are all the same, and there is no meaning per se that needs to be deciphered. The information contained within the artwork only needs to be experienced to be transferred; it does not need to be intellectually understood or translated into language. It is my belief that such information is not able to be translated into language; hence why it needs its own medium to be transmitted.

A piece of Rootist art can be anything from a tiny drawing on a napkin to a giant mural on the side of building. It can be as simple or as complex as the artist feels necessary, but the artist must consider the entirety of the work equally. This is the fourth principle of Rootist Art. No one mark is more important than any other. Each mark exists individually, but is also inextricably connected to the whole. We communicate by examining the relationships created by all the marks, not by isolating and measuring the power of any particular individual mark. Put in simpler terms, everything is interconnected and of equal importance. A piece of Rootist art is

built on the countless decisions made by the artist, and each of those decisions plays a crucial role in final piece. The artist must rely on her intuition to create a work of art that she feels is the most honest representation of her fundamental perspective. However, she must be willing to surrender the comfort that she will be able to foresee or plan what that representation will look like. The artist must simply begin making decisions, one mark at a time, each previous mark influencing the next. At some point the artist will determine there are no more marks to be made, and the work will be completed. That is when the fundamental perspective is revealed. A system has been created. This system is a series of interconnected decisions, each one made in the present moment to best reflect the intuition of the artist. Once completed, this perspective now exists on its own as a form of visual communication; experiencing it (and thus understanding it) requires no prerequisite knowledge of art history, education, or critical thinking.

The fifth principal of Rootism states that a conscious acknowledgement of the principals of Rootism is necessary during the creation of the art. Although that may sound self evident, it means that art cannot be attributed to Rootism without the artist doing so in the creation process. In order for the artist to reveal her fundamental perspective she must make countless decisions; each in the present moment. Being conscious of the reasons why she is making those decisions will, without question, influence her decision-making in that moment. Rootism is not simply about creating intuitive visual art, it is about setting parameters in which our intuitive decisions can flourish to reveal a form of communication that is unobscured by the limitations found in our more comfortable methods of communicating.

The last principal of Rootist art is deceptively complex. In order to successfully participate in Rootist art, one must be willing to feel, be affected, and to change. This principal was not created to exclude anyone, nor to establish a hierarchy of who may be more or less able to participate. It exists to remind the artist and viewer that the foundation of Rootism is about *experiencing* understanding, not trying to define it. The basis of most of our everyday

communication asks us to recognize intention and meaning within a message, and then apply it properly to the context of the current situation. However, Rootism asks you to find and feel your intuition, because it does not require you to correlate imagery with meaning. Instead, Rootism claims you can experience visual information and it can affect you without your conscious understanding of how. Think of all your favorite art (in any medium)- how easily can you describe in what way and why it affects you? For me, it's seemingly impossible to do well. But, how easily can you feel their effects? I feel them in the core of my being. This intuitive understanding that comes from experiencing something is what Rootism asks you to embrace and cultivate. As for change, it is already happening, with or without our consent, and so we must acknowledge it as an integral part of the process; if for no other reason than not to fear its presence.

The information shared through Rootist art is, in many ways, impractical. It will not help you find food or build a shelter. It cannot send messages warning of dangerous predators or environmental conditions. It is not information needed for immediate survival. However, if you create a piece of Rootist art, earnestly and honestly, you will manifest a physical reflection of yourself in the form of marks on a surface. Those marks do not represent symbols or hidden messages. Instead, they represent a complex system of your decisions, each made in the present moment, that when viewed as a whole represent you in your most fundamental visual form. If you make five, or ten, or a hundred more pieces in the same way, they will look different, but you will always see yourself in each one. This is because it is not the individual marks that are important, it is the relationships that are created between the marks that carry the information of your perspective. Each time you view a piece of Rootist art, earnestly and honestly, you will see the reflection of someone else. You will see a complex system of decisions made by the artist that she decided best represent her fundamental perspective. You will be experiencing this

perspective, unfiltered and immediately, and it will change you- even if that change seems imperceptible.

The true potential of Rootism exists outside the individual. A concept long lost in modern art. A single honey bee may be fascinating alone, but without the rest of the hive one could never understand the true nature of the species. The same is true for art. Although the individual painting may be powerful, its true impact cannot be felt without its connection to the rest of art. Rootism embodies the pursuit of all art: to communicate. It unifies both the artists and the viewers by recognizing their equal and indispensable roles. The artists create under one conscious guideline: communicate honestly. There is a unique and powerful perspective in each of us. We all possess the ability to share that perspective by simply creating what comes naturally. Let go of recognizable imagery. Let go of the structure. Let go of our need to intellectually understand. Empower yourself to utilize an innate tool that expresses your individual world; both uniquely and honestly. And know that when you complete this process, a piece of you is now part of something much bigger. Your perspective strengthens and informs mine. We change each other.