

WHY ART MATTERS IN HARD ECONOMIC TIMES

The Hubble Telescope, Creativity and a New Perspective

by Kathleen Karlsen

The Artist and Social Responsibility

Contemporary artists feel keenly the social and political responsibilities of art. For many artists, this results in the graphic depiction of areas of society needing illumination and change. Although this is a valid methodology, I prefer a very different approach. I believe my greatest service is to create art that serves as an optimistic reminder of the infinite possibilities in life.

Abstract art redefines the way we see traditional pictorial elements: perspective, color, the function of line, the meaning of shape and the role of formatting. This liberation and freedom sends an unspoken message of hope: we also have the power to redefine the boundaries of our own lives. Especially in hard economic times, we can rejoice in the amazing possibilities of modern life and our own ability to adapt to challenges and difficult circumstances.

The Power of Illusion and Reality in Abstract Art

In my own work, I seek to balance and synthesize the elements of controlled structure and self-generated form. I take my cue from nature: even in the vastness and seemingly random reaches of space, there are repeated elements and recognizable patterns. Planets revolving around stars have an unmistakable resemblance to the microcosm of subatomic particles.

Art has always had a dual identity as both illusion and reality. More than a century ago, the Impressionists began the practice of creating multiple interpretations of a single scene. A haystack at dusk, their paintings proclaimed with exquisite skill, is dramatically different from a haystack at sunrise.

Abstract art is an extension of this timeless quest for exploring the full parameters of a single experience or a single view: the potential for variations in light and color are expanded exponentially when form and movement become fluid and spontaneous. A single theme can be frozen into almost unlimited, equally authentic slices of reality.

The Art of Exploration

As human beings, we are predominantly oriented towards landscape elements. Horizontals represent the earth and large bodies of water. Verticals are mountains and skies. But what happens to naturalistic perspective when we begin to explore the universe itself: a place where direction and orientation shift completely? What happens to the meaning of size when distances become virtually incomprehensible?

With the advent of the Hubble telescope and our new vision of the universe, we have the opportunity to redefine ourselves as part of something more magnificent than we could ever have imagined. Although we cannot claim credit for the universe itself, we can certainly claim credit for expanding our consciousness and investigative skills far, far beyond the mundane.

Through this new vision of the universe, we can appreciate the power and splendor that is the very fabric of life. Perhaps this new perspective can lessen the burdens in our lives in some measure. Maybe we, too, are more luminous and resplendent than we had thought possible. I believe that celebrating this possibility through art can make a significant and practical difference in our lives.

Abstract Art as A Celebration of Life

Abstract art has always fundamentally been a celebration of color and the pure pleasure of visual stimuli. This is ultimately a celebration of life itself. Abstract art can be refreshing, delightful, unrestrained, lyrical, expansive and intuitive. Art that is liberated from the confines around us expresses a vitality and well-being that is deeply inspiring.

Personally, my greatest love and the most basic expression of art and life is color. The dramatic optical effects of pure colors, layered colors, muted colors and blended colors are surely as inexhaustible as the universe itself. Just as money is the fundamental medium of economic exchange, light (the singular mother of color) is the primary expression of the energy that runs the universe. We are sustained and nourished by the translation of light into the various colorful components in our physical world.

To celebrate color through art is to honor life. And to honor life is to recognize that we are part of a creative force that extends infinitely into the minutiae of our own cells and the vastness of outer space. When we are tested by arduous external circumstances, we are reminded of the value our connections with each other, our connections with our world and our connections with a vast, dynamic source that can sustain us and strengthen us. Call it God. Call it Science. I call it Art.

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