

Fiche

From time immemorial, artists, writers, poets, playwrights, musicians, and singers, have used their art as a means to express their views and opinions. Artists use their masterpieces to denounce injustice and inequalities, to be in keeping with the world in which they live and in order to pinpoint certain aspects that they do not agree with. As such, they expose their testimonies and their considerations of the choices and decisions made by the Establishment, governments or any part of society. It enables them to be part of the great social debates they can discuss and shed light on.

The role(s) of artists

Their role is all the more important as they seem to be the only ones to have enough acute reasoning to offer counter arguments. They aim to make people react and take a stand on certain issues while giving an objective account of things. We may undoubtedly question the unbiased judgment of those artists who want to convey a message, a vision, *their* vision, and in doing so, criticize the **unfair society** in which they live if not a **totalitarian regime**, a **tyranny**, a **dictatorship** whose goal is to deprive people of their free will or personal liberty.

In fact, Art can call what is taken for granted or domineering opinions into question. Artists, through photographs, caricatures, drawings, taggings, paintings or movies for instance – not necessarily only written expression – have a lot of tools and indeed, many means to express their vision, which requires the readers or spectators to be astute, curious and open-minded.

However, we have to bear in mind that artists can have different contexts and can thus use their work of art for different purposes. In this case, an artist can be a **witness of his time**, a kind of **historian** whose mission is to relate what they see, to give a full rendering of an event or a situation so as to make people react and be aware of what is going on. Their goal is to make the spectator aware of certain social issues and to make them support certain causes. Therefore, a lot of English-speaking authors if we take the example of Orwell, Wilde or Kipling have managed to express through their art a form of **resistance** or even **resilience** to social or political oppression, to discriminations or segregation or any kind, of human ostracism including Colonialism or British or American imperialism. This is the reason why we should question and study the position of the artist, between being a witness of their time and an important if not necessary rampart against intolerance, highlighting the fact that **the pen is undoubtedly mightier than the sword**.

Witnesses of their time

Art in its various and miscellaneous expressions is a powerful means to relate and narrate what was going on at a precise moment. It represents a powerful way of showing the horrors and the dreadful reality in order to confirm what people really went through.

As a matter of fact, many people who were not considered as artists related the Holocaust. What they wrote, drew or painted still remain as precious testimonies of that time and are now regarded as true works of art. If we take the example of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, this work reveals the life of a thirteen-year-old girl who decided to write a diary while being hidden in the secret annex of a building in Amsterdam so as not to be arrested by the Nazi and be deported. When it was posthumously published by her father, the only survivor of the camps, this diary became a poignant testimony of the horrendous and nightmarish Second World War.

Other poems or drawings prisoners or deportees survived them and were found in camps and later diffused all over the world and throughout time. Most of them anonymous or untitled but the power of the words or the strength and fortitude of caricatures or even simple sketches go beyond names.

Conveying messages

Not only do artists try their best to genuinely relate their time but they also use their talent to convey some messages and to illustrate the difficulties of the world. They use Art to give their opinions and to warn their readers, spectators, and viewers about the dangers they are facing without realizing it, which is why they aim at raising their awareness. However, it is far from being easy for them to speak out, to tell the truth, to disclose and unravel what the Establishment, the people at the head of states try to conceal or to impose. The risk for them is indeed high because criticizing or denouncing facts or revealing the true face of people ruling the country could mean for them imprisonment, banishment, discredit or even the death sentence.

This is why they resort to many devices: their intellectual skills, the possibilities given by their art to make themselves understood and to pass on their messages and opinions while avoiding censorship. To do so, criticism can also come in various forms such as a fable by Jean de la Fontaine, or tales and novels by authors like Roald Dahl or George Orwell. By embodying ideas, by creating characters who communicate in various styles and figures of speech (satire, understatements, double entente, and also images and sounds, to arouse emotions, indignation, anger, concern, bewilderment or even confusion, Art can send messages having a tremendous impact on people.

This is quite obvious with artists living under dictatorships or in tyrannical and autocratic governments whose leaders' aim is to deprive people of their basic rights or to prevent them from thinking and being free. At a time when liberties and the citizens' well being are endangered artists feel that it is their duty to react and to support the oppressed.

Supporting the downtrodden

In every period of history, every era, we find someone who voices the pain of many others, to highlight the limits of a society, to enlighten the darkness of some rulers and to express the anger, the desperation, the fear and the rancour of the oppressed. Every generation goes through hard times and artists are often those who can help break down barriers by giving pertinent lessons and reminders through entertainment and music which are some of the most efficient ways of achieving their goal.

Recently, Childish Gambino with his song and especially his video *this is America* expressed harsh criticism of the USA and Donald Trump in the way they deal with Afro-Americans and the issue of gun control. The artist used many innuendoes on the African American culture with the Jim Crow Laws and the blackface figure, with segregation and discriminatory laws still implemented in the 21st century. Each second of the video, each footage underlines the inability of the USA to cope with its past and to admit the damage caused by slavery. This was seen as a shock that echoed by the Black Lives Matter movement and the numerous police blunders on African American citizens. What Donald Glover, the true name of the artist, wanted to show was that the majority of the white population enjoyed watching African American artists entertaining them but they all turned a blind eye on the way they were treated and also on the fact that they are still the victims of racism. What he denounces is actually a form of hypocrisy like a cancer rotting people's minds.