

Residence Summary

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January, 2017

Communicating Without Words

We live in a world that is rapidly losing the ability to connect socially. We no longer have face to face conversations, or sit together at dinner time to talk about the events that occurred throughout our day. Every day, more and more people find themselves only communicating through digital devices and social media therefore replacing the basic need to connect and spend real, true quality time with one another. This loss of connection has led me into the issue of abandonment- not the physical abandonment of an object or a person, but rather, the lingering feeling of a severed connection. A lack of real, and true communication. Often time, people listen to reply, not listen to understand. Therefore, creating a lack of authentic communication.

As humans, we all have the same five basic needs that must be filled: Physiological which covers the need to eat, Safety or the need to feel secure, Love or the need to belong and relationships in general, Esteem, or the need to feel confident, and respected by others and Self-Actualization or the need to accept and understand things. Maslow, a 20th century psychologist, stated that without fulfilling the five basic needs, one can fall into a state of unrest. This unrest can lead to a feeling of abandonment because the basic needs are not being met. This type of disconnection has led to humans to try to communicate without the use of words. This is where art comes into play.

It seems difficult to believe that it is possible to communicate without words yet, people communicate without words daily. This is possible because humans have learned to respond to unspoken visual signals. These unspoken visual signals can be anything from hand gestures, to colors, signs, or even facial expressions. It is the ability to understand the unspoken visual signals that makes it possible for artists to connect with their viewers.

Non-verbal communication, or communicating with visual signals is accomplished when a visual signal is perceived by the viewer. That viewer can then decode the visual signal. It is this small transaction that makes communicating without words achievable. This way of communicating is not always clear and concise, but it has its boundaries.

Communicating visually has its limitations when it comes to the arts. However, artists have often understood this unspoken language for numerous years; they have used it in their work to connect with their viewers. It is this abstract connection between artists and their work as well as that of the viewer's interpretation of the artists' work that makes the biggest difference in the comprehension of, or lack of comprehension, of the work. Sometimes the work may be misinterpreted for something other than what the message is meant to be conveyed. Since it is non-verbal, or visual, the message is left up to the viewer to decipher.

18th century French artist, Edgar Degas, understood this unspoken language and knew how to use it in his work of dancers. He stated "Art is not what you see, but what you make others see". It was this way of thinking that made Degas' still life of dancers come to life. It was his understanding of visual signals and how they were applied to what we now call the elements and

principles of art. These principles caused his work to stand out above the others. His uses of line, color, and perspective, gave his work the needed visual signals to allow viewers to understand and connect with his work.

Degas understood how one could communicate through the arts. Yet, he was not limited to only painting; he applied his talents to the other areas in the fine arts like sculptures, prints, and drawings. Degas was not the first person in the arts to understand how unspoken visual signals work in the arts, nor will he be the last one.

Sidney Holtz, author of *Photography in Focus* brings to light this very subject of *Communicating without Words* within the newest fine arts field (photography). Sidney states in the beginning of the book:

We live in a visual world. One in which photography is making an impact as never before... but the ones that get the most out of it will be those who develop a thorough understanding of the medium. Because the camera is an outlet for creativity, a device that can make you see yourself and your world in a special way – the more you know about this tool, the more satisfaction it will provide. And the more you'll be able to communicate your special insight to others.

With this quote, Sidney seems to echo the sentiment of Edgar Degas as it relates to photography. This topic of *Communicating without Words* in photography received a great deal of attention in the late 1900's by many photography philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Allan Sekula and numerous others. Their work, along with many others, played a very influential role in the transformation of the way photography is understood in the world today.

This topic continues to grow and has expanded into my work of abandonment. In my work of abandonment, I have researched some of the most prominent photography philosophers in an attempt to have a better understanding of how I can communicate with my viewers, visually and non-verbally. It also plays a role in how the messages are conveyed through my work or interpreted by those viewers.

Similar to Jerry Uelsmann's work of double exposure, where the viewer abandons his/her belief of reality and fully immerses himself/herself into the work to fully appreciate the iconic worlds that Jerry constructs. It is this immersion of oneself into the work that creates vivid experience.

In my research, I have narrowed down some important points that have greatly blended with my topic of abandonment. This topic of abandonment is experienced differently by everyone. It is this distinct difference between each individual's interpretations of my work that will keep my work from being viewed the same every time it is experienced or viewed. Yet, the overall message will be the same. An image's power comes from the ability to invest or transport oneself from a viewer to an explorer of his/her own understanding of the topic.