

EXPRESSIVE ARTS AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE

An aesthetic rendition of our experience in the Seminar

by Maria Luisa Diaz de León and Rosario Sammartino

An artisan in Ollantaytambo, Peru, opens his doors to a group of people, most of them foreign to that land, language, and culture. The humble master, shares his art, an art that finds its roots in ancient traditions. He invites his guests to experience and join him in the art of patience, love, and respect for a land that becomes one with water and burns in the fire of the heart.

Women weavers, threading their ancient tradition into the knotted social, political, and psychological contemporary world, teach the back strap loom as if it is a daily prayer to what has preceded and what is to come.

An international group works together for a week experiencing the tradition in creative action: “Poiesis” and suddenly that tradition becomes their history too.

We had the privilege to participate and teach during the International Seminar of Expressive Arts and Traditional Peruvian Culture that TAE Peru (Terapia de Artes Expresivas/ Expressive Arts Therapy) organized this year in Cusco, Peru. It was a diverse group of thirteen people from Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Norway, US, Mexico, and Peru. The intention of the seminar was to integrate the Expressive Arts experience with the traditional Peruvian arts.

The group worked together for 6 days. We visited and creatively explored sacred places including Moray, the Inca Trail, and Temple of the Sun. We were honored to meet with the Patacanchas, women in a remote Andean community who have maintained a dedication and passion for the art of weaving for centuries. We all learned from our artisan professor in Ollantaytambo, Eduardo, who has become one with the land through the art of pottery. We also met a group of traditional dancers, and learned from them the ritual dance “The Paras” which means “rain” in Quechua.

Taking the Expressive Arts out of the studio and into the traditional culture provoked, evoked, and inspired the group members to create community. We bridged time and space between the contemporary and the ancient, between the familiar and the foreign. Sowing true dialogues between life and art. At the core remembering, in a deep sense, who we are in our common humanity.

Who are we in our common humanity? How is this reflected in our communities? Or coming into a closer focus, how was this mirrored in this particular small international group?

Far from being an experience full of romanticism, the group encountered both its light and its shadow. Remembering isn't always smooth. It asks of us not so much about

who we *were* but who we *are*. We were confronted with our own ancient love, our love of the arts, the one love that feeds artists; a love that has been relegated to childhood and school matters, entertainment and the market. It also confronted us with the hunger for tradition, for the roots we desperately seek to claim.

There are seeds of the Patacanchas, of the artisan and the Inca in all of us. Paradoxically, a feeling of belonging pervaded the experience and a thin veil of longing and impotence came into the group, because we are not *them*. Anger arrived because there wasn't anything immediately we could do to fix the being cut and displaced from our roots. A multigenerational disownment was felt across the group, as we sensed ambiguous guilt and embarrassment.

The patient love from the Artisan, the weaving of the weavers, and the passion of the dancer began to shed some light. Moving, provoking, questioning, inquiring... Art was Present! In the words of one of the participants: "We need to take the art out of the museums, the religion out of the churches, and the dance out of the theaters."

Each of us thirsts to reclaim our right to live artfully, to weave and model the clay of our individual and collective stories, as well as to dance and invoke the Paras. Only then, we will be assured that the soil of our soul will keep bearing fruit.

When we learn more about who we are as humanity, we learn more about ourselves. When we encounter self through movement and art, we can embody it, thus expanding the range of possibilities in our lives.

During the fifth day of the seminar, we facilitated a movement-based Expressive Arts experience. The intention was to harvest the new resources that had been sown into the group, collecting previous activities and experiences such as modeling, polishing, weaving, art and ritual-making. We were attentive to the archetypal myths that were unfolding. Through an aesthetic response to what we had seen, felt and imagined we used the Tamalpa Life/Art approach to reweave some of the provocative emotions and stories that had arisen in our encounter with the traditional arts, culture and community. The body, as the most honorable recipient of our life experience, was allowed to speak its truth. The movement metaphor we used to facilitate the dance was "Opening and Closing", which later shifted into the following Life/Art exploratory questions: what is this experience opening in us? What is closing in us? What was closed before? What still needs to be opened?

Body, as a moving metaphor, opens and closes, reminding us that we are always attempting to integrate life experiences in a constant cyclical gesture, like nature. We are nature, and our bodies are the mirrors of the movement of life. The dance of the cells, the constant pumping of our hearts, our lungs breathing, blood flowing, fluids, organs. Our physical body is our root. And from that root our emotions, memories, stories, images, and new ideas can grow.

Our body as humanity, as community, as group. Our body as My Body. We need to know our roots! Maybe then we'll be able to grow into healthy encounters with ourselves, others, and the world.

May we find in deep listening, our way into acknowledging and respecting the different threads that weave together our historical tapestry. May we find in patience, a new modeling for our encounters with one another. May the active and responsible art-making keep us in continuous dialogue with both our light and our shadow. May our bodies continue teaching us how to awaken from the soul's inertia and move us to be rooted in this world.

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Rosario Sammartino was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is a psychologist, specializing in Expressive Arts Therapy. Her interest and passion for the arts and psychology have brought her into the field of Expressive Arts Therapy. She started her studies at PECETI Argentina and then studied at the Metáfora, Art Therapy Institute in Barcelona, Spain. In the US, Rosario trained in Expressive Arts at Saybrook Graduate School. She is a Certified Halprin Practitioner and an Associate Teacher of the Tamalpa Institute. She is currently teaching the Tamalpa Life/Art process in Buenos Aires where she also maintains her private practice.