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Creating Culture

To stave off mediocrity, every artist should accept a vision quest

By Kat Avila | Web Published 1.14.2005

New Year's week:
patches of snow cover
the Saddleback Mountains



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The honking of geese made me look upward. A "V"-formation of pale bellies blew by northwesterly toward the ocean. I was surprised to see they were still flying since it was already after 8 at night. Of course, since 90% of California's natural wetlands have disappeared, perhaps they had to fly farther to find a place to break.

"Where are YOU going?" I had to ask myself after I saw them. The geese were working together toward a common goal, though not all would accomplish it. Some would be picked off by hunters before they reached their final destination. Still, at this moment in time, it was inspiring to see LIFE moving positively and instinctively forward.

Each online article I post is like one of those geese. At LatinoLA, I'm part of a rich and, more importantly, uncensored community of new and experienced writers documenting the experience of being Latino/a. I write for other e-zines as well, with the primary goals of

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supporting the dissemination of information about non-Eurocentric cultures in the U.S., and of creating and nurturing spaces for the development of women's culture.

To give an example of the latter, I recently revisited the subject of yaoi comics ("MALE x MALE"), which in its most hardcore form I have described as "what you would get if you spliced Playgirl Magazine with forbidden love master plots." They are often mistakenly identified as gay comics, except yaoi comics are created by WOMEN for other WOMEN, in a provocative bridge of romantic and sexual fantasies. Anyway, I'm not writing about the latest fashion in painted nail designs, mostly because it's so well covered.

so close...
the thunder sets off
a car alarm

The voice of the Thunderbird. I awoke one night from my dreams, startled to consciousness by the powerful cracking of thunder immediately overhead. The reverberation set off someone's car alarm. I sat up at attention for a few minutes mesmerized by the sky's loud imperial rumblings.

That's how overwhelming one's own expressive voice should feel within the hollows of one's skeleton. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors, by the time one comes of age, the lion's roar has often been muffled to a cat's meow, more so for girls than boys. That's why it's exciting to run across a creative individual who is not simply recycling but offers up novel interpretations of his/her social and cultural milieu.

Sure, there is a place for artists who are conservationists and archivists ("Ah, feels like home"), but it's also crucial to embrace explorers who keep a culture alive, relevant, young and flexible.

Democracies have a way of forcing the will of the domesticated majority down the throats of the outnumbered explorers. It's a test of conscience for each explorer to assimilate. But, in the case of bona fide explorers, a little effort from them is significant because they keep open a space for cultural change to occur.

Guadalajara, Tokyo, Los Angeles
-
wherever I go,
the lovely and gentle moon

It's so easy to fall into a rut. But part of the architecture of my life includes contact with culture creators and producers since my curiosity drives me to learn what I can from these role models to prop up and strengthen my own creative life. I just wish I wasn't such a slow learner, so I guess I will be doing these interviews for a long, long time.

Some artists and performers I was initially excited about I lost interest in after they fell into commercially successful ruts. Well, in their defense, it's hard to create anything when you don't have a place to sleep and your meals are coming out of supermarket trash bins.

To stave off mediocrity, every artist should accept - at least once in his/her life - a vision quest to a place outside his/her ancestral hunting grounds, to become a complete alien, in order to return home victoriously

with fresh eyes, new tools, and additional spiritual and mental resources. The domesticated are satisfied with museum art and museum theatre; they may as well be dead and buried with it. The rest of us deserve better and should be helping to plant spring gardens instead of taking care of cemetery lawns.

Kat is slowly making her way through an anthology of "Mafalda" comic strips by Argentine cartoonist Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado). Her next project is to watch the "Mafalda" movie, "una visión crítica del mundo de los adultos."

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