



**THE
MISSING
PEACE**

Artists Consider the Dalai Lama

Meditation on Universal Compassion

by artist Binh Danh as part of *The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama*

An educational activity is presented on the back of this poster. Recommended age range: high school and above. Digital copies are available for free download at www.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp

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High School Educational Activity

related to artwork from

The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama Exhibit



Meditation on Universal Compassion

Binh Danh, 2005

Artist Interview

Meet Binh Danh (www.tmpp.org/artists/danh)

What kind of artwork did you do as a child?

When I was a child, I enjoyed art classes. As a first grader, I remember sitting in art class, doing art, and having fun. I did drawings and paintings—nothing out of the ordinary. I also loved visiting museums, especially science museums. I think that's where my creativity really began to grow.

Who or what inspired you to become an artist?

My mother really inspires me. She has many family stories that she tells me about our life in Vietnam. At that time I was a child, so I don't have any real memories of these stories. When I was in high school, I thought I wanted to be a scientist. But when I took some required art classes, I fell in love with the practice of art. It was through art that I could start learning more about the world. I am attracted to the beauty of science. That inspires my art.



Picture of a young Tuol Sleng victim overlain by butterfly image

Motivation for This Work

What is the major concept behind the piece?

In 1975, the Kmer Rouge regime took over Cambodia and began killing people who didn't fit into their system. Originally, Tuol Sleng was once a high school. After 1975, it became a prison and a torture chamber. The records show that 17,000 people were exterminated at Tuol Sleng. Before they were executed, pictures were taken of the prisoners. A lot of them were women and children. Their portraits are all that is left of them now. I've been using those pictures and portraits as material to talk about this horrific event in history. Overall, 2 million Cambodians were murdered by the Kmer Rouge. The concept behind this work is that of history—a dark history. For me, history is not something in the past; it is always in the present.

Please explain some of the symbolism contained in your piece.

In the middle of the picture, there is an image of the Buddha.

Surrounding the Buddha are portraits of the Tuol Sleng victims. Growing out of the Buddha's head are butterflies. For me, the butterflies are symbols of transformation—as a butterfly goes from a caterpillar to a cocoon to a butterfly. We think about the Buddha being reincarnated over and over, thousands of times, becoming the Buddha. That is a symbol of transformation too. I think our lives are the same way. This body of work reflects that main symbolism: butterflies and Buddha.

What message would you like your audience to take away from viewing the piece?

I want them to think about death and the uncertainty of life. The Tuol Sleng victims were caught in this horrible place, and they didn't know what was going to happen to them. I want people to think about the suffering at Tuol Sleng, or any suffering that's going on right now in the world. I hope that will inspire them to take a small action—even telling a friend about this exhibit or looking up information on the Internet. I think even a small action is a step in the right direction. I hope people will slow down and think about those things; appreciate every moment of their life.



Tuol Sleng prisoner with images of a nebula and stars around him

Techniques Used in This Work

How do you create this type of artwork?

On my computer, I print out a digital negative of a photograph. I take that negative and place it on top of the leaf. The leaf has to be living for the process to work. Then I place the leaf into a frame that contains a board, a layer of damp cotton, and some water for the leaf to survive. I put a piece of glass on top of that. The whole thing is sandwiched together. I place the setup on my patio anywhere for two to four weeks, and the image is imprinted on the leaf. Then I press the leaf into books. When it dries, I place the leaf into resin to preserve it.

Describe the rest of the art in your collection, Human Nature.

The rest of the work is also focused around the victims at Tuol Sleng. Some of these are single portraits. I'm making some now that include leaves still on the branch. It almost looks like a "family tree." Some of these people look like my family members. It's weird, but I feel like I can wholly identify with them. They feel like people I know.

A lot of my work goes back into looking at science itself. Science says we are composed of trillions of atoms that are born in stars. The atoms are constantly recycled and are parts of different objects at different times. After they are released from our bodies, they become other things, like the air, the clouds, a rock, or other life forms—even other people. I wonder how much of my body is composed of other great people and animals throughout the universe. Sometimes I wonder when I take a breath, how much of that breath is from Mother Teresa.

What advice would you give to young art students?

Continue doing what you love. Find beauty in your life, even if that requires looking into the darkest part of human nature.

Introduction

This activity may be used in conjunction with a visit to *The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama* exhibit, a visit to the website at www.tmpp.org, or as a stand-alone activity. Please see the Educator's Guide for additional background information and activities. The Educator's Guide and other resources, including this poster, can be downloaded at www.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp.

Student Activity

Overview

Students will interpret a piece of art, read an interview of the featured artist, explore symbolism, engage in discussion questions related to the concepts presented in the artwork, and then create their own artistic masterpiece using their personal symbolism and ideas to promote awareness of a chosen topic.

Engage

1. Introduce *The Missing Peace Project: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama*. Background information and resources may be found in the Educator's Guide or at *The Missing Peace* website, www.tmpp.org.
2. Display the poster and reveal its title.
3. Ask students to consider the art and reflect on possible interpretations. What does this piece suggest? What might the artist be saying with this piece? If students struggle, point out specific elements of the piece and ask for possible interpretations. Accept all answers. There is no right or wrong interpretation.

Explore

1. Photocopy the appropriate panels of the poster so that students can read the Artist Interview. This includes three sections: Meet, Motivation, and Techniques.
2. Use the following discussion questions to lead a discussion of the artist's message. All of the artists are trying to raise awareness about something.
 - a. Binh says, "Find beauty in your life, even if that requires looking into the darkest part of human nature." What could this mean to you? Does the average young person ever have an opportunity to do this? Think of an example in which a young person might be faced with this opportunity.
 - b. When you think about suffering in the world, what images come to mind? (Examples could include starving children in Africa, homeless people in your community, or victims of natural disasters.) Imagine if something like this happened to you? What would you do about it and/or how would you need others to help you?

Explain

1. Students will now have an opportunity to create a piece of art with their own message to the world. Their artwork is a vehicle to discuss and promote an issue with others. Possible topics to explore include: love, peace, empathy, forgiveness, compassion, respect, and embracing diversity. Brainstorm other possible topics relevant to teens. The objective is to make the audience think about the issue/topic chosen.
2. Once students have completed their art, they should compose a one-page Artist Interview that follows the same format as this poster: a brief biography with a description of the motivation and techniques used to create their artwork. Optional: As an extension, students can create two discussion questions they would like others to consider about their message.

Extend

1. Just as important as the creation of the artwork, is the opportunity to share it with others. It will give students a chance to formalize their ideas and practice communicating their message with others.
2. Arrange for one of the following:
 - a. Class Presentations: Each student makes a 2-minute presentation of their art to promote their message. These presentations could be grouped by theme for a more powerful impact. Thematic groups could work collaboratively.
 - b. Art Show: Choose a theme and show title. Invite students, parents, and members of the community to attend. Require each student to stand by their artwork and engage visitors in a dialogue about their message.
 - c. Share With Other Classes: Create a meaningful cross-curricular activity in which members of your class present their work to members of another class/subject area.
3. We invite you to visit us online at youth.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp where members of your class can share their experiences related to *The Missing Peace* with other students around the world.

Evaluate

1. After students have shared their art, ask students to reflect on the experience of creating and sharing their own artwork as a vehicle to discuss and promote an issue with others. Did they feel like their message got across? Were there challenges? Frustrations?
2. *The Missing Peace* curriculum is an ongoing project. Your participation is welcome! We invite you to share your experiences, outcomes, insights, and suggestions with other educators at www.dalailamafoundation.org/tmpp.

The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama

Eighty-eight contemporary artists.

Eighty-eight disarming works of art.

Eighty-eight ways to think about,
talk about, experience, and create peace.

This project involves a diverse collaboration of some of the world's most respected and innovative artists from twenty-five countries creating entirely new works of art designed to start a renewed global dialogue about peace. A travelling exhibit of the artwork is being shown in museums around the world.

The Missing Peace
(www.tmpp.org)

is a project of

The Dalai Lama Foundation
(www.dalailamafoundation.org)

and

The Committee of 100 for Tibet
(www.c100tibet.org)