

Bella Nelson

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Prof. Emerson

Eng 110

The Big Debate: An Essay On How Artwork Can Be Positive

Art can give people a better life and a practical path forward. Some people believe that art cannot help people who suffer although in the project created by Jereon Koolhaas and Dree Urhahn, we see that art did help people by giving them a positive outlet to let go of negative emotions and a possible start to better living. Haas and Hahn changed people's lives in a brighter way by giving neighborhoods a better sense of community, a new identity, and, for some, a new skill that can lead to earning a steady income. The project directly improved lives of those in these communities by painting and plastering unfinished homes, this lead to many other communities reaching out for the same. I believe that art has the ability to help those who suffer just as much emotionally as practically.

Rhys Southan's article, *Is Art a Waste of Time?*, describes a group of people who believe that art cannot help the underprivileged. The effective altruism idea, as described in Southan's article, is to help those who suffer by working hard and using as much of your earnings as you can towards helping others. Although human suffering is real and important to address, Ryths Southan's essay does credit the little actions that make huge impacts in the lives of others. One example of this would be the art projected created by Dree Urhahn and Jereon Koolhaas. Dree Urhahn and Jereon Koolhaas turned many poor neighborhoods from slums into artwork. They came up with the idea to "plaster and paint" the unfinished homes of a low-income village in Rio

to create a huge piece of art across the whole city. This helped many communities become brighter and happier though it may have seemed like many little actions.

Putting money toward artwork is controversial in the eyes of effective altruists because they believe that it is taking away from those in need. In the project created by Haas and Haan, money was spent toward creating artwork that would benefit those in need. I believe that although Haas and Haan were spending money, it was going towards bettering the lives of others and therefore, justified. Haas and Haan were able to raise over 100,000 dollars in order to be able to create more artwork but they also were able to teach people a skill that can get them a job and give a higher income to the residents who helped.

By training and hiring people at each city they had painted, Haas and Haan gave the city a better look. These towns used to be in the news and in the papers because of the crimes that occurred in them and now they were in the papers for their beautiful look. Outside people started to see the locals as painters instead of criminals. This also helped the people that lived in the town to see themselves as useful and worth it. In my opinion, this can give many people hope that they can become successful and use something they love to provide for themselves and others.

EA's believe that when creating artwork, artists "paint the beautiful landscape in front of them while the rest of the world burns." (Is Art a Waste of Time, pg. 437) This is like the shallow-pond analogy which states if you see a child drowning, you would go in and save them only because it is right in front of you. The idea of EA's on artists creating artwork is insinuating that the artists, because they are painting, are choosing not to save the children in need. I believe that the shallow-pond analogy is harsh and that most artists are aware of human suffering although they contribute help by giving the world their different artwork which makes others

happy. In the case of Haas and Hahn one of their contributions was simply finishing the outside of many homes.

Haas and Hahn helped the living situation of many because of how they finished homes. When Haas and Hahn first arrived at Vila Cruzeiro, almost all of the houses were incomplete and bare. They said "we saw some of these houses that were plastered and painted," and questioned "what would it look like if all these houses would be plastered and painted." (How painting can transform communities, 1:25 sec.) When speaking with a friend of theirs that ran an organization in Vila Cruzeiro, he told them "everybody here would pretty much love to have their houses plastered and painted. It's when a house is finished." (How painting can transform communities, 2:09 sec.) In making this comment, Hahn's friend believes the people in Vila Cruzeiro were feeling poorly about having unfinished homes and having their homes finished meant more to them.

Artwork helps by bringing communities together to get through struggle. Haas and Hahn talked about how during the drug war in Vila Cruzeiro, the community got close to each other. The project brought to their town gave them more opportunities to form a stronger community. They stated how they "decided to throw one (a barbeque) almost every other week, and we got to know everybody in the neighborhood." (How painting can transform communities, 3:41 sec.) Hahn is talking about how they brought the community closer together during the many barbecues that they held. This reminds me of how my mother, a owner of two dance studios in NY, offers a free dance class once a week for transgender male and females from the LGTBQ community in our area. This class gives people the opportunity to have fun while learning an art and build a better community with each other.

Most people can not afford to give ten percent of their earnings to charities every year and Haas and Hahn are a good example of how the arts can give back to those who suffer. Haas and Hahn show that although the EA believe that art is a waste of time and money, that art can be extremely helpful to others. They also show us that artwork can have a huge impact on others in a positive way because of the outcomes of their work. When we give back to our communities through visual arts, filmmaking, books, or any other art form, we are allowing people to gain knowledge and happiness which can be equal to the donation of money.

Work Cited

Urhahn, Dre. Koolhaas, Jeroen. "How Painting Can Transform Communities."

TEDGlobal, 7 Nov. 2014, Copacabana.

Southan, Ryhs. "Is Art a Waste of Time?"