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# The Art of Resilience: Creativity, Courage and Renewal

Thursday, February 9, 2017

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If you're interested in writing either an op-ed style article for our website or the session report, or a personal reflection blog post while you're here this week, please let Salzburg Global Editor, Louise Hallman know or email your 500-word submission directly to [lhallman@salzburgglobal.org](mailto:lhallman@salzburgglobal.org).

If you write for your own organization either while you're here or after the session, please observe the **Chatham House Rule** (information on which is in your Welcome Pack). If you're in any doubt, do not hesitate to contact Louise.

We'll be updating our website with reflections from the panel discussions and interviews, all of which you can find on the session page:

[www.SalzburgGlobal.org/go/573](http://www.SalzburgGlobal.org/go/573)

You can also join in the conversation on Twitter with the hashtag [#SGSculture](https://twitter.com/SGSculture) and see all your fellow Fellows and their organizations on Twitter via the list [www.twitter.com/salzburgglobal/lists/SGS-573](https://www.twitter.com/salzburgglobal/lists/SGS-573)

We'll be updating both our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/SalzburgGlobal](https://www.facebook.com/SalzburgGlobal) and our Flickr stream [www.flickr.com/SalzburgGlobal](https://www.flickr.com/SalzburgGlobal) with photos from the session during this week and also after the session. (If you require non-watermarked images for your own publication, please let Louise know.)

We will also be posting photos to Instagram [www.instagram.com/SalzburgGlobal](https://www.instagram.com/SalzburgGlobal), and we encourage you to do so too, using the hashtag [#SGSculture](https://twitter.com/SGSculture).



@msprairierose: #SGSculture Indigenous people & allies. Meaningful dialogue to wiser actions for our global community.  
#IndigenousKnowledge



Aine O'Brien, Mary Ann De Vleig and Dan Gorman discuss art and refugees, migration and integration

## Art: healing trauma and upheaval

Oscar Tollast

**According to the UN Refugee Agency, the world is experiencing the highest levels of displacement on record. Around the planet, 65.3 million people have been forced to leave their home. Of this number, 21.3 million people are refugees.**

It is an ongoing complex challenge which requires cross-sector support and knowledge. Each day, nearly 34,000 people are reportedly forcibly displaced. Each sector can provide a skillset to meet this challenge, including the arts and cultural sector.

The role of the arts and cultural sector and resilience is being discussed by Salzburg Global Seminar at the session *The Art of Resilience: Creativity, Courage, and Renewal*. Fellows at this session have a vast amount of experience in their fields. Here are a few of their thoughts:

### Art can give people a safe platform to “kill” others and express anger

In times of upheaval and chaos, people should have the freedom to express their inner feelings and opinions on the challenges they face. The conflict in Syria, which has left a mark on

people for “six horrifying years,” has let their desires and feelings rise to the surface, whether right or wrong. It is important those suffering in times like this have an artistic platform to express these feelings in a safe space and have scenarios acted out on stage, rather than in real life.

“All this violence is initiating vengeance and initiating more killings and revenge. I think the arts is a solution in this case because it gives a safe platform for the whole desires and feelings, no matter how extreme they are through the medium of fantasy. On stage, you can kill who you want, and in a film, you can do this, but you can't do it in real life. I think if we provide art as an alternative platform for violence, we can release all of these sentiments that [otherwise] result in such an extreme cases of violence.”

### Art can be used to respond to urban upheaval in cities

The world is becoming more urban by the minute. By 2030, six out of 10 people will be urban dwellers. Mexico City is a young, dynamic metropolis but it also has the oldest urban agglomeration on the continent. Organizations such as

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Laboratorio Para La Ciudad, made up of architects, designers, editors, urban planners and more, are looking for creative ways to connect governments and citizens. Laboratorio Para La Ciudad has attempted to map Mexico City's transit system. Unofficial routes have sprung up over the years in response to demand. The Lab helped create Mapaton, a government-civil society collaborative initiative that provides a database of the formal and informal public transportation system. Riders can share GPS data with a database, mapping their routes as they ride. Users are incentivized as the more points they attain, the increased chance they have of winning a prize.

It's an example of how civil society, private enterprise, and government can have a successful partnership. It's working in Mexico City - and could work elsewhere. Creating access to information can create more opportunities.

#### **Art can be a means to find justice**

Art can teach those in times of war how to cope during and after the conflict is officially over. As part of the self-healing process, we have to ask ourselves where acceptance of past atrocities features. Does it come before forgiveness or can it only feature afterward? Acceptance does not necessarily lead to reconciliation, which can be a "dirty word" in some circles. In the hope of stopping atrocities happening again, art therapy

can help people to accept and admit what happened, regret their actions, and ask for forgiveness - which may or may not be given. The difficulty lies in understanding that justice can differ from person to person. In some cases, one generation has had a process of reconciliation and yet the next generation felt that that experience been taken away from them. "Justice is not simply justice. It could be any number of things. Justice for one person is very different to justice for someone else."

#### **Art can help later generations understand traumatic experiences**

The devastation which occurs after war can be hugely disorienting. It can cut across generations affecting parents, children, and grandchildren. There's a "massive disruption" to the fabric of inter-generational relationships. Art is a tool to reconnect with people's pasts and tackle uncomfortable areas. Art and performance can begin to fill some of those gaps and play an integral part in explaining points of history otherwise incomprehensible to those not present. Inspiring examples can be taken from projects and work in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Uganda. If there are a lack of trained professionals to deal with a mental health crises, arts organizations can step in. In Uganda, for example, spaces have been created where people can talk and make art together, helping people feel human and have something to offer the world. As Pablo Picasso said, "Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life."



# Orijit Sen: “Comics allow the audience to identify with the characters – it lets them enter their world”

Indian graphic artist and designer on how comics can tell difficult, complex and compelling stories

Andrea Abellán

Comics have traditionally been used to tell fictional stories, but the medium can also be an interesting format to portray reality. In fact, in recent years, well-established media outlets have increasingly used this storytelling method, publishing cartoons to inform about current affairs. Indian graphic artist and designer Orijit Sen, shares his thoughts on the medium and how he has used illustrations to tell difficult and compelling stories.

**Andrea Abellán:** You say that Art Spiegelmann’s graphic novel *Maus* had a strong influence on you. In this work the artist talks about his own challenges of being in a Jewish family during the holocaust. Do you also find motivation on your own experiences to create your drawings?

**Orijit Sen:** I am a visual artist and my main goal is to tell stories through my drawings. It is the reason why I prefer to define myself as a “storyteller” I grew up in India during the 70s – in that time TV was not as common as it is nowadays. I have been drawing since I was a child as comics were the easiest way we had to create our own visual culture. Every time I build a story I fully immersed myself in it first. My work is all about my personal experience so I would never make a piece of a place where I have never been or someone I have never met.

I came across Art Spiegelmann’s *Maus* while I was at college studying graphic design and as soon as I found this piece I realized that serious comics were the thing I wanted to do for my whole life.

**AA:** *River of Stories*, your piece considered to be India’s first graphic novel, talks about environmental, social and political issues surrounding the construction of the controversial dam on the Narmada River. Why do you think comics are suitable medium to raise public awareness?

**OS:** Comics as a medium of storytelling allow the audience to identify with the

characters – it lets them enter their world. In my illustrations, I try to be very detailed. I like painting people’s faces, their eyes and gestures, trying to be as accurate as possible.

When I finished university, I got involved in an environmental group. We travelled together to Jhabua area, in central India. We met a lot of people there fighting against the dam project. However, the story of all these protests did not make it to the city. People would only see one side of the story: how great it was to have electricity and other facilities thanks to the dam construction. They did not reflect on how much did that the electricity cost and how many people had been displaced to pay for it.

Stories like this one are usually told by figures and numbers so it is hard for individuals to relate to them. You can of course understand what it means when 1000 people have lost their homes if you read about it, but it is not the same as when you can see it. Comics help us to engage with a topic and become immersed in it.

**AA:** You are one of the founders of the Pao Collective, which seeks to support comics as a medium in India. How would you describe the state of comics industry in the country?

**OS:** The status of comics has evolved a lot since I first published *River of Stories* in 1994. Mainstream publishers are relying on Indian cartoonists more and more. But even today, comic artists in India cannot make of it a full-time job and still must dedicate their time to something else for their living. We have many good, young, talented artists with amazing ideas but we unfortunately are still lacking funding.

**AA:** From 2009 to 2011 you collaborated in the creation of *A Place in Punjab*, one of the world’s largest hand-painted mural installed at Virasat-e-Khalsa Museum. What message did you hope to convey?

**OS:** The government asked me to make a mural for the museum to represent the cultural heritage and landscape of Punjab area. Again, my main goal was

to tell the real stories of the people living there and properly describe their hopes and tragedies. I realized how many different perspectives Punjab’s inhabitants have about the same place.

People used to talk a lot about how different the area was before the green business arrived. For instance, they repeatedly mentioned the ponds, where they used to spend lot of their time swimming with the buffalos and mingling with other people. However, when I was there I found all these ponds to be very dirty and only full of trash. I decided to create the *Landscape of Memories* where I portrayed both perspectives, past and present, so it was easy for visitors to compare them. The mural acts as a “storytelling mirror”.

**AA:** In your presentation at *The Art of Resilience: Creativity, Courage and Renewal*, you have showed some pieces of your project *Mapping Mapusa Market*. What inspired you to start it?

**OS:** In the past I used to live in Goa and go to Mapusa market with my family quite frequently. It was always fascinating as it was full of amazing products and people. Later, when I was invited as a visiting professor at Goa University, I thought it would be a good idea to involve students from very different fields such as arts or history to work together. What we are doing at the moment is tracking and mapping different aspects of the market. This work is resulting in a visual map where people, products, and techniques are depicted.

**AA:** What are you expecting of this session?

**OS:** This is a very special opportunity. Here we are, 50 people from all over the world sharing so many different perspectives. It is a unique situation. More than specific expectations I am looking forward to be “surprised”. And so far, I think this is what will happen.

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[This transcript has been edited for clarity and length.]



## Hot Topic: “How can or has art helped you or others build resilience in times of trauma?”

Denise Macalino

“Art has always been my pillar for strength and courage. It’s rooted my work in a narrative that I’ve been able to unravel over the years. Unravelling that through my poetry I’ve been able to link those personal struggles with larger contemporary issues... It has allowed me to celebrate and honor my difference. The exploration of difference and otherness are strong components in my work. I think all of that is rooted in my personal experience as a refugee – the arts has been a badge of courage.”

**Anida Ali**

*Artist in Residence, University of Washington, USA*

“[I saw] people in Afghanistan expressing their resistance through art and creativity to the status quo. It shifted my perception... It is inspirational and yet depressing that we have to talk about it in these terms – that we have to be celebrating

resilience, when we should be celebrating creation.”

**Dan Gorman**

*Executive Director, Shubbak Festival, UK*

“[In Rwanda, art] was a tool of reconciliation. Resilience, for us, was a way to recover the humanity which people lost during the genocide... For people affected by trauma, sometimes medicine can’t help. They need to recover through art.”

**Ntarugera Gakire**

*Co-founder, Rwanda Professional Dreamers, Rwanda*

“[Art can help] by helping you see another person as part of yourself and, as I was taught, as a relative... It is that perspective that can change the way we approach each other and be willing, or at least be open, to seeing each other’s differences in a more respectful way.”

**Eileen Briggs**

*Nation Building Portfolio Manager, Bush Foundation; Member of the Lakota Nation, USA*

“I believe that art can be, in one way, a way to cope with obstacles. But then I believe art needs something like a “sidekick” – like psychology, therapy, political activism. [Art] needs a motivation that stands behind it.”

**Chadi Bahouth**

*Freelance journalist and educator, Germany*

“I believe that creativity is at the core of every human being. Everyone is creative... [Through art] we are able to find the tools and resources to overcome difficult situations. I think that most of the organizations I work with use art to help connect people among themselves; creativity is what connects you to another human being.”

**Maria Sabau**

*Independent Advisor to Cultural Organizations, Spain*

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