

Mona Forghani

**Project report
STS390, “Media, war and peace”**

**Spring session, 2008
Science, Technology & Society
University of Wollongong**

The report has two parts.

1. A response pack for an actual organisation. This is not an official document and does not necessarily represent the views of the organisation.

Mona Forghani’s response pack for the Museum of Contemporary Art is a separate file.

2. A dialogue between students discussing the project. This dialogue is fictional. Pseudonyms were used so that the marker, Brian Martin, would not know the identity of student authors.

Mona Forghani’s dialogue starts on the next page.

THE DIALOGUE.

Two friends on the phone.

Ava Ok. I've talked too much! Your turn. Tell me everything that you've been up to lately.

Martin Hmm. Nothing much really. I've just been busy working lately. Oh! But I was in town yesterday and bought this awesome book about Frida Kahlo which was on sale.

Ava Frida Kahlo? Man, she is so strange! I really don't like her. What's with the eyebrows?

Martin Hahahaha. You don't like Kahlo? How can you NOT like Kahlo? She's amazing.

Ava Ok admittedly, I don't really know much about her. I've just heard she's really strange.

Martin Ok you need to give her a chance. Google some of her art right now. I'll warn you, they're weird, but they will give you a better understanding of who she was and the fascinating way she saw the world.

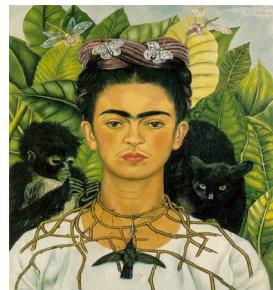
Ava (*Googles*)
Ok wow. She was quite an interesting little Mexican.

Martin Hahaha. I know I know. But on a serious note, can you really not see past the 'weirdness' and appreciate her ideas?

Ava Actually, you're right. I've been staring at this self-portrait of her for a while now. I think I finally get her now.

Martin Which one?

Ava



This one. I think it encapsulates her concept of self – bold and confident yet maternal, natural and feminine.

Martin Yeah I agree. See how stubborn you were! So addiment that you hated Kahlo without even knowing who she was or what her art was about.

Ava Forget about my stubbornness! I'm more intrigued right now by how expressive her artworks are. I honestly feel like I've just met her.

Martin Yeah it's incredible. Art is like a language. It allows an artist to speak, and the viewer to listen.¹ And the good thing is, it is a universal language. Everyone speaks 'art'. A powerful tool, really.

Ava You know what! I'm going to use this for that assignment I told you about – you know, the one that I have to make a response pack for.

Martin Oh yeah, I remember. You're going to do it on art?

Ava Well, how art can contribute towards building positive peace.

¹ M. Sturken and L. Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 41

Martin ‘Positive Peace’?! I don’t get it. ‘Positive’ as opposed to....?

Ava ‘Negative peace’.

Martin Did you just make these concepts up then?

Ava No! Basically, just like the way we define war in terms of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’, we can define peace in terms of being ‘positive’ or ‘negative’. In a nutshell, ‘negative peace’ refers to the establishment of a peace based on the mere absence of violence, whilst ‘positive peace’ refers to a peace grounded upon the co-operation, unity and integration of diverse groups.² It’s a more....‘proactive’ form of peace.

Martin Hey that’s interesting! But what does art have anything to do with this?

Ava Well I want to explore how art can assist diverse groups in a society to understand, empathise with, and tolerate one another’s culture and ideals— the crux of what positive peace claims to achieve. I’m sure it works. I mean, 30 seconds of staring at a Frida Kahlo self-portrait and already I’m calling her my new best friend!

Martin Hahaha. Yeah I don’t doubt that art can have a peace-building effect. Actually, the other day I was on the United Nations ‘Culture of Peace’ website and read about the various International Peace Day celebrations held around the world. Interestingly, majority of the participating organisations seemed to resort to the arts to execute their peace-building initiatives in celebration of the event.³ I guess that supports your argument?!

² L Sandy and R Perkins, ‘The Nature of Peace and Its Implications for Peace Education’, *The Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, vol 4, no. 2, 2002, pp. 1-8,
http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/ojpcr/ojpcr_4_2/ojpcr_4_2a.pdf, viewed 18 October 2008

³ ‘Annual Report 2007’, Culture of Peace Initiative (CPI), 2007,
<http://www.cultureofpeace.org/reports.html>, viewed 16 October 2008

Ava (*Doesn't respond*)

Martin Hello?

Ava Sorry, I'm here! I've just been searching the net for a case study.

Martin A case study of what?

Ava I need an to find an example of how the use of art contributed towards creating positive peace. Surprisingly, it's really hard to find one.

Martin Hmmmm. Perhaps it's because the peace-building effect of art is a long-term process. Glancing at a painting on a wall is not likely to instantaneously eliminate prejudice in an individual's mind. The effect is slow and cumulative.⁴ I'm sure other factors play a role in the creation of positive peace *in addition* to the artwork.

Ava You're right. Ah! So you're basically telling me I won't find a case study?

Martin Relax! No. But I suggest you forget trying to find a case study which necessarily demonstrates the peace-building effect of art. This might be too hard. Instead, focus on finding an example of where art has been utilised as an effective method of opening dialogue and inspiring empathy between groups in a society.

Ava I should just get you to do my assignment. You're right. One of the first ideas I had for a case study was the artworks and graffiti displayed on the Berlin Wall. A while ago I came across this website⁵ which featured several photographs of peaceful artworks which had been painted on the Wall. I thought I could research into this topic and

⁴ Education Department of MCA, personal interview, 20 October 2008

⁵ Berlin Wall Art: The Wall before the Fall, <http://www.berlinwallart.com/> viewed 17 October 2008

explore whether these peace-inspired paintings played a role in the unification of East and West Germany.

Martin Any luck?

Ava Not really. At most I just found information on Thierry Noir, a Frenchman who was responsible for painting a large section of the Berlin wall. However, none of these articles really suggested that the artwork played a peace-building role.

Martin Ahh, don't worry. I'm sure you'll find something sooner or later. Oh, by the way, did you hear about Mike's cat –

Ava WAIT! I think I found a good case study! Sorry to cut you off!

Martin No no, go for it. What's the case study?

Ava It's about some art exhibition which took place in Cairo in April this year which was designed to raise awareness amongst the Egyptian youth of the sufferings of displaced Palestinians.

Martin Yeah I think I heard about that?! The exhibition was in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Nakba, right?!

Ava Yeah that's the one. What do you think?!

Martin Yeah that's a good one. Where did you find it?

Ava I just read an article about the use of arts as a peace-building mechanism in Egypt generally, and it briefly mentioned the 'Townhouse Gallery'. Sounded like a pretty cool museum, and I'm the curious sort, so I Googled the name and came across this newspaper article about the '*Between the Walls*' which was held at the gallery.

Martin Bless Google! Hey, are you going to narrow your analysis of positive peace through art to a particular nation or community or are you going to keep it general?

Ava Oh narrow for sure! I think it would be too hard to do otherwise. Actually I was thinking of focusing my project on positive peace-building through art between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Martin Bringing the theory home, ay?

Ava Yeah! Well as soon as I read about the ‘positive peace’ theory, I tried to apply it to Australia in terms of current relations between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Australians.

Martin And what did you come up with?

Ava Well, I thought that generally we have achieved ‘negative peace’. We have made minor efforts to establish a co-operative dialogue with our Indigenous people, but nothing really beyond an annual celebration of Reconciliation Day and recognition of Native Title rights. We have legislation prohibiting racial discrimination and institutions established for promoting the welfare of Aboriginal people, but nothing which proactively promotes positive-peace relations as such.

Martin What about the National Apology? Does that change anything?

Ava Hmm. I think it’s a good turning point. Its words definitely acknowledge the previous wrongs we, as a nation, have committed. However, I think it’s the nature of the speech as a formal apology which speaks louder than its words. It opens a new chapter, inviting and inspiring co-operation, unity and change.

Martin And art is a good way of bringing about that change?

Ava Exactly! And think about it, a focus on Aboriginal art is perfect for this assignment. These artworks characteristically involve depictions of place, kinship and ancestry and thus ‘speak’ loudly about the culture, history and aspirations of Aboriginal Australians to their audiences.⁶ I think it would serve as a good example of the potential of art to facilitate dialogue and understanding between members of a society.

Do you think so?

Martin Yeah absolutely. I know there is a lot of literature on this too. So you’ve got your theory and you’re case study sorted. From memory, all you need now is an organisation for whom you will make the response pack for?

Ava Wow! I vow to never again underestimate your listening skills. Yeah that’s right. I think I’ll choose the Museum of Contemporary Art in Circular Quay, Sydney.

Martin Why so?

Ava Because it will give me an excuse to visit! No, on a serious note, I have selected it for two main reasons. Firstly, as a museum of ‘contemporary’ art, the works exhibited on the gallery walls are likely to discuss concepts more relevant to our current society. Also, contemporary art tends to be a lot more confrontational, sarcastic and witty, and thus, arguably easier to extract meaning.

Martin Right. And secondly...?

⁶ M Hinkson, ‘On looking at and feeling Aboriginal art’, *Arena Magazine*, issue 93, pp. 48 – 51, <http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.uow.edu.au:2048/fullText;res=APAFT;dn=200803590>, viewed 23 October 2008

- Ava Secondly because I know the Museum is a loyal exhibitor of Aboriginal artworks.⁷ On its website, the Museum even respectfully acknowledges the land on which it is built as traditionally belonging to the Eora people.⁸
- Martin Well you've justified it to me. I'll warn you though, the MCA is a busy centre who you may struggle to receive adequate time and assistance from. I know for a fact that they request any questions directed to them to be sent by email rather than be discussed face-to-face or over the phone.
- Ava Hmm. I'll keep that in mind. I have two artist friends though, Elizabeth and Lava who I think I might also interview just for some guidance. Elizabeth makes comics and Lava is a contemporary artist.
- Martin Yeah I think I met Lava the other night?! Anyway, I think it's a good idea if you interview them. These arty people usually do have good ideas. Well Avs, seems like you've got your head around this assignment.
- Ava Martin, thanks for helping me out. I owe you.
- Martin Take me for coffee sometime and we'll call it even.
- Ava Done!

⁷ Education Department of MCA, personal interview, 20 October 2008

⁸ Museum of Contemporary Art, http://www.mca.com.au/default.asp?page_id=4 viewed 18 October 2008