

Artist Statement

Tenzing Rigdol

There are two terms that immediately come to my mind when thinking about art. The Tibetan word *gyutSEL* (sgyu rtsal) and the Sanskrit term *chitrakala*. The Tibetan word *gyutSEL* comes from the word *gyuma* (sgyu ma)—meaning, illusion, magic, or magical—and *tsel* (rtsal)—meaning skill, dexterity or craftsmanship. There is a strong recognition within the term *gyuma* that emphasizes the element of magic or illusion, and implies that art is that which involves magical dexterity. It isn't just craft or technique or the imitation of imitation but has an extra element of magic, or at least an awareness of it as an illusion.

Similarly, the Sanskrit term is also a fascinating one. The term *chitrakala* comes from *chitta*—meaning consciousness or awareness—and *kala*—meaning death, empty, past/future, time. Here the activity of art is understood as an act of consciousness weaving through time. In both instances, there is an implied recognition of a prerequisite condition or certain quality of awareness needed from the one who is experiencing in order to elevate his activity to the level of art.

When I ask myself, “What is art?,” I wonder how differently I will respond to the same question when asked at different stages of an art process or practice. If I am in Hong Kong at the Rossi & Rossi Gallery, standing next to a painting I made, I might have a different experience of the artwork and therefore a different response than if we move back a bit in time and pose the same question when I am making the painting.

Furthermore, if we move farther away in time, away from the physical act of the painting and say I am only contemplating the composition of the painting, I think at that moment, I will have a very different response. I believe that for an artist, there are many doorways to experience the nuances of art but most of our discussion on art these days tends to revolve around the fruits, the artwork, or the product.

I feel that if the artworks are experienced only from the product-oriented way, then sometimes it destroys the very possibility for the viewer to partake in the process of making art. Therefore, I consider the whole journey, from the beginning of thought to the interweaving of the thought to a form, to the arrival at the final sense of fruition as many gateways to experiencing art.

Nowadays, I even find that many artists have alienated themselves from active participation in the process of making their own artwork. I think this has something to do with our natural preference for the product over the process of creating it—when instead the practice of art should

be treated like the practice of retreat or hermitage. If you treat the practice of art like a three-year retreat, then you have something interesting to tell, and to express and share with the world.

The story of Gautama Buddha's encounter with a musician illustrates this. Amongst many things, the Buddha was said to be an accomplished artist and a musician. One day, when Buddha was walking in a forest, he met some people on his way. One amongst them was a musician, and he had his flute tied around his waist. The Buddha upon seeing the flute asked the musician if he could play some tunes on it. The Buddha then gently took the flute and softly placed it between his lips and played an extremely beautiful melody with his eyes closed.

When the melody ended, he opened his bow-shaped eyes and acknowledged that to his own surprise he had become a much better flutist. Upon experiencing such a magical performance, the musician knelt before the Buddha and requested him to be his music teacher. To which the Buddha replied, "If you want to play the flute well, then pay less attention towards the flute and more attention towards the one who is playing it."