

BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dissertation

**THE RESTORATION OF THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL CONSTRUCT IN THE  
LIVES AND WORKS OF SIX VISUAL ARTISTS:  
WASSILY KANDINSKY, KÄTHE KOLLWITZ, JACOB LAWRENCE,  
MARK ROTHKO, VINCENT VAN GOGH, AND REMEDIOS VARO**

by

**ROBIN MASI**

B.F.A., Tufts University, 1983  
M.F.A., Academy of Art University, 1994  
Ed.M., Harvard University, 2007

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

2018



Approved by

First Reader

---

Hardin L.K. Coleman, Ph.D.  
Professor of Counseling Psychology

Second Reader

---

C. Allen Speight, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor and Chair of Philosophy  
Boston University, College of Arts and Sciences

Third Reader

---

Stephan E. Ellenwood, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Education

*It is very important for the artist to gauge his position aright, to realize that he has a duty to his art and to himself, that he is not king of the castle but rather a servant of a nobler purpose. He must search deeply into his own soul, develop and tend it, so that his art has something to clothe, and does not remain a glove without a hand...The artist is not born to a life of pleasure. He must not live idle; he has a hard work to perform, and one that often proves a cross to be borne. He must realize that his every deed, feeling, and thought are raw but sure material from which his work is to arise, that he is free in art but not in life. (Kandinsky, Wassily, p. 54)*

*Wassily Kandinsky, 1911*

*Art schools should be the conscience of the art world, ...they should not only consider finding a strong and clear moral core from which to educate but should achieve a moral presence in the art market. They should educate young artists about shop and business ethics; counsel them about the challenges of early success, in terms of the rigid branding expectations that are publicly set; dare to address those art dealers and collectors who walk through their M.F.A. shows; and host more than ever before the experimental and political art that has not yet found exhibition venues. In the end, art theory alone...does not constitute a lasting moral core for art schools. Actions must follow...There needs to be truly embodied practical gestures of institutional citizenship (Pujol, Ernest in Madoff, 2009, pg. 9).*

*Ernest Pujol, 2009*

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my family

Kent, Ben, Ben, Maya

and to my parents Dale and Joseph Masi

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Hardin L.K. Coleman, and my doctoral committee members, Professors C. Allen Speight and Stephan Ellenwood, for their unwavering support and invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank Professors Michael Aeschliman, Walter Earl Fluker, Robert Christian Engley, Gregg Harbaugh, Bernice Lerner, and the staff at Boston University, Sharon Brody, Brendan McDermott, Tom Reis, Stephen Roeder, who supported me in my studies. I am deeply indebted to Professor Howard Gardner, whose book *Creating Minds* started me on this journey 16 years ago, and to Professors Shelley Carson, Harvey Cox, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Donald Swearer who supported me in the earliest stages of this research while I attended Harvard University. I'm also indebted to Robert Norton and his comprehensive and inspirational work on the history of the beautiful soul. I would like to thank my own inspirational role models Marie deSales Dinneen, CSJ, Professor Emeritus of Art and Art History at Regis College; and artists Magdalena Abakanowicz, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Joseph Cornell, Artemisia Gentileschi, Andy Goldsworthy, Anselm Kiefer, Maya Lin, Shirin Nashat, Kara Walker, Ai Weiwei, among many others, and the six extraordinary artists in this study. Lastly, I would like to thank the Masi, Kuettel and Carlson families and treasured friends.

**THE RESTORATION OF THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL CONSTRUCT IN THE  
LIVES AND WORKS OF SIX VISUAL ARTISTS:  
WASSILY KANDINSKY, KÄTHE KOLLWITZ, JACOB LAWRENCE,  
MARK ROTHKO, VINCENT VAN GOGH, AND REMEDIOS VARO  
ROBIN MASI**

Boston University School of Education, 2018

Major Professor: Hardin L.K. Coleman, Ph.D., Professor of Counseling Psychology

**ABSTRACT**

The Nobel Prize, arguably the most prestigious acknowledgement of ethical achievement, was established by Alfred Nobel to honor those who have performed “to the greatest benefit of mankind” (Nobel, 2018). Despite the many categories for which Nobel laureates are recognized, there is no category that specifically recognizes the visual artist. In addition, many other direct and indirect measures of individual ethical achievement, such as Gallup’s annual most admired man and woman poll, rarely mention artists. This lack raises an important question: Do contributions to the visual arts fall outside the realm of ethics, thus rendering visual artists ineligible to stand as models of the ethical life?

This dissertation aims to cultivate an understanding of the visual artist as a type of ethical exemplar known as the “restored beautiful soul,” a theoretical construct proposed here for the first time in the Masi Model of the Artist as Restored Beautiful Soul (MMARBS). This construct combines the *kalos kagathos* ideal of the “beautiful soul,” which originated in ancient Greece as the fusion of the beautiful and the good and was revived by Enlightenment philosophers, with a restorative additional element of the communal. Using this new theoretical construct, this

investigation analyzes the lives, practices, and influences of a sample of prominent late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century visual artists.

This investigation is not simply a theoretical foray into the construct of the ethical artist, however; it is also a practical contribution to the field of arts education. Currently, arts schools and art programs at institutions of higher learning offer little guidance to help aspiring young artists ground their lives and work in a comprehensive system of personal and professional ethics. To remedy this deficiency, arts educators can incorporate the case examples from this investigation into their own curricula, and, more important still, apply the restored beautiful soul construct (MMARBS) to other historical and contemporary artists. Thus, using this new construct, arts educators can develop one-of-a-kind curricula tailored to the needs of specific students, providing those students with role models to demonstrate what it means to maintain a sense of integrity with respect to one's work, one's viewers, and one's community over a career spanning a lifetime.



## PREFACE

The origins of this investigation are twofold. It arises in part as a response to a serious oversight in upholding the ethics and moral problem solving competencies of the accreditation criteria for institutions of higher learning that specialize in arts education. Perhaps even more fundamentally, however, it arises from the researcher's lifelong love for, and struggle with, how to create art that provides a transformative experience for the viewer, and from years of seeing her own struggles replayed again and again in her students.

My years as an undergraduate art student were difficult in large part because of the highly conceptual nature of arts pedagogy during the 1980s. I encountered many challenges finding meaningful role models to help me discern the direction of my work. As a result, my work tended to be muddled and confusing. Though I frequently visited museums and galleries to shape my visual mind, I was ignorant about the voices of the artists, about their lives, practices, and influences as told in their own words, all of which would have helped me form a vision for my work and a plan to shape my life as an artist. I knew a lot about *works* of art, but little about what being an artist really *meant*. Thankfully, as I read more directly from the artists themselves, my perspective changed, gradually enabling me to find my own voice and vision.

During my more than 20 years of teaching visual art students in a variety of settings (campus and online art schools, colleges, and universities), I have found that my own unfortunate experience as a young art student is all too common in arts education, as is well documented in the literature. The great majority of my art students have consistently demonstrated the passion, dedication, and desire to create work deeply connected to themselves, their viewers, and the universal. This drive is the initial spark that is essential for a young artist to succeed, as for any other aspiring professional. However, unlike the fields of politics, religion, science, or medicine,

in the visual arts, there are few robust studies of great artists as role models that could help the student chart his or her path by learning directly from the experiences of the artist in the artist's own words. To chart such a path, students need first to develop a sense of ethical grounding, but their formal arts education rarely, if ever, provides for this need.

There is little information available for arts educators to teach the *how* of being an artist who aspires to create transformative experiences and, furthermore, to teach it through the voices of those great artists who have come and gone before them. Students need precise, well-wrought role models and readings to help guide them as they create and sustain their voices, visions, and careers over time. And as arts educators, we must do all we can to prevent our students from leaving the field burdened with mounds of debt because they hadn't developed a foundation within themselves strong and purposeful enough to sustain a creative vision and career. This study offers one component, research culled from the voices of six ethically visionary artists, to help the next generation of artists nourish that creative vision.