

# FROM: Dharma Art

BY CHOGYAM TRUNGPA



The term *dharma art* does not mean art depicting Buddhist symbols or ideas, such as the Wheel of Life or the story of Gautama Buddha. Rather, dharma art refers to art that springs from a certain state of mind on the part of the artist that could be called the meditative state. It is an attitude of directness and unselfconsciousness in one's creative work.

The basic problem in artistic endeavor is the tendency to split the artist from the audience and then try to send a message from one to the other. When this happens, art becomes exhibitionism. One person may get a tremendous flash of inspiration and rush to "put it down on paper" to impress or excite others, and a more deliberate artist may strategize each step of his work in order to produce certain effects on his viewers. But no matter how well-intentioned or technically accomplished such approaches may be, they inevitably become clumsy and aggressive toward others and toward oneself.

In meditative art, the artist embodies the viewer as well as the creator of the works. Vision is not separate from operation, and there is no fear of being clumsy or failing to achieve his aspiration. He or she simply makes a painting, poem, piece of music or whatever. In that sense, a complete novice could pick up a brush and, with the right state of

mind, produce a masterpiece. It is possible, but that is a very hit-and-miss approach. In art, as in life generally, we need to study our craft, develop our skills and absorb the knowledge and insight passed down by tradition.

But whether we have the attitude of a student who could still become more proficient in handling his materials, or the attitude of an accomplished master, when we were actually creating a work of art there is a sense of total confidence. Our message is simply one of appreciating the nature of things as they are and expressing it without any struggle of thoughts and fears. We give up aggression, both toward ourselves, that we have to make a special effort to impress people, and toward others, that we can put something over on them.

Genuine art—dharma art—is simply the activity of nonaggression.

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...So dharma art is not showmanship, or having some talent that nobody had before, having an idea that nobody's done before. Instead, the main point of dharma art is discovering elegance. And that is a question of state of mind...

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...Creating a work of art is not a harmless thing. It always is a powerful medium. Art is extraordinarily powerful and important. It challenges people's lives.

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