BOOK REVIEW

Kim Shelley Berman. *Finding Voice: A Visual Arts Approach to Engaging Social Change*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press New Public Scholarship Series, 2017. 225 pp. Illustrations. Appendix. Notes. References. Index. $24.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780472053667.

In *Finding Voice: A Visual Arts Approach to Engaging Social Change,* Kim Shelley Berman examines how the arts can be used through intra/inter-personal, organizational, collaborative, and communal relationships to address social injustice. Berman considers the pros and cons of different approaches to research, arguing "that there is no fixed methodology of best practice, for engaging social change through the arts." The creative process can enliven many theories of change and encourage the evolution of processes hitherto non-existent (9). Berman relies on John Paul Lederach's approach, adopting arts-based methods of inquiry for social action and justice. This book approaches its subject from several angles, including the challenges of building an arts organization, the impact of government policies, arts as a tool for social change, the resilience of individual(s) and their communities, and the need for collaboration.

Among the narratives presented in the book is the story of Artist Proof Studio (APS), a tale reminiscent of South Africa's *Long Walk to Freedom.* One of APS's most pressing challenges was to overcome the aftermath of apartheid. At APS, printmaking became a democratic medium to engage social change; black and white artists worked harmoniously on collaborative projects that transcended race and class. The saddening fire incident at APS resulted in the death of its co-founder, Nhlanhla Xaba, and the destruction of valuable artworks. Rebuilding APS connects the shattered pieces of the South African soul with the socio-political history of apartheid and the need to build a transformed society. It is, however, disheartening to note that one of the teachers at APS failed to learn from what he taught others about HIV/AIDS; he refused counseling and treatment, which resulted in his death. Failure to learn from history could constitute a sticking point for the wheel of development; moreover, some political leaders such as Jacob Zuma (63) have not shown enough responsible leadership, as evident by their lifestyles.

Berman utilizes the challenges, prospects, and interventions of Phumani Paper to analyze inconsistent government policies and funding toward sustainable job creation and stabilization of the nascent South African democracy. Often, lofty ideas in government policies lack strong commitment; these could be seen as propaganda for scoring cheap political goals. Berman's argument to eradicate the academic bureaucracy that threatens creative thinking as evident in the case of David Tshabalala is apt. Further, bridging the gap between "town and gown" would help the educational system to truly serve as a hub for transforming society.

Finding Voice expatiates on the need for individual(s) and communities to collaborate toward self-actualization. There is a Yoruba proverb that states, *Àgbájo owó ni a fíí sò'yà, owó kan kò gbérù d'órí* (concerted effort is expedient to achieving the desired goal). *Finding Voice* thus recounts community mural painting, visual mapping, Phumani Paper Making, PhotoVoice, Paper Prayers, and the Reclaiming Lives projects to explicate concerted efforts through which individual(s) have found their voices. The narratives that accompany Oodira's monoprint and the PhotoVoice narratives of Mashiane, Mano, Molelekoa, and Sepagela, as well as the submissions of student participants, are pungent attestations to the visual arts as a voice for engaging social change. The enduring aspirations of Blacks amid apartheid as captured in Daniel Magaziner's *The Art of Life in South Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2016) and the Zarianists/Zaria Art Society (1950s) in Nigeria are other means by which people have found their voices. Berman's narrative on the #FeesMust-Fall movement further expatiates on people's voice in getting the government's attention to subsidize higher education. There is also the agitation against the dominant Eurocentric academic model earlier denounced by Achille Mbembe (*Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive*, WISER lecture 2015) and Ruth Simbao et al. ("Reaching Sideways, Writing Our Ways: the Orientation of the Arts of Africa Discourse," 2017, *African Arts* 50 [2] 10–29). Fela Anikulapo Kuti through his music also lent his voice to decolonizing the mind of Africans.

Finding Voice has several strengths. Since its stories are based on fieldwork, the one-on-one author/actor interactions added value to the book, while the carefully chosen illustrations substantiate the facts, draw the readers closer, and contribute to better understanding. The Notes and References also constitute a treasure trove for socio-cultural scholars. With this exciting book, Berman has offered a very incisive and thought-provoking narrative on visual arts as the voice for social action toward a more desirable society. Resilience is the theme that runs throughout the book; the author convincingly argues that visual arts remain a potent means of assisting individuals to overcome fear, conflict, and stigmatization, enabling them to make positive contributions toward transforming society. The book is written in pragmatic and eloquent language, though it is not without a pocket of typographical slips; the golden thread that links different aspects of the book is a fascinating page-turner that whets the reader's appetite. *Finding Voice* will be a great delight to creative thinkers, scholars of African art and postcolonial studies, and those

who want to deepen their knowledge of the socio-political history of South Africa.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Barber, Karin. 1987. "Popular Arts in Africa." *African Studies Review* 30 (3): 1–78. doi: 10.2307/524538.
Kerr, Graham B. 1978. "Voluntary Associations in West Africa: 'Hidden' Agents of Social Change." *African Studies Review* 21 (3): 87–100. doi:10.2307/523888.