Our responsibility to harness culture for social change

Art and creativity have a transformative, healing potential that is more relevant to the 21st century than ever before. Abu Dhabi believes in the powerful impact culture has on societies; recognising that it is a necessity, not a luxury. As the city cements its role as a leading centre for cultural dialogue and influence, we also recognise culture’s transformative power and its effectiveness as an agent for change, capable of bringing nations and minds together.

In an interconnected world, and in our bid to continuously share our emirate’s vibrant and diverse culture, we cannot deny the fact that we have been facing many of the same issues and challenges being addressed by governments and organisations around the world. The evolution of cultural institutions, faced with changing audiences in a digitised era. A thoroughly globalised art industry. The spread of information in a “post-truth” world. Beyond these exist the issues of conflict, displacement and the erasure of treasured heritage.

Two adjectives frequently appear when such matters are discussed, and solutions are offered: “innovative” and “sustainable”.

As Abu Dhabi forges ahead in its creation of a truly global cultural capital, we are endeavouring to meet these challenges head on. We are employing cutting-edge museology with our existing and planned art institutions. We are contributing to the protection of heritage in peril and the promotion of open, intercultural dialogue, having co-established the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH).

This is just the start, as Abu Dhabi addresses what, beyond the expected, our role as cultural agents can be. We believe that we have a responsibility to use the potent force of culture for good, to facilitate dialogue and enable healing, and to seek effective new methods of supporting and enhancing this power.

It is with this in mind that we look to the third edition of CultureSummit. Starting tomorrow in Abu Dhabi running until April 11, the summit is our annual convening of global leaders to seek answers, policy recommendations and ideas on cultural responsibility and its impact on society in the 21st century.

This year’s theme of “Cultural Responsibility & New Technology” reflects the current zeitgeist, advocating for a central and effective role for culture in a global, technologically led society.

A series of dynamic panel sessions and workshops will see participants working together to generate new strategies and practical solutions for change. The changing face of media and the role information plays in our increasingly global society will be examined, while arguments around the tangible and intangible role of heritage in social change, as well as questions around heritage in conflict and emergency situations, are debated.

Pressing issues from the international art world, including artistic freedom and the homogenisation of global visual culture, will be discussed, while museums professionals address how their institutions can best embrace the digital age and remain relevant in shaping the future of culture.

The topic of technology will be woven throughout the programming, providing insights into digital culture and sparking constructive discussion on the role of technological innovation in arts, heritage, and the media.
The globally relevant topics being addressed by the summit are especially resonant at this time and in this location, in what has been designated the Year of Tolerance in the UAE. CultureSummit is so much more than a series of panel discussions and workshops. Striving to positively change the world, it is a cultural movement that we collectively need to sustain through time. It is one of the many initiatives that shows Abu Dhabi's efforts to foster the sort of intercultural dialogue and acceptance that can only be unlocked by educating younger generations and using culture as an instrument for change.

We believe that cultural agents can and should be more engaged in addressing global challenges, harnessing creativity and technology to propose practical solutions for change. It is crucial that culture not be defined simply as entertainment. It is a platform that the world shares to deepen our understanding of one another. We all have a collective responsibility to harness its power as a transformative force for progress and unity.

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COMMENT

It takes a leap of faith to imagine Syrian killers ever being brought to justice