

The world waits for your "and yet"

Creating art can seem futile in a world that prefers power and might to truth and beauty. But we've been here before.

By [John P. Leggett](#)

January 11, 2018

We are living in an age when words have become cheap and beauty eludes us. We've been in this place myriad times before in human history. But it just seems different now.

While I long for people whose words are vessels of truth and grace, I hear only the silence. And while I search for reliable witnesses to reveal the beauty which fills this world, I too often meet people whose despair has caused them to store their brushes or shutter their lens. And yet, we need these voices with the right words, these artists with their visions of beauty, more than we've ever needed them before.

I have noticed artists of all types—writers and poets and teachers and painters and photographers—speak about giving up their work. "It's just too much," they say, "offering up words and beauty and no one seems to notice or care." Even in the best times, but certainly now, artists know the temptation to believe that all the real decisions and great deeds are being done by people in places of power and not by ordinary artists in the midst of ordinary life.

Scratching out words on paper, spreading paint on a canvas, capturing the splendor of a sunset with your camera seem futile in a world that prefers to seek answers in power and might rather than truth and beauty. Is that why the voices have gone silent? Why beauty lies hidden?

But we've been here before.

In fact, Günter Grass wrote his novel *The Meeting in Telgte* about this very thing. Grass sets it in the first part of the 17th century, just after the Thirty Years War in Germany. As with all wars, the slaughter was horrendous. The whole country had become a battlefield and people wondered whether life would ever be life again.

The story centers on two meetings. The first takes place in Münster, the “important” city where all of the diplomats and military leaders gather to discern how life would go on after all of that devastation and destruction.

But Grass imagines a second meeting happening at the same time. He envisions all the famous poets and writers of the age gathering not in the city of power, but rather in the small town of Telgte not too far outside of Münster. Through this construct, Grass sets up a great tension. While the great politicians and military leaders are working out the terms of peace, the artists convene to engage several questions: Can art rise above the clamor of the nations? Can truth transcend the compromises and mutual suspicions and power plays in history? Can words be found that might give despairing humanity a little courage to begin again?

At first, things go well. The gathered artists write beautiful essays and poems. But then something happens that sends them into despair, and into silence. They realize that they are themselves not removed from the chaos, but rather that they are part of it. And they begin to ask the question I hear too many asking today: Why are we even here?

Grass puts the answer to that question in the voice of a musician at the table, Heinrich Schütz. He says to the artists that they are here “to wrest from the helplessness ... a faint ‘and yet.’”

And yet. To wrest from the helplessness a feeble yet unmistakable “nevertheless.” The world is waiting for your “and yet.” Do you wonder what your “and yet” may be?

Perhaps it’s a photo of the sun dipping below the Blue Ridge Mountains and setting the sky on fire and breaking open the hearts of those with eyes to see. Or maybe it’s an essay in which you reveal the ways your heart is alive by pointing us to the beauty or sorrow or ache or splendor of the world that we miss until you name it for us. Or it could be a painting that comes from somewhere inside you in response to what you have seen, and as you paint, you weep as you imagine how what you have seen might reshape the world for someone who is waiting for just the thing you are creating that speaks your feeble but persistent “and yet.”

Whatever you have that bears truth and points to beauty, that is your offering to heal the world. The world may not realize that yet. But I want you to know that I know that what the world is waiting for is you. It waits for you to show up this day, in this moment, to offer your unmistakable, unique “and yet.”

Originally posted at [Leggett's blog](#)