

The vital Beauty. A manifesto for Beauty in the education system

La Belleza necesaria. Manifiesto a favor de la Belleza en el sistema educativo

Alberto CAMPO BAEZA, PhD. Academician of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando
(estudio@campobaeza.com).

Abstract:

This manifesto argues for the importance of cultivating the fine arts in the education of children and their relationship with the cultivation of intelligence. Poetry, music, drawing, painting, and philosophy transmit Beauty, which is inseparably linked to reason and truth.

Teachers must know how to use knowledge to light a flame in the minds and souls of their students, and how to transmit to them the sacred fire of culture. To keep this flame, which is the search for Beauty, burning, the fine arts are essential.

Keywords: fine arts, manifesto for beauty, education system, cultivating intelligence, truth, culture, childhood, adolescence.

Resumen:

Este Manifiesto desea convencer de la importancia de cultivar las Bellas Artes en la enseñanza, en los niños, y de su relación con el cultivo de la inteligencia. La poesía, la música, el dibujo, la pintura, la filosofía son transmisores de la Belleza, que va indisolublemente unida a la razón, a la verdad.

Un profesor tiene que saber cómo encender de conocimiento el alma y el pensamiento de sus alumnos, cómo transmitirles el fuego sagrado de la Cultura. Y para mantener encendido ese fuego, la búsqueda de la Belleza, las Bellas Artes son imprescindibles.

Descriptores: bellas artes, manifiesto por la belleza, sistema educativo, cultivo de la inteligencia, verdad, cultura, infancia, adolescencia.

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95 EV

1. Introduction

I must acknowledge that when I chose to describe Beauty as necessary, I was thinking about how many other authors before me would have spoken about it. And so I innocently turned to Google: nobody, not one, not a single one! Nobody speaks about the need for Beauty.

How can we live without Beauty? For human beings, Beauty is as necessary as the air we breathe. Without Beauty, this life would not be worth living.

But is Beauty within everyone's reach? Yes, it is. In a thousand ways, but it is. From children, at home and at school. To the elderly, until as we approach a hundred, like Goya, we can say: "I am still learning".

This manifesto argues for the importance of cultivating the fine arts in the education of children and their relationship with the cultivation of intelligence. Because Beauty is inseparably linked to reason and to truth. "The splendour of truth" was how Plato defined Beauty. And, for the time being, neither reason nor Truth nor Beauty are the patrimony of the rich. They belong to everyone. Adam, who had nothing, was so captivated by the sublime Beauty of Eve, that when she offered him the apple, he ate it without objection. Not because of the apple but because of Eve, because of her Beauty.

Is it so hard to convince children and adolescents of this need for Beauty? I think not. I believe that children in particular understand the Beauty we have been given in this world. And I think that

the best way is to put attractive examples before them.

2. Poetry, memory

*May the soul awaken, / the mind rouse
and come to life / contemplating / how life
passes by, / how death comes to us, / so quietly,
/ how soon pleasure goes away, / how,
after awakening, / it causes pain; / how, it
seems to us / any time past / was better.*

Coplas por la muerte de su padre.

Jorge Manrique

It is disconcerting to think about how I can still recite so precisely from memory in one go this beautiful verse by Jorge Manrique, which I learnt when I was so young.

I am sure that you will remember, like me, how hearing words that sounded so good, because what they said was poetry, had such an impression on us. Do you remember the first poem you wrote when you were children after being left captivated when you heard Manrique's verses? And the expressions of delight of your teacher and the other students when you recited it in class. And the faces of your parents and siblings when you recited it that night at home?

3. Music

Do you recall the family gathering where everyone applauded when you, still but a child, played that well-known melody on the recorder?

I still remember a piano recital by José Cubiles in Cádiz. In the summer, during

the Festivales de España, concerts were held in the Faculty of Medicine next to my house. I still recall Cubiles playing Manuel de Falla's *Nights in the gardens of Spain*. In the following days I rushed to imitate that concert by Cubiles with my puppets. I made the piano out of old black x-rays belonging to my father. It was a great success with critics and the public.

My siblings and I, well taught by our parents, took the His Master's Voice gramophone and, spellbound, played classical music. The maid, whom we loved very much, always used to say: "There go the children, playing funeral music."

Yesterday I got very excited when I asked a friend of mine about his son, who had been one of my students, and my friend answered that he had just dropped him off at his clarinet class.

4. I want to be one of them

In front of me, on my computer screen, the Hofkapelle Munich orchestra and the Tölzer Knabenchor children's choir, directed by Christian Fliegner, are performing a very beautiful version of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*.

One of the advantages of the computer is that I can see the faces of all of the German children who make up this marvellous choir. The children's faces as they sing are a picture. It is clear that they are completely lost in music, that they are having a wonderful time. I would like to be one of them. How I would love to be with these children singing Bach with such precision and such enthusiasm!

And when it comes to writing about fine arts in teaching and the cultivation of intelligence, my answer would, if possible, be that the readers of these lines and their children, should watch and enjoy this incredible video that can convince any child to join in with that, to want to be one of them: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrrdWYh9Hwc>

And the fact is that music transmits Beauty. Especially hand in hand with Bach through the children.

5. Drawing, painting

Do you remember the excitement with which you showed your mother the first drawing you did after seeing Picasso's sketches? After returning from the visit to that exhibition when we were so young, we thought that we could also do it. And we drew and took it to our mother, who else? And she showered us in kisses. And we never stopped drawing at any time in our lives.

I still remember that school visit to the Museo del Prado. And how, in front of *The Lances* by Velázquez, the teacher made us count the parallel, upright lances and the ones that were sloping. I put my hand up and said: "Twenty-five upright and four sloping!" "Exactly," said the teacher. And then a few days later, back at school, he showed some slides which, as well as the painting by Velázquez, included the *Battle of San Romano* by Paolo Ucello from the Louvre, and again he asked how many lances were upright and how many were sloping. I quickly put my hand up again

and said: “Twenty-five sloping and four upright!” “Exactly,” the teacher said again. And he told us how Velázquez must have known the work from 200 years earlier, where, in contrast with Velázquez, Ucello tried to show the uproar of battle. Because Velázquez, the teacher assured us, was trying to depict the opposite, the peace and serenity of the surrender of Breda, and he managed it. This is something I will not forget as long as I live. Since then I have been a devotee of Velázquez. And it was around then that I started painting.

I have often written that to draw is to think with one’s hands. Not just for an architect, as is obvious, but for everyone. At the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, there is just one Velázquez: his drawing of Cardinal Borja, one of the few surviving drawings by Velázquez. It is a true marvel. Because Velázquez, as well as being an exceptional painter, was extraordinarily good at drawing.

I recently donated all of my drawings — all of them! — to the library of my Escuela de Arquitectura de Madrid, and the scanned archives of all of these drawings, more than 12,000 of them, to the school of architecture and to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando. I am more surprised than anyone by the result.

6. Philosophy

Do you remember, as children, discovering philosophy and how with Socrates you said “I know that I know nothing”? Maybe it was when you heard Plato’s proposal that Beauty was the splendour

of truth. And you thought “of course!” It might seem like children would not be able to understand philosophy, but of course they can!

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in a very beautiful message to the participants at a meeting in Rimini (Italy) of the Communion and Liberation ecclesial movement on the subject of “The contemplation of Beauty”, said something with clear Platonic echoes:

Whoever has perceived this beauty knows that truth, and not falsehood, is the real aspiration of the world. It is not the false that is “true”, but indeed, the Truth. It is, as it were, a new trick of what is false to present itself as “truth” and to say to us: over and above me there is basically nothing, stop seeking or even loving the truth; in doing so you are on the wrong track. The icon of the crucified Christ sets us free from this deception that is so widespread today. However it imposes a condition: that we let ourselves be wounded by him, and that we believe in the Love who can risk setting aside his external beauty to proclaim, in this way, the truth of the beautiful.

And in case it was not clear, he put forth another authoritative argument:

Is there anyone who does not know Dostoyevsky’s often quoted sentence: “The Beautiful will save us”? However, people usually forget that Dostoyevsky is referring here to the redeeming Beauty of Christ. We must learn to see Him. If we know Him, not only in words, but if we are struck by the arrow of His paradoxical beauty, then we will truly know

Him, and know Him not only because we have heard others speak about Him. Then we will have found the beauty of Truth, of the Truth that redeems. Nothing can bring us into close contact with the beauty of Christ Himself other than the world of beauty created by faith and light that shines out from the faces of the saints, through whom His own light becomes visible.

7. Fearlessly

When I wrote my inaugural lecture as an Academician of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, I searched for a central topic, Beauty of course! And, to make an impact on the audience, I looked for a compelling term that could awaken that desire for Beauty in them. And I called my talk “Fearlessly seeking Beauty”.

Because I think this is what all human beings do, more or less consciously. And in it I used a thousand arguments that I think reminded those present – they were already convinced of it – that our life has meaning within this search for happiness, which is the fearless search for Beauty. As do the lives of children.

8. Teaching: the kindling of a flame

Montaigne said: “Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.” And he was right. Teachers must know how to set a light in their students’ souls and thoughts through knowledge. They must know how to transmit the sacred fire of culture to them. And to keep

this flame, the search for Beauty, burning, fine arts are vital; they are the best fuel for this fire.

Julián Marías notes that the three qualities a teacher should have are knowledge, the ability to teach, and the desire to teach. This is very clear, much in the style of Ortega y Gasset. I recall the best teachers from my childhood and university days as being extraordinarily cultured people, who not only spoke about their specific subjects, but also about everything relating to culture. And this is what I have tried to do when it has been my turn to teach.

And for the same reason, the three qualities of students should be: knowing that they do not know, knowing how to learn, and wanting to learn. I would tell young pupils to be aware that they know nothing but that there is an easy solution to this. They must learn to learn, which means focussing all of their attention on what they are doing. And they must want to learn, which means dedicating as much time as is needed. And if drawing and music, poetry and philosophy, dance and gymnastics also appear there, all the better.

Intelligence is cultivated, like plants. And the fine arts are fertile soil for the best growth. I recall a story by Gloria Fuertes in which a child had to read in order to grow. He only grew when he read books. If this child did not just read books but also enjoyed music and drawing and poetry and philosophy and dance and gymnastics, he would grow exceedingly well.

9. Light and Beauty. The rosy fingered dawn

How could an architect speak of Beauty without speaking of light? How could a child not understand that light, the constantly moving sunlight, is one of the ingredients of Beauty?

The window of my room in Madrid is large and illegal. And it has outstanding views over all of the roofs and stainless steel chimneys stretching as far as the tallest buildings of Plaza de España. It faces west and so every day at dusk it receives the rays of the sun, which warm me very pleasantly in winter and less pleasantly in summer. But, in the morning, at the right moment, all of the chimneys adorning this landscape of rooftops, almost all of which are made of shining stainless steel, are flooded with the pink light of the rising sun at dawn in Madrid. And because of the movement of the light, this wonder only lasts for a short time. For me, the fact they are touched by

the *rosy-fingered Dawn* of which Homer speaks so well and so often in his *Odyssey* comes into my mind and my heart. I can assure you that it is a spectacle of great beauty. And this is why I mention it here, because the movement of the light reveals Beauty, it reflects the passage of time and it confirms my repeated affirmation that light builds time. And Beauty. From dawn to dusk.

10. Conclusion *I am still learning*

As I finish writing this text arguing for the presence of fine arts in teaching with the value that corresponds to them, I again feel that I am still learning. Something Goya expresses so well in a small engraving that featured in his most recent exhibition at the Museo del Prado: “I am still learning” he wrote on the engraving of an old man, with white hair and a white beard supporting himself on two sticks. As with this reflection full of personal memories, I have been learning again, at my age, and have learnt a lot.



Source: de Goya y Lucientes, F. J. (1825-1828). *I am still learning* [Drawing in black pencil and lithographic pencil on laid paper]. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

Of course Goya, who was very intelligent, also engraved and wrote “The sleep of reason produces monsters” and, adding: “But fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with it, it is the mother of the arts and the origin of marvels.” Children understand this very well.



Source: de Goya y Lucientes, F. J. (1797-1799). *The sleep of reason produces monsters* [Etching]. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

If I were a father and I had a child of the right age, the first thing I would do is make sure that he asked me to sign him up, wherever I could, for music, drawing, poetry and philosophy. He would be happy and I even more so, if that were possible. And the two of us would be freer.

11. Nota bene

Baltasar Gracián sums up very well all that I have tried to say about fine arts, culture and teaching:

Man is born a barbarian and raises himself above the beasts through culture. Culture makes the man, more so the higher it is. Demonstrating this, Greece called the rest of the universe barbarians. Ignorance is very crude. Nothing cultivates more than knowledge.

And I would go so far as to add that nothing produces more happiness than Beauty.

Author biography

Alberto Campo Baeza is Emeritus Professor in Projects at the Escuela de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM), where he has taught for over 50 years. He has given classes at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) in Zurich, the École Polytechnique Fédérale (EPFL) in Lausanne, the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and the Bauhaus in Weimar among other institutions.

He has lectured all over the world and has received numerous prizes. In 2014 he was made a full Academician in the Architecture Section of Spain's Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, and an International Fellowship was conferred on him by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). In 2019 he was made an Honorary Fellow by the American Institute of Architects. In 2020 he received the Gold Medal for Architecture awarded by the CSCAE (Consejo Superior de los Colegios de Arquitectos de España).