Identity: Exploring the Theme

We are born as beings in relationship: with our parents, grandparents, siblings, neighbors, and more. From our families, to our homes, to the woods and wilds around us, we relate to every created thing. And all of creation speaks to us, by sharing with us what it is.

Through shape, color, space, and time, we sense the identities of those around us. We relax in the pattern and rhythm of the world, whose predictable forms speak to us in an ancient language. We learn our place, our pattern, and what we are capable of by creatively engaging with others in a way that preserves the stability of others and ourselves.

The slow, steady movement of the rhythm of the world makes self-expression easy. Carefully preserved cultural forms such as language, myth, rites of passage, familial and formal roles, clothing and embellishments, and mannered ways of moving and speaking teach us what to do and who we are.

As we use these artistic forms to share ourselves with others, we receive creative signals in return. We are birthed and rebirthed through the process, our creative cues propelling us forward into new circumstances that require a re-evaluation and re-presentation of our selves.

This process too is slow and natural. But at times there is unexpected change -- misrepresentation, disease, violence -- changes that shock the stable patterns we use to discover meaning in our lives. Unable to decipher what these new patterns of communication mean, communication can fail. Then, misunderstanding can ensue.

When we cannot communicate due to misunderstanding -- when we risk feeling ashamed -- we may act one way while at school, another way with our friends, adopt virtual personas online, and resume our private routines at home. Revealing small portions of our identities can be adaptive and beneficial, but when communities expect us to hide ourselves due to misunderstanding and judgement, this can contribute to fragmentation and isolation. Repeated on a large scale, this can contribute to a crisis of meaning.

By taking the time to thoughtfully represent the many aspects of ourselves, we bring ourselves to wholeness and healing. Through our art, we then share our authentic selves with others, which allows others to work with us in a way that we all need: as interdependent, complex people with histories and a future.

The journey to self-understanding and expression is the substance of our lives. Through adoption of cultural forms, self-reflection, adaptation, and representation, we realize the enormous creative potential that unfolds as we journey toward a Self.

We may even discover that this creative potential is the very essence of who we are.