

A Pile of Bricks

The French mathematician Henri Poincaré said, “Science is built of facts the way a house is built of bricks; but an accumulation of facts is no more science than a pile of bricks is a house.”

A similar analogy can be applied to many items in the martial arts and other disciplines, as well. A kata is built of movements, but an accumulation of movements is no more a kata than...etc. If you don't see this right away, simply look at most kata/forms/hyung created after say 1950. Putting together movements from older forms, the styles that employ them have a claim on novelty, however novelty does not equal value. Quite often the pile of techniques that contribute to the kata's shape no more fit together than a Frank Gehry building fits in a medieval village, or a medieval windmill fits into a jet engine factory.

The same applies to a martial curriculum. Many “founders” create an art from a pile of techniques but have no plan that makes a construct of those techniques, except perhaps a string of bricks that are laid end to end. Anyone desiring to start a training discipline can easily pick and choose from several curricula and create *something* — integrating them rationally so that they create a martial art is the challenge. Whenever integration is successfully achieved, the next challenge is to see if the structure of the art can really “house” anyone.

If it cannot, not just cement is lacking, but also a good architect, talented laborers, and a set of functional blueprints, as well. In science, the theory is proposed, explained and justified, then tested as objectively as possible, then is released to other scientists to troubleshoot. Some may have a problem with the details, but if the scientific theory not only answers questions, but also can predict an occurrence based on its concepts, it is considered valid.

In the creative arts, I believe a similar set of circumstances should occur. No, I don't think that Jamie Wyeth needs to submit his latest painting to other artists for review, but I do believe that we make a mistake in thinking that if his name is Wyeth, everything he produces must be great art. In the creative arts, we have succumbed to the idea that if we like more than one work, we like the artist, and if we like the artist, we must therefore like his art no matter what he produces. Well not quite. I really enjoy most of Jamie Wyeth's paintings, but there are a few, especially of seabirds, that I find uninspiring. That does not mean I dislike Wyeth, it means I like him more than I dislike him. It means that, for the most part, he turns his brick piles into houses I would like to live in or near.

Of course, there is no accounting for taste. You might like a Picasso house where I would not be caught crippled in such a contortion. Ask yourself however at what point in his development would you *not* like to live in a Picasso house. Then ask how many of those houses

Picasso built. How about an expressionist abstraction house? Is this your taste in houses or is it really a pile of bricks with an address?

Martial arts are partially martial science and partially creative arts. The founders of those disciplines not only figured out what worked in the context they imagined, but also how to teach that material effectively so that others could make it work.

Martial artists certainly do not have to be scientists or creative artists. Oh wait, in their own way, they do.