

MAKING ART DURING FASCISM

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Pro tips on being active and engaged while maintaining your practice and wellbeing

- If you are compelled to be active across multiple fronts (maybe you want to show up for Black Lives Matter and protest DAPL and help LA's homeless population and block mass deportation and make abortion accessible in anti-choice states), consider drawing upon a particular resource or skill you could provide across them all (i.e. offer graphic design pro bono, provide your studio as a free meeting space, sell works to benefit multiple organizations).
- Think of your actions and contributions as one thing of many that you will do to take care of yourself; it must be in balance with other parts of your life to be sustainable for the next 4 years.
- Ask organizers and organizations *what they need*; you don't have to guess or try to figure it out.
- If someone asks you for something and you cannot do it, it's ok to say no. You can yes to something else.
- Have a clear view of your relative vulnerability and risk level in the world. Feel scared does not equal being unsafe. Feeling fearless does not equal safety.
- YOU have something to contribute to anything to which you feel committed. Right now, as you are, with what you already have, you can contribute.
- Being of service is a strong antidote to depression.
- Justice for people, animals, and the environment – like your art career – is a marathon, not a sprint. You want to last for the long haul so you have to be strategic and act in sustainable ways to avoid burnout.
- The internet is a really useful tool but it is not often the end result leading to justice. Get off the internet and social media more in 2017. Be in front of other humans more in 2017.
- I have found that 3-5 really committed people can make anything happen.

Dear artist,

I am not one of you but I need you. Art is a disproportionate part of my life. It's a massive reason I am alive. Maybe you relate? I work with a lot of your kind and after the disastrous hate crime that was the 2016 election, so many of my beloved artist clients said to me things like "maybe I should quit making art" and "it's kind of selfish for me to focus on my art now" and "I should help people in a more effective way." These are totally reasonable and expected grief responses to the shock and horror of the trumpocalypse but I beseech you: DO NOT STOP MAKING ART. I need it profoundly. We all do.

Anytime you start to feel overwhelmed by the shitshow that is humanity's impact on people, animals, and the planet, anytime you see that sentient cheeto's awful face, anytime you think you cannot leave the house because the world is too hard, think about the art, performance, music, books, films that have made you want to be alive. Think of how those artists, like you, felt overwhelmed by their life and times but they made the thing anyway. Your future audiences need your work.

With the US's enormous political swing toward white supremacist, capitalist, militaristic patriarchy, I am focusing on history to give me some perspective and keep me grounded so that I make strategic next steps. I am reading about artists making work during war, in violence, and despite of systemic neglect. I really like to look toward artists during the AIDS pandemic era like the collective Gran Fury, who said, "We want the art world to recognize that collective direct action will bring an end to the AIDS crisis." They were right! I was a child during the early AIDS years and I am obsessed with the role artists and activists played in changing science, research, policy, and culture. Now when a friend tells me they got a positive diagnosis, I know it's going to be ok and that is absolutely because of a movement that was largely orchestrated by young artists and activists.

This is a different time and place. Depending on who you are, in 2017 things may not change drastically or you might have some devastating, life-changing experiences. We don't know what will happen but historically, during oppressive regimes and fascist governments, it is the brave and creative ones who lead, solve problems, incite, inspire, organize, comfort, satirize, and reflect. Your work will be more important than ever. You have no idea who needs to see/hear/feel what you are making.

xo

Self-inventory

What can I offer? (Time, money, specific skills, equipment, previous experience, space, etc.)

What is an issue or area that directly affects me to which I want to focus on in 2017?

What is an issue or area that *does not* directly affect me to which I want to focus on in 2017?

Are there opportunities for coalition building?

How/where do I enter? There is an overwhelming need and urgency.

This site is great for overwhelm: www.holyfucktheelection.com and it can give you ideas for how to act locally. I am a great fan of starting locally, where you live.

Think first about these two questions:

- What do you have to give?
- What are some top priorities for you?

Then, within your top priorities for justice/activism/help, consider where you can be of service to yourself and where you can be of service to someone else. In other words, you could focus your resources in two areas – one that directly affects your life and one that does not. If you determine that there are too many for you to focus on and you are committed to supporting all of them, think about a specific resource you could replicate over and over.

For example: a monthly fundraising activity that benefits a different group or organization each time; being the go-to provider of equipment to marches and public demonstrations for several causes; organizing friends to attend state-wide lobby days for multiple issues; creating content online that can reach people in especially oppressive parts of the country.

How do I detect and separate my need for alone time and rest from depression and isolation?

The 50 million dollar question for most of the artists I work with. I recommend being honest with yourself about your motives for staying home again or not answering the phone or flaking on that plan. Get really honest with yourself and then talk it over with one of those 5 people whose names you wrote down earlier. When in doubt, get out of your home and get off the fucking internet please!

Will there be grants available in the next economy?

Yes. Legislation that impacts state, county, and city arts funding will take time for impact; it's not immediate - though our calls to action will be. For example, the State of California's 2017 budget was passed in summer 2016, well before the election. The California Arts Council received an additional \$6.8 million; the entire budget will exceed \$18.7 million.

It is true that progressive private foundations may follow the tide of urgent need in terms of social and environmental justice; this sometimes impacts overall arts giving. It is also true that private foundations are created out of private wealth, which tends to benefit from tax and economic policies created by Republican administrations.

What if I want to reserve my practice just for me and not use it in my activist pursuits?

That is totally fine. You can contribute in so many other ways: money, volunteer time, physical space, equipment, skills, and previous experience. Your art first and foremost needs to be in service of your vision and creative need. When you are creatively fulfilled, you will have more internal and external resources to give.

What will I do without Covered California?

<http://obamacarefacts.com/2016/11/09/what-does-president-trump-mean-for-obamacare/>

How do I navigate feeling guilty with any success in my art career?

Artists feeling guilty about getting things usually points to some deeper feeling that they are not good enough, don't deserve good things. It's ok! Get some therapy and it'll dissipate. I haven't personally vetted www.talkspace.com but have read good things about it; it's reasonably priced and very convenient.

The more you have, the more you can be of service to other people. I used to have lots of class damage and chant 'eat the rich' but more and more I'm seeing the nuance of how knowing radical and progressive people with access to money can do a *lot* of back channel good! So if you start selling tons of art and make money hand over fist, call me and I'll help you put your money to good use!

But really, a simple act of service for someone else can assuage feeling guilty.

What am I most afraid of post – election? What am I most outraged or angry about?

Which, if any, communities or groups am I afraid will abandon me in the next political climate? What would I need from this group or community to counter this fear?

What am I willing to give up to support a larger outcome?

What am I *not* willing to give up to support a larger outcome?

Who are at least 5 people I deeply trust?

Who do I know that has mobilized/organized during other eras (wars, AIDS pandemic, police resistance, riots, political and legislation fights, etc)

What do I need to be well 1. Physically 2. Mentally 3. Emotionally 4. Financially 5. Spiritually

In what ways do I want my practice to be integrated into my activism?
In what ways do I want them separate?

Where am I on the continuum of behind the scenes to on the front lines in activism?

FAQs for artists in the trumpocalypse

Should I stop making art and instead go to law school/ medical school/ run for public office?

No. Artists have to make art because it's how they process being alive. In my experience, when artists stop making work, they become depressed, anxious, and generally dissatisfied with life. Whether or not you decide to make major life changes in the near future, understand that making art is essential to an artist's wellbeing. If you feel called to make a major professional change, know that making art is still something you'll need in your life.

Is making art trite or self-involved right now?

No way! First, see above- you need to make your work because it will help you process the times we are in, which helps you live your life. Second, art helps *other* people process the times we are in and live *their* lives. The collective We need art in all forms regardless of political shift. When our culture becomes oppressive and moves toward upholding the white supremacist capitalist militarist patriarchy, we need creative, public forms of dissent to inspire, counter fatigue, rally, instigate, and inform.

Should I devote my practice to overtly political art?

If you *want* to make overtly politically art, do it! If you do not, don't! You can contribute actively, publically, and politically in many ways, your creative practice is just one.

Nina Simone said, "It's an artist's duty to reflect the times in which we live." That is a vast container and the times in which you live and the times in which I live have similarities and differences depending on our contexts. So I may experience your art and not think it reflects the times in which I live – make sense? Abstract or not, your art likely reflects your experience, whether or not it is overtly discernable to others.

Given the amount of collective work needed, how will I make time for my practice?

I argue that making art is a core way that artists take care of themselves. You have to carve out time for it the same way you do for the other things you need to do to take care of yourself physically, financially, spiritually, and mentally. The better care you take, the more abundance you will have to devote to and share with others.