Your Art Will Save Your Life

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For Famig and Other Famig

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Preface

Dear Artist,

You are holding my love letter to artists.[1] Artists are the most important people in my life, and I need you to stay active and creatively engaged through this and all political shifts. Your art will help you navigate the world, and it will light the way for others.

I have dedicated my professional and volunteer life to artists, especially those who are marginalized in the dominant art worlds: women, queer and transgender artists, artists of color, low-income artists, emerging artists, dropouts, artists who never sell anything, and brilliant weirdos who make work that defies commercial understanding. I want artists to reflect the world back to me, interpret it, and create new worlds for me to imagine.

After the 2016 presidential election, many of my artist clients said things like, “Maybe I should quit making art,” “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 expected grief responses to the shock and horror of our times, but I *beseech* you: DO NOT STOP MAKING ART. I need it profoundly. We all do.

Anytime you feel overwhelmed by humanity’s impact on people, animals, and the planet, or, really, anytime you think you cannot leave the house because the world is too hard, I want you to think about the art, performances, music, books, and films that have made you want to be alive. Think of how those artists, like you, probably felt overwhelmed by their

lives—and the times they were living in—but made the thing anyway. Your future audiences need your work, so you need to make it.

I focus on history for perspective; this helps me take strategic next steps. I read about artists making work during war, in times of violence, and despite systemic neglect. For example, I like to look to artists living during the AIDS pandemic. I read a lot about the role artists and activists played in changing science, research, policy, and culture; the anti-AIDS movement was largely orchestrated by artists and activists, many of whom were young and watching their friends die.

Today we are in a different time and place. Depending on who you are, the Trump administration may not impact you drastically or you may encounter devastating, life-changing experiences. We don’t know what will happen, but historically, under oppressive regimes and fascist governments, it is the brave and creative ones who lead, who solve problems, and who incite, inspire, organize, comfort, satirize, and reflect.

You are not alone. You have what you need for your life, for art, and for justice. Stay with your creative path, trust your vision, and know that your contributions will matter to someone else.

Part One

You’re an Artist, Keep Making Art

The realization that art could first save and then expand my life came when I was a teenager in a troubled home. Life with my mentally ill mom and alcoholic dad near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, before the internet, was *difficult*. A smart, queer feminist without the language to talk about any of it—let alone identify with those lineages—I was profoundly depressed and mostly miserable. I *ached* for art and counterculture (remember that word?), but they were really hard to come by in small Rust Belt towns in the nineties. I read books, made zines, bought 45s, and ordered Sub Pop record catalogs out of the back of *SPIN* magazine, which at the time was a wonderland filled with mysterious ads for things like *The Anarchist Cookbook*.

Then, in 1994, the Andy Warhol Museum opened in downtown Pittsburgh. I was fifteen and fortunate to be present for the museum’s midnight opening thanks to my neighbor Carol, an artist and public school art teacher who saw in me a deep need for connection to something beyond what was available in my sad town and busted school. Something new was born in me that night as I wandered the museum from top to bottom, looking at Warhol’s iconic and more obscure works, obsessively combing through the gift shop, gawking at the drag queens and kindred freaks clamoring to explore this unfathomable building. That museum opening uncovered an intuition stifled by my surroundings: there would be places I belonged and there were communities I must find.

Back then I could barely understand, let alone articulate, what was so important to me about the museum, but now I know it clearly—it was a history and lineage of queer art. Andy Warhol made an exciting life for himself despite his impoverished Pittsburgh upbringing. I saw color and humor and possibilities for a better future. I saw strange people who made their own world, and it looked wild and limitless. I saw political discourse and tongue-in-cheek paintings, sculptures, and drawings. The Factory, music, art, women, style, humor, sex, and outrageous drugs—I just had to turn eighteen and move away! That became reason enough to live through my remaining years in high school.

It's been more than twenty years since that night at the Andy Warhol Museum, and since then I have consistently, heavily relied on artists to make me want to be in the world at its worst and embody a deeper experience of life at its best.

My early career background was in professional feminist activism and higher education—I cut my teeth in a university women's center where I learned a lot about how to be a person, a feminist, and a friend. I decided I should be a therapist, so I earned a master's degree in counseling psychology. In 2007, after a decade in the Midwest, I moved to San Francisco to live in a queer community filled with artists. There, I began working exclusively in the arts and with queer artists, learning how to raise money for artists and for nonprofit arts organizations.

From 2009 to 2013, I helped organize a queer writers' retreat through the San Francisco literary nonprofit RADAR Productions. Along with the writers Michelle Tea and Ali Liebegott, I hosted dozens of LGBTQ writers and artists each year, providing them with weeks of quiet working space, delicious group dinners, and creative community in the Yucatán Peninsula. As it was a passion project, we worked hard to raise the money to create this free retreat for the artists and writers we adored, many of whom had little to no access to other colonies and residencies. We knew so many gay geniuses and wanted to support them.

That first year, I heard the writers talking at dinner about the fears and anxieties that impacted their work. I noticed that the same problems and questions came up again and again. One day while I was making ceviche for dinner during that inaugural retreat in 2009, it occurred to me that many artists encounter similar issues and stumbling blocks but don't know that

they aren’t alone and that there are paths out of those woods. I heard artists talk about their feelings of not being “real” enough, fear for the future, confusion about how to both make money and have time to write, concerns that there weren’t enough resources to go around, bewilderment at the world of grants, and panic that they would never reach a level of success that would make them understand they had made it, whatever *it* was.

In that moment, steeped in lime juice, I had the profound realization that I could integrate my fundraising skills with my counseling background to provide specialized consulting services and focus specifically on artists. I launched my one-on-one consultations with artists in 2009, and my practice has grown ever since.

Now I live in Los Angeles and have written at least a thousand grants. I write grants year-round and have raised nearly four million dollars for artists and arts nonprofits, largely comprised of relatively small grants in the ten-thousand-dollar range. I have spent hundreds and hundreds of hours talking to artists about their lives, careers, fears, hopes, anxieties, problems, projects, and dreams. I help my clients get funding, get into residencies, find career-launching opportunities, and build strategic partnerships. I also help my clients dig into their trauma and fear, develop new habits, grow their communities, heal their relationships with themselves, and shift their perspectives on success and happiness.

In reality, I have very limited time to work one-on-one with artists. When an artist is referred to me and requests consultation, I frequently have to tell them I don’t have the time. Over the years, I often found myself thinking, “My time is limited. I should write a book.” After the 2016 presidential election, the urgency to write it all down skyrocketed; I wanted something concrete to give to every artist whose ongoing struggles are heightened by the Trump administration.

You cannot possibly know right now how much your work is going to impact someone, someday. A single piece can change and save a life, you know that. Likely, you’ve been on the receiving end throughout your life. Your work—the work you’re making right now and the work you haven’t dreamt of yet—is going to impact the people who need to experience it. But first, you have to get the work out of you and into the world!

Your career—like social change—is a marathon, not a sprint. I want you to be in it for the long haul so that the work you’re eventually going to

make has a chance to be in the world. But you *must* get out of your own way. The world you have grown up in—regardless of your identities and experiences—has taught you limiting ideas about being an artist. You and I both know that you need to make your work in order to be alive. Artists have to make art.

I want you to rethink how to engage your practice during these oppressive political times, to grow some new skills, and to learn some support strategies that will ensure you can keep going, upward and outward.

The following sections are designed as a workbook for artists—especially artists deeply affected by our political reality, i.e., practically everybody! I focus on both the internal work and the external work that will strengthen your practice, your well-being, and your ability to take steps toward the kinds of success you want. You will find concrete assignments that will help you build core skills to support your practice for years to come. The skills and techniques will have a cumulative effect; the more you use them, the better they work and the easier they get.

Election Aftermath

Post-Election Illuminations

1. Trump isn't your asshole stepdad.

I am in California on Pacific standard time, but I went to bed well before the election was called, hours before Trump's acceptance speech. I was at home with my wife and our pets, and, in what now seems like psychic intuition, we had turned down every invitation to Election Night watch parties throughout Los Angeles. On my couch, rhythmically petting my elderly cat, I watched in disbelief as state after state went red. My stomach churned, and my wife and I grew more and more crabby and despondent. We agreed it was better to go to bed not knowing the outcome. That way we could at least get one more night of sleep with a Democratic-led future. We would need that sleep. The next morning, over coffee, she read me the headlines and we both wept.

The first few days after the election are now a foggy stupor. I cried a ton, exchanged outraged texts with everybody I knew, avoided phone calls, and reloaded the news on my phone every ten minutes hoping for a different outcome: It was a hoax! There was a miscount! Trump admitted it was all a PR stunt! I wanted to hide. Who could leave the house? People canceled on me; I canceled on people. It felt like a nationwide hate crime had been perpetrated against 75 percent of the country by a small but angry voting minority.

One of the great benefits of working a type of job where helping people is key is that I had to move through my own feelings of being overwhelmed and depressed pretty quickly so I could support my artist clients who—it was swiftly revealed—*were losing their collective shit*. Within a couple days, I had sessions with many clients, and focusing on and serving other human beings really helped me get some perspective. This helped me feel my feelings and more thoughtfully respond to what was happening around me. I believe this is what establishes the conditions for action.

The election season and the national embarrassment of the debates raised a lot of issues about widespread anxiety and PTSD that received ample media coverage. As Election Day drew closer, mental health professionals throughout the United States described increasing anxiety in their clients, who used sessions to talk about the presidential race and the conflict it caused at work, at home, and in public.[2] After Trump creepily stalked Hillary Clinton in the second debate, people who had experienced assault reported increased symptoms of PTSD.[3]

I witnessed both of these phenomena in sessions with my own clients. The artists I met with were fighting with their friends and families, cutting off social media "friends," and feeling anxious, angry, and afraid throughout most of their days. My clients with physical- and sexual-assault histories felt newly at risk, like someone was following them, or that they were now not safe out in public.

As a member of an anonymous twelve-step group, I watched other members cry openly and talk about the larger political atmosphere's devastating effect on their lives. Everyone around me, it seemed, had been suddenly emotionally transported back to their childhood homes with their dysfunctional families.

A week after the election, it dawned on me: "Holy shit, this feels like an abusive alcoholic father. The creepy pervert Mom remarried has just been elected president of the United States." Finally! I understood my emotional reaction to the election and why I felt as if I were walking through slime, shrouded in denial, and eager to fistfight any mustachioed white dude in golf clothes I passed.

Now I want to tell you the good news: Trump isn't your father or your stepdad or any other awful man that loomed horribly over your childhood.

You will likely never meet him. He will probably never hear your name. You may never even be in the same state as this man or his many vile cronies.

The White House isn't your or my actual childhood home (unless Malia and Sasha are reading—hey ladies!), and so the embarrassment we feel about who moved into it isn't singular, it's collective. Our individual family's dirty laundry isn't being aired; it's our entire nation's past and present hanging out to dry.

On the flipside, Barack Obama didn't abandon you. He didn't leave you with a crazy man in charge because he wasn't our dad and you probably never met him or his family. But the symbolism of our political times combined with childhood trauma can yield some powerfully personal reactions in which our pasts get mixed up with our reactions to the present. This mixing up of past pain with current events happens all the time, definitely in a shocking election with the unforeseen changing of powerful figureheads. You may have old feelings swirling around over a present condition.

And by *you*, I also mean me! Throughout November I had to say to myself: Barack Obama isn't my dad and Michelle Obama isn't my mom. I had to reflect on the sinking feeling in my gut and the general embarrassment I felt that I couldn't pinpoint. Part of my post-election denial was my refusal to accept what was so clearly unacceptable. I couldn't *stand* that this narrative would now be part of my country's history. It felt personally humiliating. It was as if I didn't want other countries to know what was happening inside my own nation. Sound eerily like your childhood home?

I shared this realization with myself daily and then with my clients, my friends, and the artists who began showing up to the weekly post-election drop-in group I host in Los Angeles. Profundity and insight washed over faces as I reminded people that Obama wasn't their dad and Trump wasn't their stepdad. Their eyes widened as they realized, Oh my god, you're right!

This cognitive shift allows us to move out of emotional reaction and into rational response. We can move out of the instinctual fear response that we developed in childhood and into our adult selves. Our adult selves—unlike our childhood selves, which emerge when we're triggered by

something—have choices, support, friends, and are equipped with many tools we didn't have as kids.

The bad news: we're still in the political reality that I avoided on Election Night by going to bed early. But we are the majority. We have a vision for the world we want to live in, and we have the tools for resistance.

2. Start exactly where you are.

In August 2014, I was on vacation in Akumal, Mexico, with my best friend from college, Marcia Chatelain, now associate professor of history at Georgetown University. Marcia's activism, encyclopedic knowledge of civil rights history, and Jesuit-influenced commitment to justice have influenced and challenged me for twenty years.

Marcia and I had been catching up at our condo in the Riviera Maya for only a short time when we learned the news of teenage Michael Brown's murder by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Marcia and I first met as teenage students at the University of Missouri–Columbia, a couple of hours from Ferguson. It felt so close to us; we'd both known so many young black men from the greater St. Louis area who attended the university with us.

We now watched in horror and awe as the country, and Ferguson citizens, reacted to Brown's murder and its aftermath. On social media, our friends and colleagues were rightfully horrified and enraged, and, naturally, everyone wanted to "do something." In response to the growing protests and the racist power structure's protection of Darren Wilson, activists headed to Ferguson from all over the country with countless personal intentions.

Marcia insightfully noted that the impassioned protesters flocking to Ferguson—some with civil-disobedience training, many without—could place undue pressure on the community's resources and create potential danger for people who live and work there. Yet, she observed, doing nothing was not an option.

The tens of millions of us enraged by Brown's murder needed outlets for our anger and pathways to action. Marcia knew this. She also knew that for many children and young adults, this was the first instance of racially

motivated murder by police they witnessed in real time. To not engage youth about Michael Brown's murder would only harm them further.

Soon, we learned that the start date for public schools in Ferguson would be delayed. At the same time, teachers all over the country reported pressure from school administration to avoid discussing Ferguson in the classroom as students returned to school. Marcia, an intuitive educator, knew how to respond. She developed the #Ferguson-Syllabus, rallying educators everywhere, who teach every age group in every discipline, to share resources for bringing racism, policing, urban history, civil rights, and black history into each of their classrooms.[4]

Using the #FergusonSyllabus, Marcia was able to ask educators to make a commitment to bring Ferguson into the classroom through crowdsourced books, films, songs, artworks, articles, TED Talks, podcasts, and discipline-specific assignments that could explore Brown's murder. An enormous educator community immediately formed using this simple tool. An impressive and extensive list of resources was compiled. Kindergarten teachers could access children's books on race. High-school chemistry teachers would find articles on what chemicals are used in crowd control. Higher education professionals learned how to facilitate conversations about white silence.

Marcia's simple idea was profound and far reaching. The lesson I took away—and that I access during every natural and human-created crisis—is that I can start exactly where I am, with what I have, to work toward justice and be of service to someone more vulnerable than I am. I don't have to wait. I don't need to become somebody else or wish for different skills.

The day after the election, my first instinct was to physically block the White House. I would use my body somehow to stop the Republicans from taking over all three branches of the US government. No joke! My first thought was to chain myself to something, a throwback to my twenties when this was always my first thought.

A useful lesson I've gleaned over the years: I am not responsible for my first thought. I am responsible for my second thought *and* my first action. In this instance, my second thought was: My body can't stop Trump. What can I do? What do I already know how to do?

I reflected on the skills, resources, and tools I already possess. I know how to help artists, who, in turn, go on to impact large communities. I have counseling training. I have access to community space. I can commit time. I know how to fundraise, and I have organizing experience.

My first action after the election was to organize a designated space for artists to come to, share their reactions and observations, and reflect on where they are and how they want to proceed. Because I am on the board of two Los Angeles arts nonprofits, I have access to free space and broad marketing to artists. I decided I could commit some time as well, resulting in my weekly, free gathering called Making Art During Fascism, to which Los Angeles artists and activists were invited.

For three months, we met weekly to talk about our questions and fears. We committed to weekly actions in support of creative practice and personal well-being (as well as community well-being and social justice), and we met new friends, which helped combat depression and isolation. Some artists shared resources and events while others announced needs and desires for involvement. In this way, the group became a fluid, self-generating resource and support center.

Because I am human, I wondered whether this was effective, whether it was enough. I thought to myself: Is this doing anything? But each week, participants tell me afterward—or email me when they are alone—that the gathering helped them sort through their feelings and fears, find useful direction for their anger, and commit to both justice and their own lives. That's how I knew it was working and why I summoned the energy to continue; I can observe the critical, fearful thoughts, apply some factual evidence, and decide to dismiss the thoughts.

3. There are things you must accept and things you must change.

It was a comfort during the eight years of the Obama administration to know that the president and first lady would think of me as a human. If I were to meet them, I truly believed we would listen to and respect each other deeply. I would probably cry. I disagreed deeply with some of the Obama administration's policies, but I also agreed with many of them. I was grateful for and benefited tremendously from Obamacare and the

nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage; both shaped my choices and quality of life enormously.

With Trump, I'm certain I do not matter. I am a gay woman over thirty-five who does not come close to his beauty standards. *And I disagree wholesale with him.* This clearly puts me in his administration's human garbage bin. This fact—that my personhood went from valued to discarded—hurts on a personal level but helps me feel closer to and more compassionate toward other people who have been historically and systemically discarded by government and social structures within the US.

Each week since the inauguration, I wrestle with the Serenity Prayer, a cornerstone of twelve-step programs that says: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Sometimes when I can't sleep because I've been scrolling through news on my phone late into the evening, I will meditate on the words of the Serenity Prayer, inhaling one word and exhaling the next.

It's very confusing to separate what I can change from what I cannot. Each day of this Republican administration has unleashed bad news, catastrophic decisions and subsequent chaos, and an endless stream of terrible people ascending to power. With each headline, I want to react. I want to *do something*. Something big. I often feel powerless. I can make a phone call, but my state's representatives in Congress are in agreement with me. How do I stop an immigration ban, a cabinet appointee, or a Supreme Court nomination?

The reality is I often can't change anything, at least not by myself and not in this moment. However, cumulative action creates change; our individual actions put pressure on systems and the people upholding them. I can add my voice and offer service to the people who can effect more change than I can.

The first executive order (EO) banning refugees and travel from seven Muslim-majority countries is a good example. That EO came down on a Friday afternoon and chaos erupted. I felt truly powerless. I could not change the fact of this EO, and it was physically uncomfortable to wait through the hours to see what would happen in airports, courts, and public spaces.

Quickly, airport protests were unleashed, and lawsuits were expedited over the weekend. After calling representatives and expressing social media outrage, I wondered what else I could do. Friends texted and emailed me wondering the same. We weren't lawyers; we knew nothing about immigration laws. But what we *could* do was protest at Los Angeles International Airport or help our loved ones get there. We could talk about this EO to everyone who would listen. We could join the meal train organized for lawyers and interpreters volunteering round-the-clock services. We could stir up our social spheres to make sure this ban would not be normalized or accepted for a moment.

With each new crisis, I feel the outrage, fear, disbelief, and other symptoms provoked by this White House's mess. First, I ask myself: Am I safe? Am I at immediate risk? I am a white middle-class woman living in California, so the answer, invariably, is: I am fine. That means it's time to consider an action even while I am feeling the awful feelings. Discerning what I can do from what I cannot comes next; often, what I can do is not very satisfying, honestly. I read more information, look to organizations and leaders I trust to understand their suggestions for "everyday actions" related to whatever crisis is happening, and I make a choice to enact one of these. Then I have to move on with my day.

Part of accepting what I cannot change is acceptance of the actions I have access to. I want giant, powerful, Trump-stopping actions! The reality is my actions will mirror those of tens of millions of other Americans: phone calls, protests, community conversations and coalition building, fundraising, and encouraging these same actions in my friends. My power lies in adding my one part to the whole.

4. You still need joy.

The Sunday after the first Muslim ban, I led my weekly gathering for artists and activists. I asked everyone to introduce themselves and identify a question they wanted to bring to the group. One woman in attendance asked if it was wrong to have fun now. She explained that she'd been out to dinner with friends a few hours after the EO was announced. She was laughing and enjoying herself when suddenly she was overcome with guilt, awash with

shame. What right did she have, she wondered, to have a great time while the rest of the world seemed to be falling apart?

We all nodded emphatically. Navigating the mindfuck of having a good life while the new administration puts entire populations at risk—this was a deeply human and very much shared experience. So, we talked about it. I asked the group if anyone had similar experiences, and everyone raised their hands. It seemed we all wondered how to balance the continuity of our lives, goals, and dreams with keeping on top of Trump's disastrous first one hundred days.

A few key ideas emerged from this vital conversation that help me on a daily basis.

— *One Life to Live*: it's not just a soap opera. As far as we concretely know, we get this one life, a limited time on the planet, and it's not clear how long our individual spans will be. No matter what is happening in the world, in your community, in your household, it's up to you to move ever toward a joy-filled and satisfying life, whatever that means to you. Why? Because this is your life and you cannot put it on hold because of assholes in power. Assholes, after all, have always been in power.

— Anger isn't action and misery isn't solidarity. This is a concept I must relearn every week because it's easy to forget. The social iniquities, humanitarian crises, and environmental decline of our times make me angry and very unhappy. This is a normal reaction to circumstances around me. I have to feel and express feelings like sadness, anger, and disgust. I also want to understand that those feelings aren't actions and do not replace outward activism nor do they give me the same positive benefits of working with community. In a similar way, feeling unhappy and outraged is not necessarily solidarity. There are outward expressions that can contribute to a larger media-based or in-real-life (IRL) sense of solidarity, but simply staying unhappy because I believe others feel that way is not being politically aligned with them. Asking how I can be of service and then taking those action steps is a concrete way to be in solidarity.

— Anger is real and necessary, and it can be transformed into fuel. I want you to feel and express anger in safe and effective ways. So many people are discouraged from and punished for expressing anger—women and black people come immediately to mind—but feeling the full range of your feelings and expressing them in ways that support your overall well-being are, I believe, vital human rights. Anger is an inevitable and natural response to injustice, so stuffing it down and shaming yourself for being angry is not realistic. Anger produces energy in the body that can be used in your artwork, in exercise and movement, and in committing to outward actions supporting vulnerable communities.

— A joy-filled life leads to sustainability in social-justice work. Burnout is real and it is a bummer. When we overcommit, say yes when we mean no, resent the people we aim to collaborate with or serve, and neglect other parts of our lives, we are on a fast track to burnout. In simple, concrete terms, this is a waste that shortchanges communities. If you burn out quickly and early, you will be kept from important, future work. It’s a bad model for your friends and collaborators, too, and an epidemic of burnout can spread throughout activist circles. Supporting healthy, balanced activism in your social circles helps reduce burnout. Infusing a lot of fun and joy into your life will also reduce burnout! Fun is not optional, and joy is not a luxury—this is an actual antiburnout strategy.

Part Two

Self-Inventory

You know a little bit about my background, and now I want you to be vulnerable and excavate your own personal and familial histories through the lens of work, education, money, and art. These exercises focus on who raised you and reveal how the beliefs and habits you were raised with affect you today. Then, you will assess how you are situated in the current oppressive regime, which will illuminate what you want to do about it.

Your upbringing, family of origin, early beliefs, and expectations continue to impact you now. What you learned growing up about the world of work—what it's like to manage money, whether being an artist is a financially viable career, and so on—forms the core of your choices, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Even your early experiences with work—that shitty fast-food job, helping out in your family's business, babysitting, and under-the-table work you'd rather forget—contributed to a set of beliefs about you as a worker, what labor and work are like for you, and what kinds of things you can do for income.

Our jobs, educational experiences, and financial lives all intersect with the other parts of ourselves, including our social identities and internal characteristics. These different parts of ourselves are inextricably linked. So, when my clients begin telling me their family and individual histories, they tend to reveal the majority of what makes them tick, showing me how best to work with them.

I am constantly amazed at the different stories artists share. Their stories are filled with themes of immigration, war, global economic shifts, social progress, political climates, family fractures, prison, white flight, migrations, risk, failure, and resilience. Across social identities, my clients' ancestral paths are marked by World War II, Vietnam, the Holocaust, American immigration waves, segregation, GI bills, feminism, black power, workers' rights, AIDS, and late capitalism. Again and again I hear about the tremendous change that families encountered over the past fifty years and how that change shaped choices, access, and outcomes.

Consistently, my clients also reveal the other inextricable pieces of their ancestral paths, such as addiction, abuse, sudden wealth or poverty, professional dreams unrealized, enormous success, and a loved one's early death. All of this information is useful to look at when making sense of your present-day life.

My clients are eager to take this first step; most people I encounter have never thought about their life and family history in these particular ways. Yet this is a crucial launch-pad for understanding how we came to be and what we make of who we are today.

Socialization plays a strong role in how artists approach their practices, careers, opportunities, and expectations. Becoming aware of how you think, feel, and behave and the people who influenced you can help you make choices and changes that lead to the outcome you want. Once you identify a way of thinking or acting that is not serving your life and your goals, then you can take contrary action, taking a path in the opposite direction.

If you've ever been in talk therapy, you'll find this exercise very familiar. The central difference is the lens through which you are remembering and describing the people in your family: one of work, money, education, and art.

You can do this alone, but you may want to ask a trusted friend to share this exercise with you; it is very helpful to have another human being listening and asking you these questions. Record what you say so that you can play it back and gain insight. You may also decide to write it out, creating a record you can read and understand. Either way, I want you to have an audio or written record you can review and access.

An advisory note, it can be tiring and emotionally draining to recall your own, and your family members', history in detail. As I always say to

my clients, be sure to take it easy after you complete this exercise. Do something fun, nothing stressful.

Begin:

Go back as far as you are aware on each side of your family. Discuss who these people are, what you know about them, and what they are or were like.

What did they do for work, whether paid or unpaid, and what do you know about their attitudes and expectations regarding work, education, money, and art?

What do you make of their choices and expectations in life? What else do you know about the household your parents or caregivers were raised in? Finish with your parents' or caregivers' generation.

Then, let's get into your childhood:

Discuss the homelife you were born into. Who raised you and with whom did you grow up, both adults and children?

What were the expectations in your home regarding school?

What were you like as a child and a teenager? How was school for you?

When did you start working, and what were your jobs?

What did you learn about money in your home?

When did you start making any kind of art, and what role did it play in your life?

Next, let's follow you as you transition into adulthood:

When did you leave home and under what circumstances? Whether for school, relationships, or work, how did you make these decisions?

If you went into higher education, trade school, or any other postsecondary education, describe your experience with it, what you studied, and why.

Talk about each paid job you've had in your adult life. How much did you make? How did you get the job? What did you like and not like about the job?

Describe your relationship to your creative practice since you've been an adult. What have been the ups and downs? Describe some highlights and some lowlights.

Now, get current:

What have you created most recently, and what are you working on right now? What is a project on your mind that you'd like to get to?

What is your relationship to money now? How do you earn it? How much debt do you have? How much savings? What is your annual income? What are your total monthly expenses?

Who are the most important people in your life? Who has your back? Who values your art making?

What is your household like now? Who do you live with, and what does the home feel like to you?

Describe a typical week. How do you spend your days from waking to sleeping?

Finally, talk about what is next:

How do you hope to be living in three years? What do you want your life to be like?

Describe a few people whose creative life or art career you admire, whether you know them personally or not.

What do you want more of in your life? What do you want less of?

What is working well and what do you want to adjust?

Once you have completed this excavation, review it. What themes do you encounter? Consider the most important people to you in your lineage. How free or constricted were they to make choices about how to live? In what world were they making choices, and what contexts were they navigating? What changed in your family between generations? In your estimation, how satisfied were people during their lifetimes? What life lessons did you learn directly from them? What lessons can you take from their stories? What of your family's values and lessons do you want to incorporate or continue using in your life? What do you want to leave behind?

The Artist's Three Basic Needs

Once you have excavated your family history and your life (so far), you can examine the foundational aspects of your practice. The artists I know who have both success *and* joy in equal measure work on their art and their lives holistically; they do not exclude one aspect of their well-being in order to focus on another. There are cumulative consequences to denying your body, finances, family, spirituality, creativity, or mental health.

You need a foundation comprised of three things that must be balanced in your practice: an ongoing art practice, a community of working artists, and lots of varied art consumption. Each component feeds the next. These three pieces are the basis of flourishing working artists who are satisfied with their practices and expanding careers. I'll break each one down clearly.

Your Practice

You have to make your work, above all else. You are an artist—as opposed to, say, a person creatively expressing yourself—because you need to make art in order to lead a contented life. I love to do creative things with radio, food, style, and community organizing, but if I were to go a year without really doing creative activity, I would be okay. I derive meaning, connection, and understanding in many other ways.

In my estimation, artists need to be active creatively in order to be alive, processing the world and other people. I find that artists who have been

away from creative engagement for a long period of time frequently describe feeling depressed, agitated, anxious, disconnected, and empty. Making art is an essential form of self-care in their lives. If my clients tell me they haven't made anything in a while, the first thing we do is get them making work without putting pressure on what that work is.

You, as an artist, have to continue making art using the time, space, and resources you can access now—not later, not someday. Different disciplines have different availability. A filmmaker, a poet, and a performance artist would each tell me a different span of time, amount of physical space, and level of access to funds they believe are necessary to support their work. Regardless, you can and must continue experimenting, playing, and being in your art in the present.

There are a few common reasons I hear from artists as to why they aren't making art: time, money, and inspiration. I promise you, each of these holds a mythical status and you may never think you have enough of any of them.

Let's start with "not enough time." You want to make art but are too busy. You work too many jobs and are exhausted. You have children to care for and not enough support or babysitting funds. You are taking care of an elder family member. You need uninterrupted spans of hours (or days or months) to really get into a project and simply cannot carve out that time in your current life. You are honestly just too brain-dead at the end of the day or week to get deep enough into your work for it to really matter.

Does any of this sound familiar? You could replace "making art" with lots of other things any given person probably needs in their life: exercise, cooking, meditation, or friendship.

I want you to understand and accept that nobody is ever going to make you prioritize your practice *except for you*. The world and the people surrounding you constantly want to take up your time, pull you in many directions, and provide millions of distractions of varying degrees of importance. Only *you* can make your practice a priority, and the way you do that is by saying no to some things, not forever but for a little while. Make this a habit just as you have built other habits in your life such as flossing, exercising, or dutifully calling a family member.

You contain multitudes and may have a million interests and things you want to do in a day and in a lifetime. *You might not get to do all of them, all*

of the time. But you do get to determine what is most important to you right now and create space in your life for it. If you are an artist, I want you to include your practice at the top of your list.

Where is that alleged space coming from? You literally cannot think of any activity you can give up or more hours you can open. You don't believe you can add another thing into your full life. But consider this: whatever is most important to you right now, you are making time for it. Some activities you currently prioritize may be less important than your art so you can discard them for a little while.

I want you to write down everything you do for one week: sleeping, walking, driving, eating, talking, working, waiting in a line, feeding children, playing, texting, grooming—everything. It's useful to observe how you actually spend your time in order to disrupt your beliefs about your time and busyness. Me? I just scrolled through my Instagram feed for the fourth time this morning so I could avoid writing this book.

Next, be honest with yourself about the amount of time devoted to feeling bad on the internet and social media, watching television, having anxious thoughts about life, gossiping, or sending mind-numbing texts to dozens of people about the minutiae of your day. These time sucks are ripe for relinquishing in favor of making art.

Your practice deserves practice. Start practicing your reprioritization by committing for one month that each time you wander off to do any of the relinquished activities, you will instead sit with your project or start a new one. If you end up carving out just two hours in a week for a project, that may be two hours more than you were allotting before. This is progress.

You are certainly not alone in the social media drift. Each time I sit down to write this very book, I compulsively look online and then must tear myself away from the great nothing of the internet. Every one of my clients reveals to me at some point that they are spending a lot of time on social media or trawling online feeling bad about their lives and their work, comparing their experiences to the photos and 280-character descriptions of others. This is called "compare and despair."

Observe yourself as you start to drift toward the internet, searching for confirmation that you suck, and then use that impetus as a signal to instead turn off your phone or internet connection and be messy in your art for an hour without the intention of making anything in particular. You can

actually train yourself to use your gravitational pull toward being online as a flag that it's time to get into your art. Observing yourself from outside of yourself will help you notice your habits and make different choices in the moment.

Let's talk about money. We live in capitalism (capitalistic authoritarianism?), and that clearly means you exist in a system of inequity in which resources are not equally distributed and wealth is concentrated among the very few at the top. It is true that rising in the art world often correlates with personal wealth and access to other wealthy people. It is true that artists who do not need to earn income have more time for their art and can afford the resources, materials, space, and labor required to implement their vision. It is also true that the vast majority of artists I work with are not personally wealthy and work all kinds of jobs and use all kinds of income strategies to support themselves and their families while still prioritizing their practice. We must critique and work to change our economic system while also living within the reality of it, which you as an artist are likely already doing.

Time is more important than money when it comes to just making *something.* No matter your form, medium, or materials, once you set aside some chunk of time, you can be in your work: playing with a script, writing a poem, experimenting with color, warming up an instrument, drawing, imagining a performance. You can also just play using any number of prompts and tools. Artist Lynda Barry created some of my favorite books for getting any artist moving creatively including *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor*, *What It Is*, and *Picture This: The Near-Sighted Monkey Book*.

Are you thinking right now, but I need to buy this or hire them or pay for that before I can make my project? When you come up against something in your project that requires money you do not have right now, move on to another aspect of your project or make something else. Being too broke is a belief that becomes a story resulting in an illusionary brick wall between you and art making.

My clients are from across the economic spectrum. Some hover right around the poverty line with no safety net, and others live off of a significant inheritance. The surprising lesson I learned early on was that my clients' beliefs about having enough money and therefore time were *not*

correlated to their economic reality. There are lived differences, to be sure, between artists who panic about making rent each month or providing for their child and those who do not have to earn income. What they have in common is they believe there is never enough and someone else has it easier. These thoughts and beliefs impact their feelings, which form actions and habits.

It's important that you are able to financially care for yourself and contribute to your family system: partners, kids, parents, chosen family members. Frequently there is a lot of digging to do about monetary fears and habits. The key lesson now is to accept that your anxieties about money are separate from your need to make your art. The money problem does not have to be solved before you can make art. Whatever monetary goal you believe you have to achieve before you can really be an artist, the barometer will keep rising each time you arrive.

My clients tell me repeatedly that by making art, by being in their practice, they feel more relaxed and less fearful, and this includes money-related anxieties. Remember, artists need to make art as a form of self-care. It is likely that money is something that worries you to some extent, and, as one of your ongoing fears, it can be managed by caring for yourself—which includes making art!

Finally, let's talk about inspiration, another fabled thing people tell me they don't have enough of. Discipline and commitment will yield you a lot more art than inspiration. Waiting on inspiration is like waiting for time or money—it's not coming your way without your footwork. You become inspired from being active and curious. Much of the time, you will be uninspired by what you are making, especially after you get past the initial honeymoon phase of a project when it's new and fast and exciting (not unlike a romantic relationship!).

My clients who have the greatest output are committed but not always inspired. Sometimes, when you are stuck in a project, it may seem as though what you need is an inspirational nudge when really you may have encountered a problem that you need to solve in the work. You may be unsure how to make something work or how to proceed, but this situation does not call for inspiration, it calls for help.

Your Community of Working Artists

Regardless of the kind of work you make and the amount of solitude your art requires, you will benefit from a community of active working artists. By active and working, I mean just that—artists in any and every discipline who are committed to developing their practice, creating their art, and building opportunities for themselves and others. Solitude in service of creating can swiftly turn to isolation, which is a real enemy for artists regardless of their personality, their introvertedness, or their need for alone time.

Remember that queer writers' retreat I described? Because we lived in close quarters, four to six people per two-bedroom condo, we created mandatory quiet working hours each morning and afternoon. Every night, I cooked a communal dinner, and we sat down to talk about everyone's day's work, their trouble spots, and how to connect to opportunities once they returned home.

By closely watching, living with, cooking for, and talking to these artists every year, I observed some interesting lessons that formed the foundation of my eventual consulting practice.

After quiet working hours each day, I noticed the writers and artists got up from their laptops or emerged from their work stations and temporary beach-chair offices with haunted, disoriented looks on their faces as they tried to regain the ability to speak. Some chatted rapidly, bombarding me with lunch questions as they stretched their wrists, aching from drawing or typing. Others silently moved around the kitchen, grabbing snacks and staring confused at the teakettle. Michelle Tea, Ali Liebegott, and I called this "spooky writer face," the transition an artist experiences when they are "in the zone" and return to the human world of other people and tasks.

The artists would talk to each other in this liminal zone of wide eyes and confusion, describing where they got stuck or how they worked around a problem, with their productivity heightened. When a writer said something self-disparaging, cringing at their creative blocks or despairing at the useless draft they believed they'd written, another artist, their own eyes wide and haunted, would soothe and reassure them, describing their

problems the previous day and providing solutions for the subsequent work hours.

Spooky writer face is a time when your critical brain might start sending you a stream of negative thoughts about your work and you as an artist: What I made sucked. What a waste of time. What am I doing with my life? What am I doing with this project? I feel so lost and like the work is going nowhere. Is this going to lead to anything? This stream of cruel thoughts can make it really difficult to get back into your work and undermines the reality of the creative process—that you may have to make a lot of work to get to the thing you were supposed to make all along.

Spooky writer face is an invaluable space for some meta observation. It's a time when you may have some deep feelings about the work from which you just emerged and probably some thoughts about yourself as an artist. It's also a time when you can learn important information about the specific place you are in within your project and gain insight for how to reenter it. The key is talking to another artist.

As the artists in the retreat ambled around the kitchen, coming back to reality, they described to one another what they worked on, how it was productive or not so much, what they were excited about, and what scared them. They challenged one another's corrosive thoughts, giving validation and encouragement, effectively mitigating the experience of working hard for four hours on something and then telling oneself it was a colossal waste of time.

You don't have to be in a retreat setting to benefit from spooky writer face. You can create your own working group of artists who meet for a few hours once a week, twice a month, whatever, and spend an agreed-upon number of quiet working hours on a project. During the break or social time at the end of working hours, be with one another in your spooky writer faces. Talk about what you just worked on, how you're feeling about it and about yourself, what worked and what didn't. Share your experience and solutions to one another's blocks and problems. Describe where you are feeling stuck or when you want to walk away from the project.

You can also have one partner anywhere in the world who works during the same set of hours as you, and, at the end, you meet up on the phone or over video and do the same thing. Spooky writer face is just as apparent on Skype.

What is critical is to verbalize what you are thinking and feeling as you transition out of your zone. If you were really productive and figured out something important in your work, telling someone else will help you remember that information for the future. Or the friend can remind you. If you feel like a giant piece of shit, the other artist can remind you that you're fine and these are just feelings. They can describe the times they have felt the same way, normalizing the thoughts and reducing their effect, making it easier to reenter your work.

Your community is also critical in helping you access opportunities. You can ask for introductions, help on a project, and advice on raising needed funds. Your community can read your application drafts, look at early iterations of your work, and tell you about residencies they know of. You and your community can launch your own reading series, create a DIY gallery space, make a film together, and stage guerilla performances. I am a firm believer that if I have two other people who have their shit together, we three can do just about anything.

The caveat to this community talk is that you need to select people who are generous, uplifting, want you to succeed, and believe in sharing information and resources. And *you* must be this person, too. Surround yourself with people who understand that as one person rises, that one lifts up another, and so on. Hypercompetitiveness, hoarding information, and a scarcity and poverty mentality only serve to keep artists isolated, wary of one another, and believing there is not enough of anything to go around.

Does that sound familiar? Are some of your friends scarcity-addicted hoarder types? Are you? It's time to invest in "shine theory," a term coined by two of my favorite feminists and hosts of the podcast *Call Your Girlfriend*, tech leader Aminatou Sow and journalist Ann Friedman. Their theory goes, "If you shine, I shine." Don't be in competition. Be in collaboration.

My directive to you is in opposition to how much of the art world is framed; the capitalist art world needs you to believe that there is only so much wealth, so many opportunities and resources, so much success to go around and that you and you and you are all in competition for it. Any scraps feel good! This is utter bullshit. As we know, capitalism relies on hoarding wealth at the top where a small number of people control the

resources that could, if they were distributed more fairly, sustain the masses long into the future.

The reality is you need other people and they need you. The image of the lone artist, drinking turpentine, painting masterpieces, oblivious to the world around them, is a myth. Van Gogh had his brother's financial and emotional support and at least one sex worker providing him care. Besides material and community resources, you need other artists to get you out of your head and out of your own way. You hold each other accountable to your internal deadlines. You give each other great ideas and feedback. You tell each other about films, books, exhibitions, albums, and performances that the other would love. You send each other poems and links to obscure videos online. You are inspiration and brain food for one another!

Where are you going to find these fabled supportive, noncompetitive, well-connected artists who want to hang out with you? The internet is full of people you can meet, so that's a start. But I am a proponent of IRL relationships. Start local. Are there artists and writers in your town or city whose work you admire? Ask them to coffee to talk about art. Are they famous, so you're shy? Go see their work and send them a brief fan letter (keep it short, creep!). Does your friend have awesome artist friends? Tell them you want in on it! Go be where the artists are. This brings me to your third core need.

Your Art Consumption

My spouse is an artist and a writer. Left to her own devices, she would become a solitary hermit who stays at home to watch baseball while painting. That sounds like heaven to her, and yet, two days in she can get pretty weird and start believing her own mean thoughts. Leaving the house suddenly becomes an impossible task. I'll suggest that we go see some art at any of the thousands of galleries and museums in Los Angeles, and she'll dismiss the idea. Once dragged out of the house and into an art space, though, she comes alive, feels inspired and connected. Without fail, she then says to me, "We should see art every week. Why are we doing anything else with our time?"

Part of your job as an artist is to take in a lot of art in a lot of different forms. Work you love, work you hate. All of it is good for inspiration and replenishes your internal resources to generate ideas, solve problems, and understand the larger context in which you are operating and making work. I want you to again start local and IRL. Go to the museums, art spaces, bookstores, and galleries in your town or the nearest city. These are frequently free or have free events open to the public, so it's not even a financial investment. See independent films. Read books. Ask for playlists from your music-savvy friends. Take in new sights and sounds and textures and smells. Go to lectures by artists and writers. Sign up for mailing lists for nearby arts spaces so you can learn in advance what is happening in your town.

Being out in your community's art world is also useful research. It's important for you to know who is programming what kind of events and where. Identifying the places that are hosting events and supporting work you connect with gives you a targeted community to get involved with. Volunteering your time or otherwise participating in local arts spaces will increase your artist community. (See previous section!)

I want you to take risks and avoid art ruts. Consider what kinds of work you believe you don't like or "don't understand." For example, people often tell me they don't get dance or performance art. Or installation sound art is beyond them. Challenge yourself to try some artworks that you've avoided, maybe see them with someone who makes work in that field so you can talk about it before and after. Poetry always makes me feel dumb, so I like to read biographies of poets to connect to their lives before I read their work.

The Artist's Interior

There is internal work for you to do in order to grow in the direction you want. I am going to provide you with concrete steps, exercises, and techniques to do the work, which will yield you more energy, focus, contentment, and willingness to take risks.

By "interior," I mean your specific inner life, what it's like to be inside of you, your brain, spirit, soul, and inner dialogue. Whether you are a loner

introvert who savors their solo time or someone who will agree to any plan with any frenemy to avoid being alone, I want you to observe what you're like to be alone with. I want you to become deeply acquainted with how you talk to yourself and what feelings and behaviors this self-talk produces.

Even highly self-aware artists with years of therapy under their belts may engage in interior habits that are counterproductive to the success they want, the contentment they wish for. The interior work makes it possible for you to be of service to your practice, to take risks, to ask for things, and to allow your work to be in the world.

Do You Hear Yourself?

How do you talk to yourself? Are you aware of the things you say silently and out loud to yourself throughout the course of a day? Don't despair if you have no idea; many people are not aware. Our brains chatter all day long at us, telling us things, casting judgments, asking questions, giving warnings, and flashing ideas. Often, this chatter communicates fixed ideas about ourselves, our choices, and our futures.

Your brain can do incredible things, genius things, but one thing it cannot do is reflect you and your work accurately back to you. Whatever you call it—inner critic, mind, inner voice—every artist I encounter has ongoing interior chatter that tends to get pretty cruel and self-defeating. These voices say things like, "You'll never really be an artist," "You're wasting your time," "You should get a real job," "People won't like your work," "They're only saying positive things because they like me and want to be polite," creating endless, fear-based chatter. Truly, *every artist* I know has some version of this fearful inner voice that sounds eerily like the mom from *Carrie*.

This vitriolic internal monologue has real consequences in your life. Saying cruel things to yourself nonstop for years will produce feelings and behaviors that make it very hard to grow your practice and career outward. If we said these cruel things to another person, we might be accused of verbal abuse, but saying them to ourselves seems somehow "true" or "honest." Stopping seems impossible. Yet it is completely possible to

change these internal, verbal habits. The space that opens up can be inhabited by your art.

1. Observe your interior voice.

First, you must hear yourself in real time. Sometimes we can be on an anxious loop for days at a time before we begin to notice what we are thinking or saying on the inside. We may have old "tapes" that run on and on, chattering about how much we don't know, our imminent failure, how scary taking risks will be, maybe something along the lines of our penniless and homeless futures. We say absurd, untrue things to ourselves that are not based in any fact or reality, and we would likely never say them to someone we love.

Some of my old interior tapes include things like, "Everyone else knows how to be an adult except you. They are all doing things you don't know about and will never understand." I also notice myself saying, "You aren't an authority or an expert on anything." Another classic is, "You will die alone, broke, and friendless." Sound familiar? My brain lands there, too.

Fortunately, I learned through a constellation of therapy, meditation, twelve-step programs, love and friendship, and other necessary tools how to observe my thoughts and *to question my internal chatter*. First, we have to become aware of what we are saying to ourselves. Check in with yourself right now and observe what you are saying to yourself. What kinds of things do you say to yourself that you would not say to someone you love? Did something come up as you've been reading?

No idea? Can't access it? Here's an exercise: For a week, set a timer on your phone or watch for every hour while you're awake. When the alarm goes off, just notice what you are thinking about or at yourself. Write it down. Certain activities will likely produce more of the critical self-talk: sitting with your art practice, preparing to talk to someone about your work, applying for a grant or another resource, going to an art opening, talking to an artist friend. Higher-stakes activities can help you notice some of your meanest internal chatter, and that observation is key.

This can be very upsetting. You may have not been aware of some of the most extreme sentiments your brain spews out. Often, when we unconsciously go on tirades at ourselves, we in turn unconsciously self-

soothe by numbing ourselves with substances or activities that preoccupy us. A classic example: you have an anxious thought or a fear rises up—you may not even be aware it is happening—and it feels vaguely, familiarly uncomfortable. So you reach for your phone or hop on a computer to scroll through social media in order to escape the feelings that the thought produces. Before you know it, somehow you've been looking at other people's lives and photos for an hour, and you're not sure how you lost so much time. Maybe instead of the internet you reach for a cigarette, food, drugs, another person—just something to distract you from the thoughts you may not even be aware you are having.

But rather than numbing or escaping the rise in anxiety that your thoughts produce, I want you to stay with it and write down what is playing over and over again in your head. Gathering the data, observing the thoughts, and capturing them—this will help you take the next step.

2. Be curious about the thought and answer back.

You've written down the dialogue rolling around in your brain. Read through it and get curious about it. I don't want you to judge what you've written down and observed. There's no need; it's just your brain, doing what it does! Instead, I want you to be curious about these thoughts and the underlying fears or anxieties that may form them. They are not internal aspects to be destroyed; rather, the interior chatter is a voice for you to encounter with curiosity and compassion.

Now it's time to engage these thoughts by responding to them in writing and out loud with your voice. Let's avoid answering the mean thoughts with mean words though. Instead, imagine a friend that you love, preferably another artist but it doesn't have to be. Simply picture someone you care for a lot and for whom you feel an abundance of love and tenderness.

With each interior statement you've observed and written down, speak it out loud and imagine the person you love telling you this sentence about themselves. Then, I want you to question the thought out loud and write down what you say.

Here are some examples taken from conversations I've had with artists just in the past week:

Interior thought: I shouldn't apply for that fellowship because I am not really qualified.
Answer back with: Maybe I could get this fellowship. I see that some of my peers have received it. If I don't apply, I definitely won't get it, so maybe it's better to be in the pool of candidates.

Interior thought: I am afraid that after this current good break or flurry of financial opportunity I won't have another one ever again.
Answer back with: I can't see around corners, and I cannot predict the future. It's likely that if I keep doing my part, I will continue to receive opportunities.

Interior thought: I should be further along in my career.
Answer back with: I am right where I am supposed to be.

Interior thought: I am not a "real" artist/ writer.
Answer back with: I know other artists/ writers sometimes feel this way. What makes someone a "real" artist/writer is making art/writing.

Practice responding to your thoughts, both out loud and in written form. If you notice that you're responding with more judgment, cruelty, or punishment, resurrect the picture of a friend to whom you would not be mean and imagine what you would say to them in response to any of these statements.

3. Take a contrary action.

The final step to making change to the internal chatter is to take a contrary action. What this means is doing something concrete that acts "as if" the fear-based thought were not true. This is habit-forming, and you can produce interior conditions that create a pattern: you have a fear-based, cruel, judgmental thought to which you answer back with curiosity and kindness, and then you take a positive action in service of your art practice.

The action step is key because it concretizes the change of habit. Action takes the internal process and externalizes it, creating a path for you to take actual steps to support your art practice. It is crucial that your meta-

observation process results in an *action* that runs contrary to the mean inner voice.

Some examples, again from recent client interactions:

Thought: I want to try acting, but I am old. I should've started earlier, and I wasted so much time.
Answer: All kinds of artists try new things throughout their lives, and I am allowed to as well. I can pick up new skills and engage new parts of myself for as long as I live.
Action: Sign up for and complete an acting class.

Thought: I need a letter of recommendation, but the person I want to ask won't answer me, will feel inconvenienced, or will say no.
Answer: Artists ask other people for things all the time, including letters of recommendation. The worst thing that can happen is they say no or do not answer me (this may feel bad but will not kill me), and I can move on to another person.
Action: Send the email asking the person to write you the letter.

Thought: I want a studio visit with a curator, but why in the world would they ever come waste their time on my art?
Answer: A curator's job is to know what is happening in their field, and I am an artist who makes art in their field. They may be interested in what I am working on.
Action: Practice a low-stakes studio visit with an artist friend or two. Then ask someone who knows the curator to introduce you. If you know no one who is acquainted with the curator, cold-call them or send an email.

Thought: I want to start writing a new project, but I am afraid it's going to be terrible.
Answer: My first draft is *supposed* to be terrible! It's the material from which I will form a more polished version. I will make a better second draft that is closer to what I have in mind.
Action: Set a timer for fifteen minutes and write that whole time. At the end of the fifteen minutes, decide whether you want to commit

to an additional fifteen minutes. Repeat.

Perfection

Let's rid you of perfection seeking and of even uttering the word. Perfection will not serve you because it's just an illusion. Each time you approach the mirage of what you deem to be a perfect something or other, your standard for perfection will dissolve in the distance, hazily moving a mile up a bleak and brittle desert road.

You cannot be perfect nor make perfect work or decisions. You will not find a perfect studio or writing space. There is no perfect mentor or teacher or friend. No perfect MFA program or opportunity. You will not reach perfection, and, if your friends or audience deem something you do to be perfect, you will surely have a list of mistakes or improvements needed that they couldn't see. Perfection simply does not exist as long as we are in our human brains, which do not cease analyzing, criticizing, wondering, and comparing. In a sense, everything is already perfect and nothing is ever perfect.

As long as perfection is our measurement, we are always less than, not quite getting there. Is this a motivating tool, always pushing you to work harder or deeper? No. Instead, I see it as a road to swift burnout for artists. Shooting for perfection might give you short bursts of motivation, but it is not a pathway to a long career and a lifetime of making work that gets to your audiences. Perfectionism erodes an artist's will and risk-taking.

Becoming liberated from perfection can transform your process. I learned this through Maggie,[5] a Los Angeles–based visual artist who was stalled out in her practice as she was making a decision about switching studios. She was considering leaving her big, bright downtown Los Angeles studio and moving to a smaller, darker studio she could share with her best friend. Both choices had an equal number of pros and cons as she considered light, price, commute time, and scheduling.

As she talked to me about this choice and how stuck she felt in making it, it became clear to me the issue was seeking perfection. I know this

because Maggie mentioned several times that neither studio was perfect and maybe there was a perfect space she could find if she looked hard enough. She was caught in a trap of seeking an illusionary perfect studio that would be the answer to every problem.

This decision was a red flag to me because Maggie had stopped making work as the studio choice weighed on her. As discussed earlier, maintaining an active practice is a fundamental necessity for an artist's well-being. Sure enough, Maggie described feeling obsessed with this decision, anxious about what the future would hold through Door A and Door B. What if she made the "wrong decision" and then something bad happened and she stopped making work or it suddenly became terrible and her life was over? For a perfectionist, making a choice about which room to rent can quickly lead to thoughts of death and destruction.

Maggie revealed to me that she had already given notice on her original studio and had plans to move into the shared space with her best friend. It wasn't even a current decision; it had been made, but she was haunted by it still because no option seemed perfect.

I said, "What if there isn't a perfect studio? What if there is just the *next* studio?" Her face changed as she considered this, and we discussed replacing the phrase "the *perfect* XYZ" with "the *next* XYZ." Maggie returned two weeks later and reported back that this was a liberating concept and she was increasingly able to observe how much thoughts of being perfect dominated her life and her practice. She agreed to follow through with her impending studio move and think of it as her next studio, not her permanent one and not a perfect one. *Just the next one.* She resumed her practice and began organizing exhibition events with artist friends.

Perfectionism often plays a role in artists' preventing their work from being in the world. I have dozens and dozens of examples of artists and writers who refuse to let work be shown or pass it on to someone who wants to give them a great opportunity because "it isn't perfect yet." Sometimes they use the word *done*, but they mean *perfect*. In this way, perfection becomes self-sabotage. Finishing work and not hurrying through a piece before you present it to someone you respect, these concepts I agree with, of course. I want you to give your work the time it needs and deserves. I don't want you to rush and sloppily pass off something you know you could make stronger.

But I want you to get radically honest with yourself about the ending of work. Do you hold onto it for a long time and refuse to give it the opportunity to be in the world? Does a work never really feel done, prohibiting you from letting it be seen or experienced? Do you think that if you hang on to all of it longer, you will stumble upon a sublime level of perfection?

What if the work in front of you that *maybe* is done but isn't perfect just reflects your current thinking, skill, and interests? What if you let the work go out into the world and trust that your next work will reflect who and where you are *next*?

Comparing

If I could rid all of my clients of one interior experience, it would be "compare and despair." When my clients compare their careers, artwork, and opportunities to other people, they feel pretty terrible. When they compare their interior to someone else's exterior, they believe the myth that they will feel better on the inside if they get something external.

Look, it's easy and alluring to look around and compare yourself to someone else in order to understand where you are in your own life. The problem? It doesn't matter and will probably make you feel like shit. Another person's life, success, and failure has nothing to do with your own because you are not living that life. Your real source of comparison is you—where you've been and where you want to go.

Michael, a San Francisco filmmaker, often finds himself comparing his life to his friends' lives and believing he comes up short. The grants they get that he hasn't received yet, the film funding, the fun they appear to have on Instagram. These thoughts make Michael depressed and unwilling to work on his own film projects. This lethargy then reinforces his internal narrative that he won't be as successful as some of his friends.

When Michael was experiencing a gnarly bout of depression, we agreed he needed to take some action to interrupt the awful compare and despair he experienced. Michael had an upcoming one-month span of unstructured time approaching, and he was anxious about falling deeper into despair

during this period when he would have to be self-motivated. He was willing to try two actions that I have come to recommend to all my clients at some point during our work together.

First, Michael began writing a daily gratitude list when he woke up each morning. He could put anything and anyone on the list. Next, Michael downloaded an app onto his phone and computer, which blocked social media from all his devices. After a few weeks, Michael described his mood as lighter and less depressed. Now he and I know that these are useful tools that he can return to anytime he gets out of practice with one or both of them. Unstructured time for Michael and most of my clients is a breeding ground for compare and despair.

Generosity

The artists I know who are joyful and content are generous with the other artists in their lives. Not just with money but also with things like emotional support, creative help, introductions, opportunities, and information. There seems to be an inverse relationship between generosity and envy; when an artist helps to uplift and support the other artists in their community, they tend to live with less jealousy, envy, and compare and despair.

My favorite example of this is writer Michelle Tea. In addition to the retreat described earlier, she has dedicated her entire career to two things: her writing, and supporting a larger writing community comprised of queer and trans writers, women writers, writers of color, and outsider/underground writers. Before she even published her first book, Michelle organized reading events and tours for other queer and women writers. She eagerly creates publishing opportunities for other writers; for example, she founded a still-thriving queer literary nonprofit organization, and hosted a monthly reading series at the San Francisco Public Library for a decade. In the many years I've known and worked with her, I have never known Michelle to be a jealous artist or someone with creative schadenfreude. For me, she is a model of how generosity and community building can shape one's own gratitude and contentedness with regard to

successes. When Michelle's friends have big successes, she is genuinely thrilled for them; this makes being supportive of her success a no-brainer!

On the flip side, the artists I know who are not generous are often racked with jealousy of other people's careers and lives. I strongly caution you against living this way, and I encourage you to surround yourself with generous artists. In my experience, artists who are not generous and who are jealous of others' successes live with a gaping, bottomless pit inside of them. No matter how much they get—money, awards, grants, opportunities, accolades—it is *never* enough. They consistently look to someone else who got more, and there is *always* someone who has more and someone who has less. We all live on a continuum.

Another aspect of generosity and how it operates in your art practice is being generous with your work by letting it be in the world. I bet you have lots of examples of artworks that have changed or even saved your life. The examples probably go back pretty far. Maybe some of the work—songs, books, images, films—don't mean the same thing to you now, but they did mean something critical in your life at one time. Think about a work that has recently blown your mind, something that makes you want to be alive and on the planet. Ask yourself: What is the work that makes you so grateful for artists?

You will make work that has enormous impact on someone. You may never meet or hear from them, but someone will encounter a work you make and it will do something transformative for them. They will be grateful you exist, thankful you made the work and let it be out in the world. In order to get there, to let your work reach the people who need and want to experience it, you have to be of service to it. You have to make it, yes, and you also have to support its life after it's no longer your private experience. This takes enormous generosity.

Fear

"I procrastinate. I'm lazy." I hear this from dozens of artists each month. Now when I hear the words *procrastinate* and *lazy*, I know the person in

front of me is afraid and their fear is contributing to avoidance. I don't know lazy artists; I know artists who are living in fear.

Here's why I believe this: artists have a whole extra job they are compelled to do, one that may or may not yield any income, in addition to their paying jobs and all the other parts of a functioning adult life. This is not the marker of a lazy person or a procrastinator. Artists may not realize this, but we nonartists don't typically pick up extra, nonpaying jobs that contribute to inner anguish. Artists are driven and compelled to make art; the source of this drive is not laziness, but it can be hampered by fear.

What are you afraid of? Probably a million things, but some of the major fears I hear from artists include:

— My art is bad.

— Other people think my artwork is bad.

— I'll never make money from my art.

— I won't be able to take care of myself because I spent so much time/money on art.

— Everyone else thinks I should give up my art practice.

— I won't ever finish this project.

— I will be rejected.

— I will die alone. (Usually this is where the list of fears ends up!)

Courage isn't the absence of fear; it's being afraid and doing the thing anyway. You do not need to wait until you are no longer afraid of an outcome before you act. In fact, waiting out fears isn't a good strategy. You will wait until death.

I encourage artists to think of the worst outcome and then talk through whether they can live through that outcome. Often, we discover that a fear isn't related to any possible outcome. For example, you may be afraid that if you apply for a grant and you don't get it, you will die. Talking about that

fear out loud is often soothing enough. Disappointment will not kill you. I often find that when an artist experiences the outcome they are afraid of, they find the fear shrinks down to the correct size.

I also find that fearful thinking about something takes far more resources than the action itself. Because I spend a lot of time writing grants with my clients, I consistently see how fear interacts with grant writing. Frequently, my clients will wait until the last moment to work on some part of a grant and then report to me that it was easier than they thought it would be or it took a lot less time than they feared it would.

The lesson here? Your fear is much bigger than the task at hand.

Myths about Applying for Stuff

Applying for grants, residencies, and other opportunities is part of the administrative side of your art practice. I have amassed a considerable list of mistaken beliefs artists may hold regarding applications for these kinds of resources.

1. They won't give me money if I have money.

When applying for a grant, it's better to demonstrate that you have some other funding committed to the project or that you have a plan for raising those funds. You appear to be less of a risk, and the panelists or selection committee will be more certain that you can complete the project. In the world of grants, money is sticky—you get some after you already have some. It's often said that the first grant is the hardest one to get.

2. I can't pay myself out of the grant.

A professional artist is paid for their work, and they pay others for theirs. The budget of your application should indicate that you are being compensated. Projects in which people are compensated are more likely to be completed. Your artist fee pays for your time invested in the project.

3. I can't get a grant, only other artists can get a grant.

This indicates that the artist is experiencing imposter syndrome. Are you making art and do you plan to keep doing so? Yes? Then nonsense! Of

course you, too, can get a grant.

4. A grant is something I can throw together the night before.

If you wait until the last minute, you *will* make mistakes in your application. I know this because I write hundreds of grants every year. I am very good at what I do and I have a lot of practice, but when circumstances collude to make a last-minute proposal necessary, I make stupid errors. Sometimes errors will cause your application to be disqualified. Commit to three drafts of your application—including someone else's eyes on it—and give yourself the time to do so.

5. I should stop if I don't get the first few things I apply for.

Most things artists apply for they don't get. If it's something you are eligible and competitive for and you really want, you must keep applying until you get it! Anytime you are rejected from something, ask for feedback on your application. Sometimes it will be provided and include useful insight to apply in future applications.

6. Only famous or well-established artists can get grant funding.

There are grants and residencies designed to serve artists at every stage of their careers, including emerging and midcareer artists. Read the guidelines to determine if you are eligible based on the phase of your career you are currently in.

7. I shouldn't ask the funding staff any questions.

Most entities that provide grants and residencies have dedicated program staff whose jobs include answering questions from applicants. If, after reading all available materials provided, you still have questions, you should absolutely call or email the staff. Most people who work in the arts are artists themselves or love artists. You can assume they are on your side and want you to submit the best application possible. They don't want you to waste your time nor do they want to waste their panelists' time. Bonus:

most of the time, the staff are not the panelists making the selection decisions!

8. I should bury everything in "art speak."

Grant applications should be clear and complete, above all else. Increasingly, arts funders are asking applicants not to use jargon in their proposals. It is possible that the selection committee will include people who are not very familiar with your discipline; they will probably not know your work specifically. A great way to insure you are being clear: ask an artist friend in a completely different discipline to read your application and tell you whether they understand what you've written.

9. I need a polished project or a complete vision before I can ask for support.

Typically, you are applying for funding or residency support for a project that you haven't started yet. Your proposal reflects a fully formed idea, but likely you haven't initiated it and this is fine. It is understood that your work and ideas will change and evolve over time, and so your project will likely evolve once you get started. Grant timelines are slow! You will apply for funding and you may not learn the outcome for six to twelve months; certainly you will have changed by then. When you get a grant, you are not bound to every detail you wrote in your proposal. If you make big changes (e.g., the discipline, timeline of completion, city where it will take place), just let the staff know. They will work with you to make sure your project still complies with your contract; they do not want to take back the funding.

10. I should apply for everything I hear about.

You likely have limited time to devote to your practice, and a small portion of that time will be dedicated to the administrative side of it such as grant and residency applications. Therefore, I want you to be strategic about the applications you submit throughout the year. Be sure you are eligible first. Then look at the previous recipients of the opportunity. Are they your peers? If, for example, the previous recipients are all twenty years ahead of you in their career, then you may want to wait to apply for that opportunity.

11. I don’t have an MFA/didn’t go to art school, so I’m not likely to get a grant.

Many of my clients did not get an MFA nor did they attend any formal art school. Holding these degrees is not typically a factor in whether you will receive most grants. Some of my clients who receive many grants are self-taught and dropped out of high school or college.

12. There is a correlation between talent/vision/excellence and external validation or success.

I wish! Throughout history and into the present, lots of brilliant artists have not gotten the money or success I believe they deserve. Sometimes a wild genius is successful, and it feels to me like a bit of justice. Look around you. Lots of dumb shit gets money and fame. Here’s a fact: if you don’t apply, you definitely will not get the thing.

A To-Do List for BFA/MFA Students

— Relish this time. Before your family, the media, and student-loan officers start hounding you with “Now what?” savor your time, and when you graduate, celebrate this accomplishment and the years you devoted to training and creative growth. Mazel tov!

— Take stock of your school contacts. A major resource you just cultivated is a community of other emerging artists. Find out who will stay in town with you or who is moving to the same new locale—they will be your working-artist friends with whom you can build community. You also have access to a pool of potential mentors and writers for letters of recommendation—your faculty. Who did you connect with? Who challenged you, pushing your work to new realms? Write them a thank-you letter, and ask them if you can stay in contact after school. Then maintain contact! Take them out for lunch to ask advice, invite them to your shows, and go see their work.

— Build a low-overhead life for at least the first year out of school. Talk to your student loan officers to find out about your repayment obligations including a postgraduation grace period, forbearance and deferment policies, and income-based repayment options. Commit to not living beyond your means and truly avoid debt to the degree you are able. Bonus points: read Paulette Perhach’s “A Story of a Fuck Off Fund” on the Billfold, which underscores the crucial role of savings so you can

make choices after graduation.[6] It's geared toward women, but all genders can learn from it.

— Create a financial plan based in reality. Make an honest list of your living expenses that includes tucking away some cash each month to build an emergency savings fund. Once you know the actual data about how much money you need per month to be financially self-supporting, you will have more clarity about how much you need to work and the salary or hourly wage you require. This is different for everybody, and where you live is a major variable.

— Line up creative deadlines that will occur within six months of graduation. It's not unusual to feel depressed and adrift after graduating. You transition from structure and intense focus on your practice to the larger culture in which working artists have to fiercely protect their creative time. Make your first postgraduation deadline a reality by setting up a reading, performance, or exhibition, or making and screening a short film—anything you can do with your community. Get it on a schedule in a space somewhere in your town so that it's for real—you have a deadline you must make! This external deadline will keep you making work, and it will launch your professional artist resume.

— Visit your bank and open two savings accounts. One will be for personal savings and the other will be called "Taxes." When you get paid from jobs or gigs that are not W-2 income (aka they don't take out taxes for you), put 30 percent into the taxes savings account. If, at the end of the tax year, you owe the government very little or nothing at all, transfer that money into your personal savings account. Remember, all income you are paid—including grants—is taxable income; tuck away 30 percent anytime you are paid something and taxes are not already withheld.

— Ask for everything you want—jobs, meetings, interviews, mentorship, funding, and more. Do not say no on behalf of other people; ask for what you want! The more you ask for in life, the more you will likely get.

— Maintain weekly hours for your practice including the business side, such as applying for opportunities, answering emails, meeting with potential partners. But be sure to be creatively engaged in your practice each week. If you hit a wall, ask an artist friend to work with you. Use your community to keep you accountable to yourself.

Reflections for When You Freak Out About the Planet

— What can I offer (time, money, specific skills, equipment, previous experience, space, etc.)? What resources do I not currently have to offer?

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

— What is an issue or area that does not directly affect me that I want to focus on? Consider an issue that affects someone more vulnerable than you.

— Are there opportunities for coalition building?

— What am I most afraid of in the current political climate? What am I most outraged or angry about?

— Which communities or groups, if any, am I afraid will abandon me in this 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 five people I deeply trust?

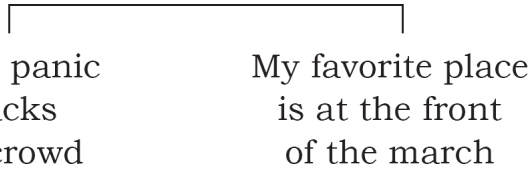
— In what ways am I willing to increase my activism?

— Who do I know who was an activist or organizer in other movements (anti-war, the AIDS pandemic, police reform, political and legislative fights, etc.)?

— What do I need to be well physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, and spiritually?

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

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



FAQs for Oppressive Political Climates

Should I stop making art and instead go to law school or 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 well-being. If you feel called to make a major professional change, know that making art is still something you'll need in your life. When thinking about making art and all other possibilities, eliminate the word *instead*.

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" needs art in all forms regardless of political shifts. 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 overly politically art, do it! If you do not, don't! You can contribute actively, publicly, and politically in many ways; your creative practice is just one.

Nina Simone said, "It's an artist's duty . . . to reflect the times." That is a broad mandate, 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.

Will there be grants available in the new economy?

Yes. Legislation that affects state, county, and city arts funding will take time for its impact to be felt; it's not immediate—though our calls to action will be.

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.

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

When artists feel guilty about getting things, this usually points to some deeper feeling that they are not good enough or don't deserve good things. It's okay! Get some therapy or join a twelve-step group!

The more success you have, the more you can be of service to other people. I used to have lots of class damage and resent wealthy people, but more and more I'm seeing the usefulness of knowing radical and progressive people with access to money. So, if you start selling tons of art and make money hand over fist, you can take good care of yourself and your community and then put your money to good use!

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

I am a great fan of starting locally, where you live. Think first about these two questions: What do you have to give? and 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 issues 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: coordinating 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 statewide lobby days for multiple issues, creating content online that can reach people in especially oppressive parts of the country.

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

The fifty-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 someone you trust. When in doubt, get out of your home and get off the fucking internet, please!

Should I alter my politically driven artwork to reach a broader audience? Should I intend for my audiences to include conservatives who have different values than me?

I believe you should make the artwork you want to make, period. Regardless of the content and your hopes for it, I find that if artists focus too heavily on who they want to like and receive their work, they lose sight of their creative vision. I understand the desire to reach across partisan lines or to somehow connect with Trump voters, and I think there are many strategies for doing so, but I recommend you keep your artwork aligned with your vision. You may be preaching to the choir, but the choir needs the sermon, too.

What do I do about my family members who voted for Trump?

Listen, if I had a formulaic answer for this, I'd be a talking head on MSNBC. Depending on the day and my mood, I vacillate between detaching with love and total self-imposed exile. As of this writing, it's less than two weeks into the new administration, and I'm pretty committed to Trump voters' experiencing the full weight and responsibility of the choice they made, which seems very much like a hate crime perpetrated against most of the US and the world. Regardless of where you live and to whom you are related, you need to find Your People to commit delightful acts of resistance. Do not be isolated. You are in the majority even if you need to get to the next town over to be with Your People. Do not shy away from your values, but do not expect to change your Trump-voter relatives. Invite them to participate in resistance, especially when your civil liberties are at stake.

Does protesting, calling elected officials, donating twenty-five dollars, etc., really have an impact?

Yes. Each big, small, and medium action has a cumulative effect. It keeps *you* motivated and living life despite a currently fascist environment while *also* adding your individual drop to the larger and ever-growing river of resistance. Your twenty-five-dollar donation to an organization seems tiny (even if it is a big deal to you), but remember that you are one of thousands of people on that particular day making a donation. You took up three square feet at a protest, but five hundred thousand other people surrounded you. Your phone call denouncing a Trump nominee was one of two hundred fielded that day. Take up your space! It seems small, but it's your space and it is an important part of the whole.

I am an introvert and would prefer to be involved behind the scenes. What if I don't want to canvas or go to protests?

Every kind of resistance—inside the system, outside the system—has value. If you're not a protester, don't despair. There are dozens of ways you can live your values daily. If you really want to help out an organization but it says that it just needs canvassers and your heart sinks into your stomach, change your thinking a few degrees. Say you're looking for some behind-the-scenes volunteer duties and tell them about some skills or experience you have: administrative tasks, data entry—these are less appealing activities that volunteers don't often want to participate in. If it's a no-go, offer your time to a different organization in your community that is also doing work you believe in.

Be willing to challenge the beliefs you have about what kind of person you are or are not. For example, I hate talking on the phone and refuse to order food from any restaurant that doesn't have an online system. I rarely answer the phone even when my friends call. But everyone says, "Call your elected officials!" or "Calling works; online petitions, not so much!" So I started doing it and I still hate it. But after making calls to elected officials each day, I'm getting a lot more comfortable and willing!

Should I donate a percentage of my art income to causes I believe in?

I hear from a lot of artists about both a desire and a *pressure* to donate some of their sales or art income to issues that concern them.

Publicly donating a portion of sales can be a great boost to both community morale and your marketing efforts while also raising serious cash for causes you love. Los Angeles– and New York City–based boutique Otherwild is a queer-female-owned store that highlights objects and apparel by creative entrepreneurs who are mostly queer and/or female. Their "The Future Is Female" T-shirt initiative has been an incredibly successful example of the intersection of sales and creative work and fundraising. Otherwild's owner, Rachel Berks, donates 25 percent of all T-shirt sales to Planned Parenthood.[7] The T-shirt—a creative collaboration based on a 1970s image—became a runaway success in both sales and in the media. As a result, Berks has become a major donor to Planned Parenthood while also creating new jobs in Los Angeles and New York City.

I firmly believe in committing funds to the things we value, but that can only happen if you have the financial stability to do so. If you are not earning enough money overall to pay all your monthly expenses and put some money toward savings, retirement, debt, etc., then money does not need to be the resource you commit because you don't *have* that resource to commit. Before you make decisions about donating a percentage of your art sales, you should first assess your current financial picture.

Remember, even if you don't have money to give, you have other resources to contribute.

How do I stay woke but also function and maybe even have fun? Is it even okay to have fun?

Regardless of what the government is up to, we are still in the only lives we can be sure we will have. This is it! No do-over; no delays for a better political situation somewhere down the line.

It's useful to experiment with news and social media intake and see how different configurations affect your mental health, productivity, and capacity for joy.

Some examples from artists in my community:

— No electronics in bed

— Thirty minutes of social media and news scrolling at the beginning of the day and at the end

— No news or social media before 4 p.m. or after 10 a.m.

— No cable news; only print news and NPR

— *Democracy Now!* only on Fridays

If you can help it and it doesn't affect your actual job, it's best to take in the news and the surrounding social media storm in moderation. You still have your life's obligations and all the many wellness needs a modern human has: jobs, family, friends, hobbies, your body, spiritual life—not to mention volunteerism and activism.

Not only are you allowed fun but you *need fun.* Fun is the fuel of resistance! Integrating time with loved ones into joyful activism is a great "two birds, one stone" situation. But dumb fun, mindless fun, smart fun—all kinds of joy will keep you going.

What should I do about infighting in my activist circles?

I come from a queer community where infighting and shunning is practically a cliché joke. For me, I want to do work and expend energy where there is both fire and love. I want to challenge and be challenged by my community so that my larger trajectory is always toward more justice and inclusion for more people. I am less interested in proving that my current beliefs are enough of anything: radical enough, inclusive enough, "right" enough. Marginalized communities carry trauma, and one way that can manifest is in the policing and censoring of others in the same community.

Wherever you are in your understanding and knowledge of the world, inequity, justice, and activism *is exactly where you are supposed to be*. You will know more and different information a year from now. My beliefs and

activism at thirty-eight years old is very different from when I was twenty-two. And when I was twenty-two, I insufferably believed that my way was not only right, but the *only way.*

I have a more nuanced and expanded understanding of other people now, and I know my beliefs and methodologies are just that—mine. If I disagree passionately with another person's beliefs and methodologies, this is an invitation for me to consider whether we are a good match for community building and activism. Sometimes we will be; our differences will challenge each other in ways that make us both expand. Sometimes, I will discover that it's time for me to find different people to do this work with.

Another gem I love from twelve-step programs: "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity." If it's just not possible to find unity with your current activist community, consider looking into new communities. There are a lot of people in the world!

Okay, I'm Ready! Where Do I Start?

Great attitude! Let's keep it simple in the beginning and make some incremental changes or increases. In the week ahead, plot out time for the following: move your body for an hour at least three times, have fun with people you love at least once, carve out two hours for your art practice, and reflect on the questions on page 45.

Pro Tips

How to Stay Active and Engaged While Maintaining Your Practice and Well-Being

— Don’t normalize this political climate.

— Do not keep your phone in your bedroom. Need an alarm? Alarm clocks are inexpensive. Avoid starting your day with “the scroll.”

— Make art. Be in a community of active artists. Take in new art.

— Remember that you are in your life, the only one you have. You get to make it meaningful and well lived each day, regardless of the political climate. People make community and beauty in the most treacherous and fascist climates.

— Look at artists around you who are publicly responding to the administration for guidance, inspiration, and refueling.

— Think of resistance and activism as a new hobby or one that you are devoting more time to now.

— You know that friend who you meet at the gym, who helps you get there? Your gym buddy! You can have an activism buddy, too. Do your action, activism, and volunteering with someone if you prefer.

— If you are compelled to be active across multiple fronts (maybe you want to show up for Black Lives Matter and help a local homeless population and block deportations and make abortion accessible in antichoice states), consider drawing upon a particular resource or skill you could provide across them all (e.g., 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.

— Ask organizers and organizations *what they need*; you don't have to guess or try to figure it out.

— Remember that you are not the sole person working on any area of justice; you are part of a larger contingency. Justice work needs your individual piece, but it does not rely solely on you.

— My favorite food writer, M. F. K. Fisher, approached a well-rounded diet like this: balance the day, not the meal. With everything filling up your life, you can balance your week, rather than the day. You won't get to every area of your life, every single day. Think about how to serve yourself, your family, and your community over the course of a week rather than trying and failing to cram it all into twenty-four hours.

— Form a resistance crew, affinity group, action collective—whatever you want to call it. Identify a small group of people (four to five is plenty!) that will regularly get together to support each other's activism and/or collaborate on creative actions.

— If someone asks you for something and you cannot do it, it's okay to say no. You can say yes to something else or at another time.

— Have a clear view of your relative vulnerability and risk level in the world. Feeling 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. When you feel like utter shit, take a contrary action to whatever your brain is telling you.

— Determine what your lines in the sand will be and then do not cross them. If you are not Muslim and you decide you will not stand for a Muslim registry, then commit to doubling down if such a repeat of fascist history were to come to pass. Be ready and willing to organize other non-Muslims to register before Muslims in your state.

— 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 what ultimately leads to justice. Use the internet as the tool it can be and then be sure to log off of the internet and social media. Be in front of other humans more and more.

— Commit to making calls each week. How will you find time to do this? Spend twenty minutes less on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter each day and make your calls. You can sign up for alerts from any number of progressive websites, and these often include weekly instructions for making calls to your representatives.

— I have found that three to five really committed people can make anything happen: raise lots of money, run a candidate for local office, organize a rally, or initiate coalition building.

— It’s capitalism. If you feel crazy, remember you live in a crazy system. We can work to change and dismantle systems while we live within their constraints. You still have to pay your rent, right?

— If you are eligible to vote, be sure to vote in every single election in your area. Carve out a couple hours in the weeks preceding the election to research candidates and legislation on the ballot.

My Wish for *You*

If I could take on every reader of this book as a client, I would. For real. I want all artists to benefit from financial, emotional, and career support. Very few artists have access to the cultural signifiers of success like big money and fame, and yet they are held as the standard all artists are supposed to shoot for. I want this book to serve as a framework for maintaining your practice regardless of the political climate. I also want it to serve as a reminder that if you are an artist, then you need to make art. Take whatever you liked and discard anything you didn't. You may find different material in this book useful later down the road.

The compulsion inside of you that drives you to make things is a gift and not a universal one. This gift must be of service first and foremost to you and then to other people. Assess what you already have rather than staring at what you don't. Start right where you are.

Ask for help and resources. The more you ask for, the more you'll likely get. Not getting what you ask for is a great lesson, too. Getting comfortable with disappointment and rejection makes it easier for you to bounce back.

Give your practice and your art career the resources they deserve. Your practice deserves the work you're putting in now. This is also true for your goals and your dreams—you must put in the work to build in the direction you want to go. Don't wait.

I hope by the time you read this that the political climate has shifted drastically for the better! In the event that this shift has not yet happened, then we each need to keep applying pressure to the people and systems that

cause suffering and injustice. We all have a stake in creating the world we want to live in. As an artist, the gifts you have really matter.

Notes

1. As shorthand, I will use the word *artist* to refer to artists and writers in all disciplines.
2. Lesley Alderman, “Talking to Your Therapist About Election Anxiety,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/20/well/mind/talking-toyour-therapist-about-election-anxiety.html.
3. Robin Mather, “For Survivors of Sexual Abuse, the Presidential Campaign Is a Giant Trigger,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-mather-election-triggering-20161014-snap-story.html.
4. Marcia Chatelain, “How to Teach Kids About What’s Happening in Ferguson,” *The Atlantic*, August 25, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/08/howto-teach-kids-about-whats-happening-inferguson/379049/.
5. Identifying details have been altered to protect artists’ anonymity.
6. Paulette Perhach, “A Story of a Fuck Off Fund,” *Billfold*, January 20, 2016, https://thebillfold.com/a-story-of-a-fuck-off-fund.
7. Erin Faith Wilson, “Empowering Makers and Fostering Community at Otherwild,” *Design Sponge*, October 28, 2015, http://www.designsponge.com/2015/10/the-future-isfemale-at-otherwild-goods-services.html.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AMOS MAC

BETH PICKENS is a Los Angeles–based consultant for artists and arts organizations. She provides career consultation as well as grant-writing and fundraising assistance to clients across the United States.

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ALEXANDRA BRODSKY is an editor at Feministing.com, student at Yale Law School, and co-founder of Know Your IX, a national student campaign against campus gender-based violence. Alexandra regularly writes about feminist law in publications including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Nation* and has spoken about strengthening civil rights responses to gender-based violence on national television and radio programs and before the Senate.

RACHEL KAUDER NALEBUFF is a playwright living in Los Angeles. She is the creator of *The New York Times* bestseller *My Little Red Book*, an anthology of women's first period stories. She has given talks about periods to schools, conferences, and Girl Scout troops around the country. Her work

reducing the taboos around menstruation has been featured in the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, the *Huffington Post*, NPR, and Jezebel.

TRANSLATION AS TRANSHUMANCE

Mireille Gansel
Translated by Ros Schwartz
Foreword by Lauren Elkin

Mireille Gansel grew up in the traumatic aftermath of her family losing everything—including their native languages—to Nazi Germany. In the 1960s and 70s, she translated poets from East Berlin and Vietnam to help broadcast their defiance to the rest of the world.

Winner of a French Voices Award, Gansel's debut illustrates the estrangement every translator experiences for the privilege of moving between tongues, and muses on how translation becomes an exercise of empathy between those in exile.

MIREILLE GANSEL has published translations of a number of distinguished poets including Nelly Sachs, Peter Huchel, and Reiner Kunze, as well as letters by Paul Celan. After living in Hanoi in the seventies, she published the first volume of classical Vietnamese poetry to be translated into French.

ROS SCHWARTZ is the award-winning translator of some seventy-five works of fiction and nonfiction, including the 2010 edition of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*.

LAUREN ELKIN is a translator and writer living in Paris, and the author of *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London*.

KING KONG THEORY

Virginie Despentes

Translated by Stéphanie Benson

With humor, rage, and confessional detail, Virginie Despentes—in her own words “more King Kong than Kate Moss”—delivers a highly charged account of women’s lives today. She explodes common attitudes about sex and gender, and shows how modern beauty myths are ripe for rebelling against. Using her own experiences of rape, prostitution, and working in the porn industry as a jumping-off point, she makes the bold, stinging point that when it comes to sex today, everyone’s getting screwed.

VIRGINIE DESPENTES is an award-winning author and filmmaker, and a noted French feminist and cultural critic. She is the author of many award-winning books, including *Apocalypse Baby* (winner of the 2010 Prix Renaudot) and Vernon Subutex (winner of the Anaïs-Nin Prize 2015, Prix Landerneau 2015, Prix La Coupole 2015). She also codirected the screen adaptations of her controversial novels *Baise-Moi* and *Bye Bye Blondie*.

STÉPHANIE BENSON is a literary translator.

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