

More Letters To A Young Woman Artist

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June 23, 2023

Your personal vision and achievements have moved us and enriched our development as young women artists. You are a model to us.

We, in the spirit of the Feminist Art Program at California Institute of the Arts, are creating a one hundred and thirty day Feminist Art Program Archive Exhibition to celebrate the emergence of our own new spirit of visibility and vitality in the arts.

We plan to document this event with the publication of a catalog which will have a section called "More Letters to a Young Woman Artist". We would be deeply honored to include such a letter from you about your experiences, or advice, or whatever feelings you might wish to express.

Your letter would be an invaluable contribution in our efforts to build a strong identity for women. We sincerely hope you will respond to our request. Our publication deadline is July 23rd, 2023.

Thank you,
in the spirit of the Feminist Art Program

Leila Amalfitano	Cynthia Genn	Rena Small
Linda Burnham	Jill Giegerich	Susan Starbird
Susan Camitta	Constance Marsh	Teri Yarbrow
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Barbara England	Molly Rhodes	Director
Ida Forman	Sydney Schuster	Sherry Brody,
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Gala Porras-Kim, Artist
Daniela Lieja Quintanar with Ana Briz, Ekta Aggarwal,
Julia Raphaella Aguila, Lucia Fabio, Talia Heiman, Janet Sarbanes,
and Arantza Vilchis-Zarate, Curatorial Team

INTRODUCTION TO LETTERS

Eighty four years ago, Miriam Shapiro was fifteen and she wanted to be an artist. She was frightened, but her mind was set. She had been told by her father (himself an artist) that she was gifted and that the fact that she was a female, made no difference. At that time she didn't understand that her ambition and her gender didn't match. She was so crazy/serious about all of this, that she went to the library to look up the lives of famous artists to find out "how they did it".

It turned out that THE LIVES OF FAMOUS ARTISTS did not include women-artists. Did that mean that there weren't any? She felt rotten, angry—cheated of her own history. She did not want Rembrandt as a role model—he had a penis. She knew that if she were forced (for lack of female models) to identify with him, she would be neutered and lose the richness that came from her female fantasy life. She thought about being Mrs. Rembrandt—right sex—wrong profession. Everything was wrong: she wanted to learn from **women** what it felt like to want to be an artist. She wanted to check out all of her feelings, to compare them to see if she **was** crazy—to get reinforcement for her craziness. She needed to be less lonely, less frightened. She wanted... she needed...

SOPHINISBA ANGUISCOLA: she got pleasure from the very difficulty of pronouncing her name. Had she known about her eighty four years ago, she would have known:

that it was O.K. to be a woman and an artist
that it was alright to marry
that one could even marry a nobleman
that a lifetime of painting was possible for a woman
that one could even be praised by Vasari
that a woman artist could be 96 and be sketched
and acclaimed by Van Dyke.

Well, what a life, better than Rembrandt, eh!

So much for her thoughts at fifteen. Later when she was twenty-seven, an artist, graduated from college, married to an artist, she found herself still nagged by that feeling (she called it the “monster” feeling) of mismatch between “woman” and “artist”. Her husband, Paul Brach, and her were living in Columbia, Missouri. She found a paper given by Max Beckman, the German expressionist artist, to the women at Stephens College. She read it with great interest, it was called: LETTER TO A YOUNG WOMAN ARTIST. She hoped that there would be some words of illumination for her—perhaps he would touch on the “monster” problem? It was disappointing—cold, reserved, formal—not at all the way women talk to each other. It was impossible to know that young women were being addressed. “God,” she thought, “there must be a better way than this, to communicate with women artists!”

Not until 1974, as she was teaching the women in the Feminist Art Program, did she realize that the communication must be done by two women—one asking the question and one answering it. Those women composed a letter asking a question which entirely reflected their own needs and the replies came back with astonishing variety and sometimes poignant similarity. All women artists mourn their lack of history. At times we are enraged that “we” who surely existed, were excluded from the records. In this collection (a continuation) we try to fill the cup of history adding a small amount from the vital repositories of woman’s wisdom. ANONYMOUS WAS A WOMAN, she need no longer be.

GALA PORRAS-KIM

7/23/23

* writing about your life for yourself is important. It will help keep you in touch with yourself, which is an important foundation to have as you navigate the demands of the world.

* Know your values and never lose sight of them.

* never let ~~the~~ ~~be~~ your "weaknesses" ~~make you weak~~
Be a negative factor in your life + practice. Learn to ^{make} ~~use~~ your "weaknesses" ~~as~~ useful. Embrace them as you.

By embracing what you think are weaknesses, you can better know + love yourself and offer more to others. This extends to emotional states. Never think your emotions are weaknesses. They can become great ~~sources~~ sources of strength.

* Marcia Tucker shared this with me: Go ~~where~~ where you are wanted. Never let the idea of what you "should" be doing lead you away from a good community or situation. Sharing time + energy with people who want to share that with you is important. BEWARE of "should" thinking in general.

Never forget who you are. NEVER forget or disregard those ~~who~~ who ~~have~~ helped you achieve your dreams. NEVER forget to give back generously, but also don't allow yourself to be used.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY + MIND IF YOU WANT TO WORK HARD. EAT EXERCISE AND keep mentally active + inquisitive.

BE PRESENT. PLAN FOR THE FUTURE BUT BE READY TO CHANGE THOSE PLANS. STAY AGILE. BE IN REALITY SO THAT YOU CAN BUILD A SOLID FOUNDATION TO DREAM ~~new~~ NEW WORLDS + SHARE THEM WITH OTHERS

NEVER ~~forget~~ forget THAT ART IS SOMETHING SHARED WITH OTHERS. STAY OPEN TO OTHER PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS + PERSPECTIVES. They don't HAVE to define you BUT they ARE important + useful.

DON'T LET OTHER PEOPLE OR YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCES TO DEFINE YOU OR YOUR ART UNLESS YOU FIND THAT USEFUL. THEN HAVE FUN WITH IT ;)

~~NEVER~~ NEVER FORGET: you can't control everything. Accept this ~~as~~ AS A RULE OF LIFE + BEING AN ARTIST. IT'S ALSO A WONDERFUL THING TO NOT BE ABLE TO

CONTROL Everything. LIFE IS A NEGOTIATION WITH CHAOS.
~~CH~~ CHAOS CAN BE USEFUL + FUN.

When making ART, BUILDING A PRACTICE, MAKE SURE your
Audience is on your "Train" with you AND you
MAKE ALL THE STEPS TO get them ON BOARD.
THEN TAKE them INTO OTHER SPACE :

I don't think about this year, next year, FIVE years,
ten years with ^{my} PRACTICE + ARTmaking. I think
about 40 years or more, the whole trajectory.
Your Archive is ~~an~~ important. Your documentation,
NOTES, etc ARE important. Keep these HISTORICAL
materials so you can SHARE them with future
ARTISTS. Your VOICE is important. MAKE it last.

OLDER + younger generations ARE important. Do not
neglect them. Don't Be AFRAID to Be ~~challenged~~
CHALLENGED.

I HOPE these NOTES PROVE USEFUL. SOME things
CHANGE, But I FIND these points to BE USEFUL BROADLY.

7/23/23
3:18pm



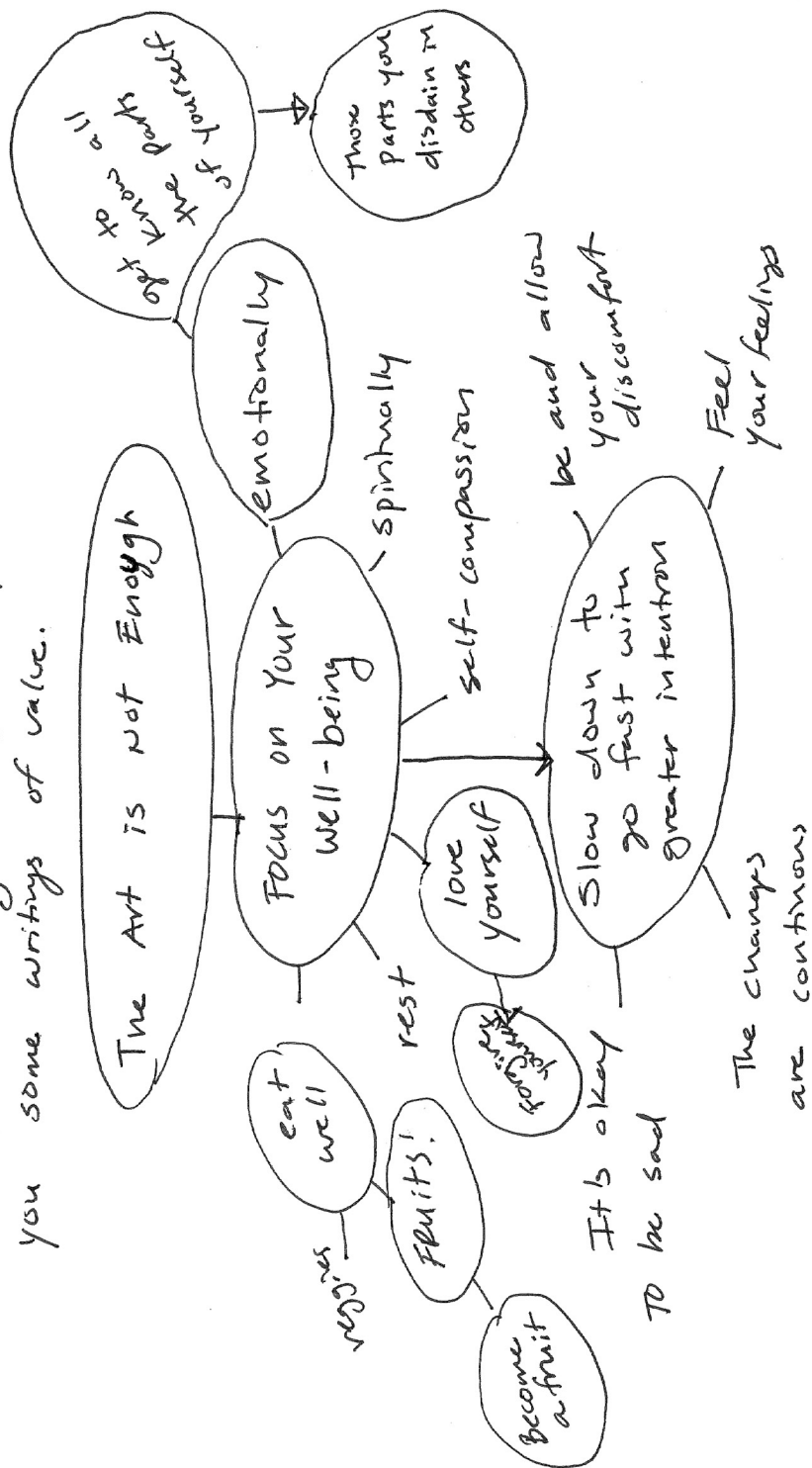
KELLY AKASHI
ALTADENA, CA

Kelly Akashi

P.S. HAVE FUN AND BE YOU + SHARE YOU + WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE!

To a younger woman artist,

Age does not define your stage in life and, that being said, I hope I can offer you some writings of value.



The process is art, art is in the walking,
In the relationships. Art is in the living
through constant improvisation.

The time in-between is the work. The changes and
frustrations, your grief, your joy, your making
love is the art. The art is a documentary
of you living and changing. Make your
Re-membering of self felt and embodied.

TRUST the serendipity

→ The surprise that is ART

Does NOT
make for
sustainable
Art

I didn't get to where I
am now by not regretting
! (sad face)

Be in constant conversation with
your work. Let the ideas pivot and
change as you change. Misbehave with
integrity.

The ART is Not Enough

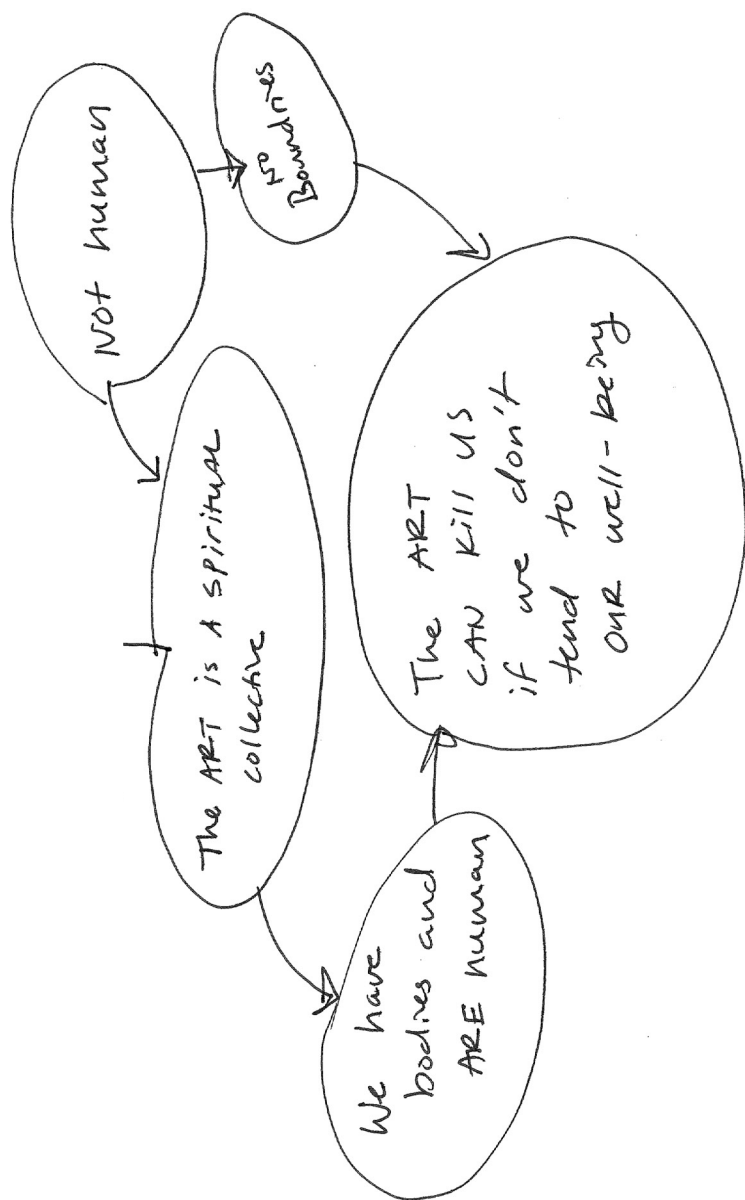
I wish it was

Hi Ego!

No too.

How do you feel about shifting some of your
energy away from the art and into other
areas of your life?

I was offended
righteous indignation



Be in the joyous surprise that the art will be there, that it will ripen, get deeper and more feral once you trust it.

SW 6695 137-C2
Midday

This is
your
HOUSE
You have
agency

SW 9022 136-C3
Yellow Bird

Stay
in
Gratitude

SW 6696 137-C3
Quilt Gold

Did you
give your
self
Attention ☐
Appreciation ☐
Acceptance ☐
ALLOWING ☐
Affection ☐

137-C4
SW 6697
Nugget

You have
Response - ability
+
tools

134-C2
SW 9016
La Luna Amarilla

Your Fear Response
shuts down
Cognitive
ability
↳ WALK AWAY

SW 6913 138-C5
Funky Yellow

When you
are triggered,
Pause ;
WALK AWAY
↓
Breath

Carmen Argote

Ellen T. Birrell
A desk somewhere in Ventura County
West Coast of the North American Continent
Starship Earth

July 20, 2023

Dear REDCAT Feminist,

This letter to “Young Women Artists” you want me to write—you know y’all are asking me to play *Hamlet’s* Polonius, right? It is bound to be a hoot, just like the original, but here goes....

Hmm, Polonia? Poloni-X?
Come on Ophelia, float that Ham-man right outta yer hair!
Float, GOAT!

2 equal goals, simple, but tricky:

- a. To be perpetually siloed by difference is fucked; I will not be imposed upon.
- b. I refuse to perpetuate the silos I have inherited and been uncritical about.

In the many years my partner and I went wilderness camping, I found that when we were prepping the next trip, we were always correcting for the disasters we hadn’t foreseen the last trip, and, guess what, there were always, always, new ones. {Warning: metaphor starts here:} The lesson I have taken from this, and that I offer to you, is this: whenever you find yourself complacent, and especially when you feel self-righteous (a failure I am sadly prone to, in case you can’t tell), slow down and do a really honest inventory.

I am, by training and inclination, an analog photographer in love with the realism of the world around me. A colleague of mine in the Film School once defined an artist as someone who pays very close attention and reports back. But now, roughly a quarter of the way into the 21st century, how quaint and sketchy the simple forms of analog making—writing and photographic/filmic capture—seem. The direct work of the hand is in there too, as is the testimony of the body—your body, any body, all bodies.

But, I insist they are therapeutic and essential! The indexical, like the dude, abides, because simulation, technical enlivening, and escapism does nothing to alter our meaty, perishable, essentials IRL (aka The Anthropocene, y’all).

I retired from teaching at CalArts in the (2020 covid) pandemic. Excellent timing for me because there was no transcendent experience to be had from peering at an art object through the 2D gaze of Zoom. All art needs the fleeting grace of bodies and minds moving and witnessing, paying close attention in breathing time and space. I think all great art is dependent on that moment of encounter for completion. The artworks that have resonated down through time have always come down to us carefully preserved in the tales of many other's experiences with them. We venerate them because of this traced witnessing. As a species we have valued that reporting back, whether about great art, or those "lions and tigers and bears, oh my" over the horizon.

Here is the tricky part. In this, as in other things, one size doesn't fit all. Lived history actively reframes old objects of veneration, for example, statues of Stalin or Robert E. Lee.¹ Who in these days can ever approach the *Mona Lisa* innocently?

Fact is, we are all, always, wilderness camping in the present, because the ever changing pressure of living together on this little spinning ball always yields new opportunities for unforeseen disasters.... Lions and tigers and bears! No shit!

We are, as I write, in a vast and necessary contestation about how narrowcast our speaking to each other has been. Both what has been said and to whom all these things have been said, and perhaps most important of all, who can speak to legitimating and respectful attention. It is painful. And slow.

Shared and acknowledged, laughter, tears, history, and criticism, all matter in the long run. Good art is exquisitely social and garrulous. It speaks to your peers and fellow travelers, and to the future. So Young Artist of any self determination, I ask you: What do you need to report? Why you? Why now? The answers to those questions can only be individual to yourself and, importantly, only ever situational. In

1 Kaucyila Brooke and I had a talk about this letter. She rightly challenged me on several insights she had as she read a 1st draft. (Goal 3: Keep your friends close, especially when they challenge you to think bigger.) Censorship of all kinds, even, as in these two cases, thoroughly and righteously applied, must be understood *at best* as a strategic act taken at an important point in time. It is an autocrat's move to extend censorship into law, a move both repressive and dangerous. That way lies forgetting and erasure all over again. Its an example of that trickster self-righteousness problem I mentioned above. (Book bans, abortion bans, profiling.... The list is long and soul killing. The long term answer must be some version of an exhibit hall of shame, with lots of information packed in there. Someone needs to figure *that* shit out!) BTW, Kaucyila also argued for footnotes, like this one. I think I fixed all the others, but no doubt, I will be wrong again soon. "Keep those cards and letters coming," we analoggers used to say, licking our stamps....

my lucky life, I have found that the answers I have come up with to those questions never turn out to be rules. If you are finding that yours are, I recommend a return to that honest inventory I mentioned above.

So as we, all of us—Polonius, Polonia, Poloni-X, dark or light, furry, bearded, four-footed or four wheeled, titted or dicked, or none of the above—all say:

“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any.”

Share your rain and sunshine where ever it is needed.
Above all, dare to care.
xxe
(she/her, as usual, yo.)

Dear Young Woman Artist,

The world is not currently organized to easily “be an artist”, especially if poor. But [maybe] becoming an artist isn’t the primary lesson and learning to care for yourself and others is: listening to your dreams and tending to your feelings; sweeping the floors and making the bed; watering the plants and making time for neighbors. When reciprocation doesn’t come back, you will be steadier and more certain about misalignments, whether in nearby relationships or from political leaders. This inward/outward daily attentiveness is carried by pictures, sounds and words.

My best,
Tasha Bjelić

August 9, 2023

Dear Artist,

Pleased to meet you in absentia! We may never be properly introduced or personally connected. Hence, it is an honor to correspond with you wherever these words may land in the future or the future past. Presently, I am at the beginning of my 70th decade and have logged some years as an artist and a teacher of young artists, and it is primarily from these experiences that I am constructing a random list of thoughts.

I do not believe that there is one way or even several codified ways to be an artist. In our culture so concerned with measurable results and productivity there are received ideas that go unexamined. I encourage you to question the source and assumptions within all of these definitions of good and bad artists. Often financially successful or publicly known artists are the ones to spread these ideas. They may say that they never intended such overwhelming success and that they are lucky that they achieved such status. Their advice for younger ambitious artists is to keep making their work no matter what the reception to their creative process or objects. The emphasis is on productivity, but I often wonder about play and pleasure. It may be difficult to quantify the fruit of a lazy artist, a conflicted one, or an ambivalent one, but indeed it does not ultimately devalue the importance of that artist's contribution.


Starting with Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), art history has based its narrative of the Great Artists on the construction of a lineage of influence and styles in an Old Testament series of begats. Long ago, I read an interview with a successful lesbian artist who had a big exhibition in Europe. The clearly feminist journalist asked her to list her most important influences. The artist promptly responded with a list of names of well recognized male artists and in doing so placed her work in that princely lineage. The journalist remarked that she did not list a single woman artist and pointed out that this was a chance for her to challenge the canon and to bring along some of the women artists who had come before her and created the opportunities for her to be an exhibiting artist by breaking through the gender barriers before she began to practice. Her defense was that her male art history teachers failed to provide her with examples of women, queer, non-European, black and brown artists. I was disappointed with her inability to think through her trajectory as a feminist and how it could break with the lineage of influence. I was by then teaching photo and media history but long before that I had tried to understand my own art making and how

it arose. I worked hard to find other artists not included in the canon or the art market to create a context for myself outside the ones that had been offered to me. This may sound like an intellectual act, but it was also a part of my self-creation, a way to shape my creativity.

Many of you are likely to be more progressively and better taught than I was, or so I hope, but we're still both trapped by history. All of us have the ability to pry ourselves from the received hierarchies we learn in the market place of art exchange values. Most artists are autodidacts. But do your own research and remember to cherish the names of those obscure influences in any platform that you may have to transmit your ideas. Standing on the shoulders of the uncelebrated, you may have the opportunity to bring light to their heretofore unrecognized frivolous anonymity, and help push their contributions out of obscurity into historical specificity.

I wish you all the best. Please make the art that you are fascinated with rather than what you imagine will achieve the most popular appeal. This in my experience is the best way to sustain your enthusiasm for a life-long practice, whether that be through leisure or laziness or obsessive production, it is yours to enjoy.

I salute you!



Kaucyila Brooke

PS. Things my younger artist self didn't know:

The artworld is not monolithic - when people say the artworld they primarily mean the commercial gallery business context and the mainstream museums - when they say the world they often mean the locally recognized artworld and the people curators they see when they go to openings or they know from educational contexts - this is not a world in the largest sense - if you practice does not seem to find favor in the locally recognized context that doesn't mean anything except that - there are other places where the discourse is different and you will very probably find a better context for you work than one in which you don't fit

June, 26th, 2023

There are role models for young women artists now: a smattering throughout history and plenty in the 20th and 21nd century.

Dear younger woman artist, if you are afraid but want to be an artist, turn to your art for reassurance.

Whatever thoughts, feelings, concerns you're having at the moment can be addressed within the artwork. Loneliness is a reason to become an artist. In focusing your creative imagination, you develop something like another self. The art must be imbued with spirit and able to speak back to you. You are no longer alone when you have art.

If you're thinking about fame and fortune, it is possible you could achieve those through art. However, those are not the same thing as being an artist and finding a life within art.

Women have historically painted, drawn, decorated, and made things with children. Letters on a page is a form of drawing! Sewing clothes, altering patterns, making something delicious to eat out of possibly meager rations are all the art the homemaker, oftentimes a woman.

Art is an ordinary thing. Being an artist is often the only thing that's left when the world shuns you and makes you an outsider. The best work comes from people who don't belong anywhere in particular and whose creative visualization and problem solving are pointed in a strange direction (rather than the direction of something useful in a material sense).

If you are unloved, fall into the arms of the artwork you create. Over time it will become more than you expected, develop a language and speak back to you. You can make art even in prison or a refugee camp. Ontologically speaking, there are no specific materials required.

In art, you make your own blanket; you make your own mother; you make your own mirror; you make your own lover. You don't even have to share it (or make it because truly no one cares whether you do or not).

Sincerely,
Kristen Calabrese

“Letters to a Young Woman Artist”
By Barbara Carrasco

Dear young artist please consider this advice when seriously embarking on a career as an artist. When you are creating from your imagination or from real life do it with all the acquired skills and experiences you personally possess. Document the process as well as the finished work of art and as a result, you will be able to observe your progress and reflect on how you felt when you created the work. Be organized by signing, dating and photographing your work. This also prepares you for future presentations of your work.

Create with as little pressure from exterior sources such as galleries, family and friends. Train your hand to render images in the best possible result by practice and commitment. Experimentation is part of the process of creativity. Your creative environment should be conducive to focusing on the work that needs to be done.

Sometimes your art will have a positive or negative effect by the public and private institutions. Female artists have been overlooked in many art museums and institutions. Realize that your perspective is important. You can disregard or take into consideration the advice of others or those you respect. Be aware of your position in the art community/establishment. Be prepared to defend your work. Seek Professional advice before signing any agreement concerning your work. Strive to improve your technique and style. As an artist, you are in control. Most of all, create with integrity.

Querida artista, dear artist

Here is a letter-poem for you, to read when your blood is in tandem with the moon and the tides. I've found that, generally, the days after bleeding I tend to have a sharp and resolute imagination.

Aquí un poema-carta para que leas cuando tu sangre está en tándem con la luna y las mareas. Me he dado cuenta que, generalmente, los días después de sangrar suelo tener una imaginación aguda y resoluta.

Rivers of Care

Mujeres women trans-women femmes grandmothers mothers daughters sisters
aunties comrades girlfriends cousins mentors, students workers cuidadoras
artistas poetas soñadoras wise ancestral dancers,
our given names buried in the structures of patriarchy
nevertheless we build our genealogies strong and transversal.
We hold onto each other, weaving hope into our bodies
renaming ourselves with each birth
with each transformation remembering
mountain river forest
flower jaguar maize
tide ocean wind
butterfly rock hurricane
whisper spell heat
rain fruit mangrove
tortoise snake spider
immigrants rebels givers.
With each new moon
with each new name
we create infrastructures of care.

con amor
with love

Carolina Caycedo
Los Angeles, July 2023

Hola tú (quien también soy yo, who is also me)

We have never yet been free ¹

Especially true if

Black

Of an exterminated sort (Taíno - Arawak)

From a colony

You go by 'she' but what does that mean ¹ Amia Srinivasan This road is set with traps

But and that is the world of people in the gap of time we are in

You hopefully already know not to do the work of the commodity mecha for it
Though if deep in the 'art world' you might be the thing called the 'art world'
artifice and smelly mire

If you're in this for non-alienated reasons/ways then you're in the mystery what
we aim to do do is a spell that needs existing though not one that is needed
needed is growing food wisely or talking to one another meaningfully the
spell is

Incomprehensible
Confounding
Distressing
ecstatic

Notice hard this world is constantly speaking but really listen not waiting for a
break to insert

Request
Case
Pitch
plea

Meet yourself in the green shower and hold your hand to your own fire if you've
determined your fire to be ok otherwise find a fire you like or put them all out i
don't know

Don't let you lie to you even especially when the lie is good and juicy at the
fancy party

No one is an expert or should want to be a professional *baz luhrmann voice*

I know what I know technique is less important than you know what you know
Your lessons will be different for coming in the envelope of your life

Ready for too much admin too many emails
don't teach unless you are called to it otherwise you'll be a bad gift to give
Don't forget:

The conditions of culture
(whichever you're in and the way they interlace with others)
The old violences still living
(of which you at least know one)

and

The new babes spawned by the
unjust machines that work to govern us

Climate change may make all the above change shape because the struggle of the spell will lie in our daily survival but as you, you have already been in that battle all your life

May all the points align (your spine, the sun, the needs of bird and whale),

Sofia Córdova

July 20, 2023

Letter to a ~~young woman~~ artist:

I am writing this letter to you, but I cannot, in good conscience, call it a letter to a young woman artist because I believe that labeling you as a woman artist, or as a woman at all, is part of the problem. I am also against calling this letter a letter to a young artist. I was never really a young artist. I was young once but at the time I was busy surviving a war and surviving migration and became a professional artist when I was already in my thirties so I would not know what it means to be a *young artist*, I must say that this sort of label sounds hierarchical and ageist to me. But let me go back to my reasons for refusing to call you (or me) a woman artist:

1. Humanism and the Western Canon

Humanism, the realm where the Western canon of art history belongs, centers a white male as the idealized subject that we should all aspire to be. As a result, most of the artists that became part of the Western Canon are men, and reproduce a certain idea about art that labels the work of women and the work of contemporary Indigenous peoples as craft. These ideas have had an enormous impact on the artworld. Change comes slow. The artworld continues to be patriarchal. Women continue to be the targets of institutional violence, gendered forms of violence, and domestic violence. Even today, about a quarter of the 21st century has already passed and women's solo exhibitions are still too few. women's work makes up only about 12% of major museum collections in the United States. A brown, immigrant woman artist who was brilliant and whose work continues to make an enormous impact in the artworld today, in our imaginaries of gender, of bodies, of the earth goes out the window of her apartment on the 34th floor of a building

in lower Manhattan and the artworld continues to support, honor, and celebrate major solo shows of her husband's work even if he was the only other person there, even if the reason why she might go out the window was never understood. A curator speaks out about this and she is removed from her leadership position at a major art museum. But she makes a podcast that we can listen to, we can learn about how the artworld defended a male white artist without knowing what happened (none of us do). What would have happened if this artist had been queer, Black, Brown, or Asian? would the artworld have defended this artist in the same way as they did when Carl Andre was accused of throwing Ana Mendieta out the window? What does this say about how the artworld views the body of a brown immigrant outspoken woman artist?

To dismantle these ideas we need to question humanism. The idealized subject of humanism is Eurocentric and there is an imagined genealogy that has been constructed for this subject that links him to the ancient Greek. But the Greek are not our ancestors, and the past was as diverse as the present. We can unlearn this narrative, but it's not easy. In school, if we studied philosophy we were told there is a chronology going back to Plato and if we studied art history we were taught to start with the *Winged Victory* or the *Parthenon*. We can establish other narratives, we can engage in untimely conversations with other ancient peoples, with other modernities besides the one linked to liberalism. We can forge multiplicities, simultaneities, time warps and multiple temporalities. More importantly, we can make every effort to unlearn and to steer clear of genealogies and chronologies.

2. Binary understandings of gender

Women need to have visibility and we must fight for that, definitely, without a doubt. However, what is a woman? how is this concept defined? for whom and why is this concept defined in this way? These are really important questions. I was saying at the start of this letter that taking as a point of departure the concept of *woman* is part of the problem. The reason I say that is because there is no such thing as the feminine. These ways of speaking of gender help solidify a binary understanding of gender and a traditional way of constructing subjectivity. They replicate a diagram of gender that helps sustain patriarchal power. This understanding of gender reproduces the idea that the feminine is an essence, that women are wild, they belong in nature (and that as a counterpart men are intellectual, brainy, that they belong in politics, institutions, libraries, etc.). Even when open minded people say that they embrace both their feminine side and their

masculine side, they are reproducing a binary understanding of gender that places queerness, non-definition, and becoming as abnormal, and that seeks to define everything as either the feminine or the masculine, that seeks to even define nature as the realm that is to be imagined as wild, uncontrollable, a place to be conquered, tamed, domesticated, and the urban as the modern, intellectual, organized space. These binaries are not good for us, so I run away from them, as fast as I can. I don't invest my time in them, and do all you can to steer my work away from them. These ideas are based on patriarchal ideology and colonialism.

3. Erasure of racism and discrimination between women

Women can think collectively, women are marginalized and controlled by the patriarchy, but there are women who are classist, racist, homophobic, and patriarchal. Therefore to say that all women work collectively, or to speak of a commonality among women can help erase these differences, contentions, acts of violence between women. As an artist, I consider it my task to question everything, and that includes dismantling racism, and fighting homophobia. We become part of the problem if we help make these things invisible. Just as we question a queer movement that is all white, we need to be suspicious of a feminist movement that is all white, or privileged. If we speak of women as a subject without speaking of intersectionalities, we help erase racism, we help erase the discrimination of immigrants, we become part of the problem. When I think of feminism, I am reminded that there are different types of feminisms. I often think of the feminism that emerged in the middle of wars in Central America: women went into politics, they went into the street, they organized while fighting for the rights of men, the rights of men and women to live. I also think about Indigenous communities and the ways in which Indigenous women leaders say with all clarity, "please don't call me a feminist," even as they fight for the rights of Indigenous women. They don't want to be called feminists because they don't want to help erase the brutal colonial forces that they are also fighting and that some women also represent.

4. Identity as a diagram of modernity

Identity can function as a diagram of modernity. I see my work as an invitation to imagine other, to imagine becoming other, to imagine having nonhuman vision, and so, I know that we cannot run away from identity. I understand that we must strive for the visibility of women, immigrants, Indigenous people. I understand that it is important to give visibility to cultural identity, to ancestral knowledge, etc. But my effort is to be open

towards the future and towards multiple temporalities and the problem is that identity, when only bound to the past, becomes a diagram, a box, a prison, and hinders our process and our imaginaries of becoming. So the issue is how to make identities visible and yet allow them room to be malleable, always in the making, nomadic, in the middle of becoming.

5. Collective thinking and collaborative work

The collective is about multiplicity, difference, multispecies, sometimes, even uncomfortable others. So when thinking about the collective it is important to think about the teachings of matter: matter is self-organizing, spontaneous. Our collective work, when it is about spontaneous, improvised, temporary collective action, forms collective spaces and subjects that are not about permanence, that function like matter. Those are the collective moments that interest me. Otherwise the collective can function as a small component of Western modernity, as nationalism, as a collective subject that creates otherness, borders, exclusions, etc.

8. A non-human, posthuman, object oriented artworld

But I still want to write this letter to you, an artist that could very well be me. We live in a patriarchal world obsessed with humanism. We can feel excluded sometimes but in order to dream and to imagine another world that is possible it is very helpful not to desire being included or recognized in that same logic of patriarchal Western humanism. Our desires are at the heart of that. So, I try to tell myself, don't desire a strong identity for women. Don't desire to be recognized by a patriarchal artworld. Don't desire recognition, desire something else, something that multiplies your creative powers, desire queerness, non-definition, desire time warps and Indigenous technologies surviving into the future, desire to uncover the powers of self-organizing matter, desire hyperobject and nanoworld forms of abstraction, desire nonhuman vision, desire other. And even in the middle of this battle for equality and inclusion, have fun, make joy.

All my best to you,

Beatriz Cortez

REDCAT Feminist Art Project

My cherished future artists,

As the moon whispers secrets to the stars, and the wind carries tales of old, I reach out to you with a heart brimming with love and care. Within your souls, the fire of artistry burns bright, entwined with the threads of feminism—a tapestry of passion and purpose.

In this journey of self-discovery and creation, I offer you these words of guidance, as a companion walking alongside you through the labyrinth of life:

1. **Embrace Your Authenticity:** Your voice is unique, and your experiences are unlike any other. Embrace the power of your individual purpose and let your art reflect the depth and beauty of your truth.
2. **Learn from the Past:** The footsteps of the feminist artists who came before us echo in the halls of history. Study their work, their struggles, and their triumphs. Let their courage inspire you and their stories fuel your resolve.
3. **Create Fearlessly:** Art has no boundaries; it is a realm where your imagination roams free. Release your inhibitions, and create your thoughts, dreams, and emotions with unbridled passion.
4. **Empower Others:** Feminism is a call to lift each other higher. Nurture a community of artists, share knowledge, and celebrate each other's victories. Together, you will create a chorus of courage that reverberates far beyond the realms of art.
5. **Seek Knowledge and Growth:** Be a perpetual student of life and art. Dive into the ocean of learning, exploring diverse perspectives and embracing the wisdom of others. Your growth as an artist and a feminist lies in constant curiosity.
6. **Challenge the Status Quo:** Use your art as a force for change. Unmask the bullshit, question norms, and challenge the constructs that suppress freedom and liberation. Be a catalyst for a world that honors the voices of the most marginalized.
7. **Practice Self-Compassion:** In the pursuit of excellence, remember to be kind to yourself. Allow room for mistakes and missteps, for they are

stepping stones on the path of progress.

8. Amplify Abolitionist Artists: In the tapestry of feminism, threads of intersectionality must intertwine. Abolition is feminism. Abolition thrives through care and transformation. Lean into abolitionist values.

9. Find Solace in Art: In the whirlwind of life, art can be your sanctuary. Allow your creativity to heal and rejuvenate your spirit. It is in those quiet moments of creation that you'll find clarity and solace.

10. Persist and Persist: The road to change is often met with obstacles, but know that your unwavering determination will pave the way for a future that is built through our imagination. Rise up in the face of adversity, for your art has the power to transcend barriers.

My dear artists, may these words serve as a guiding light on your journey. As you wield your brushes, pens, and hearts, remember that the world needs your art, your voices, and your fearless pursuit of a world that is molded and shaped by love and care.

With boundless love and unwavering support,

Patrisse Cullors

Dear Young Woman Artists,

Everyone has their own areas of struggle in their practice. I would describe myself as a "late bloomer" in finding my way to a language. I found my way through multiple art educations in different parts of the world by rejecting much of those systems. My time at Calarts and the years following were some of the most intensely confrontational, inspiring and impactful. I would nonetheless say that it was through rejection and rejecting that I found a way towards a subjective learning that has helped define my work. This included an ongoing period of unlearning.

Here are some thoughts that have aided or guided me - or that I wish someone had said to me back in the day... I hope they might be helpful to someone else.

Become your own expert. Find and study all your ancestors, whether you are related by interests, by practice or form. In times of disillusionment or insecurity, rely on the connection to your ancestors, to the inspiration you feel from that connection. Remind yourself you are not mid air, you are rooted in both all you have done so far and in the rhizomic connection to all before and around you.

You are not in the service industry. Trust in aspects of the work that are not yet even clear to yourself. One can discuss art, and it is vital too! until it turns to dust but no language can touch the essence of it. Consider criticism you receive no matter from where, whilst keeping in mind who is telling you what - not in terms of that person's accomplishments or value but in what their approach is, this will often help in taking what is useful from feedback.

Find peers to trust, share and grow with. Create a network with your sisters, where you can support each other in any aspect of your work: feedback, texts, production, install - any relevant aspect. It is amazing what one can achieve together. I have been able to create in any media and scale only through the support of my collaborators. You don't need to have a collaborative practice for this support to be essential - Invest in each other. The art world is not something graspable to structure your practice around. Support your sisters, it is a very different system to navigate when you stand on shared ground with them.

There is always some form of hierarchy within existing structures, also in the use of language in artistic discourse and practice. Inform yourself, be aware of current discourse and of your political and social environment. This is part of the conversation that you are in. Your responsibility is towards the work, in learning about all that it connects to and from - it is not necessary for you to be an expert in all histories or theories. The language you utilize should serve you, find a way to make it your own. Or Dada.

Developing your communication skills is a tool that will enable you to connect with those with shared ideas and create access to your work. This is not language to hide behind, if the work doesn't further enfold with the language around it, that language is not an aid and posturing is boring. Be honest with yourself. It is your responsibility towards your own work to create work that embodies itself. Your loyalty should be towards what the work needs and what you need to find out through it - not whatever the current mode is.

If you become blocked, pause your process and relieve the pressure: Inhale all the knowledge you can, listen, look, read and write - and then throw it out and make what you need to. Think of what you want to see or experience and go and create it.

Mariechen Danz

Dear Young Woman Artist,

I am not sure what to say to you, as you are the future and I wish you could give me advice.

I can't assume what you would tell me, but would it be more than the proverbial anything is possible, don't conform, be radical in your life and art, and take care of yourself and others?

Writing this letter brought me back to being a student in London and the excitement I had in developing a new art work and discovering new things about materials, life and other artists. It was a time of asking a lot of questions, a time of uncertainty and thus of both dread and hope that never really ended.

So my questions to you, young woman artist, are, will we always have an exploitative capitalist system?

Young woman artist, should we form a union?

Young woman artist, can we unite all workers' struggles?

Young woman artist, can you have a critical practice and also be on the art market?

Young woman artist, how do I know if I am good enough?

Young woman artist, can I have permission to leave the studio and go to the beach?

Young woman artist, should I always insist on getting paid for the work I do?

Young woman artist, is it possible to have a family and a career?

Young woman artist, will the art market always be a marker of success?

Young woman artist, how should we value our own work, even when others don't?

Young woman artist, can I trust myself to know if an artwork is finished?

Young woman artist, can art actually make a difference?

Young woman artist, should I stop making video art?

Young woman artist, do I actually have anything to teach you?
Young woman artist, what is the future of gender for an artist?
Young woman artist, what is a woman?
Young woman artist, will the prison-industrial complex ever be abolished?
Young woman artist, what is lacking from the L.A. art scene?
Young woman artist, can I stop worrying about what I look like when I go to my opening?
Young woman artist, do you need that white male curator's legitimization?
Young woman artist, how can we support each other, and not be in competition?
Young woman artist, will Black people ever receive reparations for slavery?
Young woman artist, can we become friends?
Young woman artist, do I fit into the L.A. art scene?
Young woman artist, can we imagine a future that does not exploit people and the earth?
Young woman artist, should I completely stop flying to openings, lectures and shoots because of climate change?
Young woman artist, is it even more impossible to find somewhere to live in L.A.?
Young woman artist, should I call myself a Black artist or a biracial artist, or an artist of color?
Young woman artist, how can I make cool art? What is cool art?
Young woman artist, how can you be an artist, and a daughter, and a sister, and a mother?
Young woman artist, should you make art about your identity? About politics?
Young woman artist, should I make art that looks pretty?
Young woman artist, should I make NFTs – No!
Young woman artist, will Artificial Intelligence take over art?
Young woman artist, will police brutality ever stop?
Young woman artist, how can you stay excited about art?

I do still have such excitement, and this is what drives me to keep making art. And the fact that I can never get the artwork perfectly right, and that my very being an artist is almost an illicit form of being. I always feel doing art wasn't something I was supposed to do. As a young woman of color from a working class background, I followed a path that I dreamt about but never thought possible. I was not conforming to the expectations of where I came from and had to rough it a bit along the way. I know these reflections may sound typical, even stereotypical.

They are sort of naively timeless I guess, but maybe they just never really go away. The answers are irrelevant. Your attempts at answering them, young artist, is what we need; your questioning, your possibility, your dedication, your making-with and ambition is what inspires us.

Thank you, young woman artist. I hope I can keep listening to you.

All my best,

Danielle Dean

Dear mija/x

I know your decision to pursue a path as an artist was not an easy one. You took in your life circumstances, inhaled the world around you, and considered your options. Listening to your gut you noted what held promise, what ignited your fire. Your deep intuition guided you toward portals of possibility and warned you of dead ends that history seemingly had lined up for you. You had the wisdom and the bravery to take the leap because you saw a glimpse of what stepping into yourself, growing into your potential, pursuing liberation, both for yourself and others, might look like through the realm of art. Bravo for bravery! Bravo for trusting and believing in yourself!

You will likely encounter many difficulties, obstacles and challenges within your journey into this thing we call art. You may struggle with making ends meet; paying your rent, finding the time space, adequate resources to create. It is a constant juggling act. Life events may happen that will require your attention, loved ones will come in and out of your life. At times you may experience self-doubt, confusion, lack of motivation. Practice self-care. You do not have to sacrifice your well-being in the name of art. You may grow weary if not disillusioned by art worlds, institutions and the strange mixes of capitalist/hetero/patriarchal social dynamics of those worlds. You may even decide that you do not want to reside in these worlds. (That is ok. Professionalism is over-rated. There are many ways to be a creative person in this world). It may be difficult (but not impossible) to build the community of support that you need. I encourage you to turn toward rather than away from these bumps and road blocks. The creative process is not limited to the act of making art. We can be creative in deciding where, how and for whom

are work is destined. We can build our own systems, infra-structures and worlds! Trust the process. You may be delighted even surprised with what unfolds.

In whatever form and with whom your artistic practice manifests. My hope for you is that you continue to find spaciousness when you experience confinement; stability within the instability; joy, play, and wonder in the process. May you find kindred spirits, allies and teachers in unexpected places, May you know who your true homies are; who's got your back. You may be disappointed by others, can you learn to forgive? Ask for help when you need it. In turn, be generous and compassionate as you witness other's struggle. May you learn to tend to your fears, your self doubt with love and tenderness. Learn to say No! Set your boundaries, to protect your self and so that you do not put yourself in a situation of overwhelm. Find joy in the joy of other's. Metabolize the competitive, comparing mind that either comes at you or that is within you. Know the power of the We! Find your rhythm, ride the momentum when it gets moving. You worked hard for it. You are a part of a life affirming, swelling ancestral river that came before you and will flow beyond you! Enjoy the ride.

With love. In solidarity.
Sandra de la Loza

Dear Young Woman Artist,

Being an artist means finding your freedom, and finding your freedom is going to upset a lot of people. Don't let this discourage you.

I was recently on a bus crossing the border from Iraq into Kuwait. It was the forth or fifth time I'd done this in the middle of the summer. All I could think about was how much I wanted to be in my own car, which was parked just beyond the checkpoint so that I could blast the AC, listen to music and drive home.

Meanwhile, I was sitting with one leg crossed over the other on the bus when a border officer (on the Kuwaiti side) stepped in to check everyone's passports. He asked the people in front of me for their travel documents and then kept moving down the bus. I thought to myself,

“strange, maybe he didn’t see me” and figured he’d notice me on his way out. When he finished going through everyone’s documents, he walked straight to where I was sitting, snatched my passport out of my hand and began yelling, “Uncross your legs! Put both your feet on the ground!” I was shocked and confused and didn’t understand what point he was trying to make so I asked him to explain. He then yelled even louder and threatened to keep my passport. From behind him I could see some of the people on the bus signaling to me to ignore and comply. I was outraged, but somehow managed to calmly put both my feet on the ground and refrain from saying more. He then gave back my passport and left.

Hours later, I kept wondering what his problem could have been. I had unwarrantedly been yelled at and humiliated in public. Days later, I finally understood. It was my freedom that had upset him. The mere fact that I was traveling alone and didn’t react when he got on the bus infuriated him. In his mind, I should have been terrified. All the other women on the bus were traveling with men. How dare I travel alone, and how dare I be unafraid?

Your courage and freedom will be met repeatedly by hostility. Some people won’t even know what it is about you that makes them uncomfortable.

Don’t let anyone define who you are and how you live and move in the world. Choose friends who’ll allow you to be yourself. Prioritize your own needs, ideas and success. Recognize how social conditioning/ideology/religion have barred and continue to bar women from society. Whatever they say is normal is absolutely not. Make your own money. It will make you happier.

Love,
Alia Farid

Dear young/woman/artist:

When Luna was born we were mostly quiet in isolation, in the desert. It happened during the covid pandemic. I had spent some time thinking about what non-toxic materials I could work with in the studio, as I continued to make work, in the most natural way I thought, alongside a small baby. I turned to the cochineal that was around me on the opuntia cactus of the desert and began to learn about pigments. But when Luna was born, the paintings still needed to be completed with oil paint. There was no way of getting around it. So if Luna napped in her stroller I would leave her at the edge of the studio and continue to paint. And what seemed so natural was not, because as when you re-enter society after a retreat you face others and their expectations. The context changes.

When I came back to the city of LA, a curator saw me walking home from the studio with Luna and asked me: Are you still making art? She might have asked me that without having become a mother, because the challenges of being an artist are real. A month later I was surprised when I didn't receive an invitation to my friends' preview for his museum show so another friend lamented, "oh they probably didn't invite you because you have a baby." The questions started to happen weekly. "How do you make art?" "How is your work affected by the birth of your child?" "Do you have enough time to make work?" "How do you balance work and life?" Are all questions I am asked, and often by women. Perhaps because they know it's the most challenging thing – to be a woman in a patriarchal society and also to have a baby that needs you and mostly lives off of you, as Luna did for the first two years of her life.

It's hard, I reply but I do it because I need to make art. Art has always been hard and you make adjustments in your life so you continue to be able to do it. There is a myriad of possibilities that create challenges in a life – race, sex, gender, economics, politics – but you make art because you do.

Recently, Anna, an artist friend who is also a mother, and I confided in what felt like a secret: on how our bodies entered some sort of hypnosis during breastfeeding and we were able to clearly see an entire exhibition, enter the space of the paintings, build and create in the resting periods and quiet moments outside of the studio. As a woman, so much time is spent laboring in ways unaccounted for, but we had been able to find a way to slip away and imagine; in this sort of trance you've created entire worlds. You become clearer in your ideas. As a woman artist you might learn to be quicker to know and to see

because you have to be. As a young artist you must continue to make art. Like Jen said: "We make the rules."

Patricia Fernández

To a Young Woman Artist,

This week I was fantasizing about recent work I would like to buy, and I realized that almost everything on my fantasy list, which was extensive, was made by a woman. There's so much to celebrate in that fact: that when I entered the art world in the early Seventies, there was almost no work by women that you could see in museums or non-profits or see in or buy from galleries, that for women artists there are so many opportunities to be seen and heard now, that there are more and more women curators who are interested in women's work, that as a female audience member, there are so many more works by women that I get to see.

So I say to you: You go, girl! There's open space out there, and it's yours to occupy.

Judy Fiskin

July 19, 2023

Dear young woman artist,

I'm a little weirded out by this invitation to address you as an elder artist, as if I have some wisdom to impart when I still think of myself as a young woman artist, with more left to learn than to teach. Perhaps I can at least help validate some thoughts and feelings you probably already have, or share some life lessons that might ease some tensions you've been accumulating. Things don't change with time so much as they just repeat enough that one is able to understand them more clearly, contextualize them, discuss them with others and develop a more complicated understanding.

First of all, if you feel inadequate wherever you study, work or live right now, you are probably just in the wrong place or in the wrong crowd.

Fortunately, the world is big, life is long, and there's lots of people left for you to meet and learn from. Move on from wherever you feel judged or that you can't express yourself fully. Find your people. Not just people that think you're great but people that you can trust to tell you when you're fucking up. Hold on to them. Don't be afraid to let go of relationships that change if they don't contribute to who you are anymore.

Throughout my life, older women have always been the ones who recognized my talent and created the most important opportunities for me to develop as an artist, inviting me to collaborate or take on work that I wasn't aware I was capable of doing. They trusted me more than I trusted myself, and that gave me confidence and space to grow. Maybe it won't be the same for you, but honor the wisdom of older people when they see you and find ways to benefit from their experience. That won't prevent you from charting your own path or force you to inherit all of their positionings.

I am humbled and embarrassed by my past ideas, actions and positionings ALL THE TIME. That's life. We are constantly learning and unlearning, what's important is to be open and compassionate, with ourselves and with others. Things are constantly in flux, social norms and codes change, and it's perfectly valid to be assertive about your beliefs and also willing to doubt, change your mind, pivot. We are a work in progress.

Recently, I've been recognized by important institutions that I looked up to as a younger person and invited to share my work in fancy spaces where I never imagined myself. Although that's not the kind of validation that is most meaningful to me, it brought back memories of different times when people I respected or looked up to made derisive comments about my work that made me doubt. I felt proud of myself because I realized that much of the work that is now being recognized was at some point dismissed, but instead of (or despite) being discouraged, I persisted and made it anyway, even if I felt insecure. Make your shit. Listen to others and take feedback and critique, but don't let anyone stop you from doing what you need to do. We only learn by trying. *De los pendejos no se ha escrito nada*¹, my dad used to say.

Finally, make plans but be ready to abandon them. I've never been very good at imagining the future or setting professional goals but the most

1 Loosely translates as 'nothing has been written about people who do nothing' though in the Caribbean a *pendejo* is like a coward or a fool.

interesting, life-changing turns my life has taken have all presented themselves in unexpected ways. Be open and ready to flow with things as they come up. You never know who you'll meet, what will result from your efforts, who will advocate for you, or where you will end up. The best you can do is be honest, caring and responsible - with work and pleasure.

Defend joy and rest, 'cause nobody else will do it for you.
Don't be too hard on yourself for being contradictory or insufficient.
There's no ethical consumption under capitalism and we are all negotiating insufficiency all the time.

Build collective power, even if it's exhausting. Be in community with people who think differently from you and have different life experiences. The world's problems are too big for any one of us to face them alone.

We are all in the mud, just don't let it immobilize you. You might feel tokenized, you might feel useless, you might benefit from external forces and institutional trends that have nothing to do with your work and ideas, but just do your thing, speak your mind and don't let anyone else define you.

The art world is not a talent competition. No one becomes successful or gets into positions of power solely based on their brilliance; it's a combination of talent, luck, timing, connections, coincidences and a bunch of other variables. Don't be intimidated by other people's success. Don't be cocky about your own. Success is fickle.

90% of the work opportunities and support I receive still comes from women: curators, critics, editors, professors, programmers and fellow artists, among others. I'm able to share myself and take up space because other women make room for me, trust me, value my practice and care for my ideas. Share yourself with others. Let people you admire, know that what they do is meaningful to you. Give love and be open to receiving. Don't hold back.

With love and honored by the opportunity to be in
dialogue,

Sofia Gallisá Muriente

Dear Young Woman Artist,

If this letter has found its way into your hands or onto your screen, then I am lucky. This is what an artist dreams about, finding the perfect audience for her own voice. And you, reading this missive, are she.

Writing this to you, today, at 50 years old, I have spent over half my life as a professional artist. While I may not be a Young Woman Artist relative to you, I am still one today in relationship to the women who came before me and to myself. Once a Young Woman Artist, always one. Louise Bourgeois, Joan Brown, Miriam Shapiro, or any of the women involved in the CalArts Feminist Art Project will always be Young Women Artists in their interiors and spirits in relationship to the artists who taught and inspired them.

Being a Young Woman Artist is really your second birth into the world, where you define yourself on your own terms. Becoming an artist is a willful and intentional decision.

Writers Charles Baudelaire and Hélène Cixous introduced me to the idea of a second childhood, the kind that only artists and poets have as adults. Baudelaire declared that “genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will.” And Cixous wrote:

But there is a path. It makes us go around the world to regain the second innocence. It's a long path. Only at the end of the path can we regain the force of simplicity or of nudity. Only at the end of life, I believe, will we be able to understand life's secret. One must have traveled a great deal to discover the obvious. One must have thoroughly rubbed and exhausted one's eyes in order to get rid of the thousands of scales we start with from making up our eyes.

I call “poet” any writer, philosopher, author, plays, dreamer, producer of dreams, who uses life as a time of “approaching.”

A second innocence, the rebirth we give ourselves, requires sustained work. It is unlike naivete, which is disillusioned and revealed and broken by the workings of the world. Innocence is not naïve: it is a form of adulthood that looks at life through the eyes of a child with the capacities adulthood brings. An artist's life is a journey of both beauty and tragedy, brimming with sensitivity to nature and energy, and efforts to reconcile our actions with our ideas.

If there is anything that I can share with you, it is what I have done to nurture my interior Young Woman Artists, my second innocence. Here are fifteen thoughts that have sustained me, and I hope, that one, if not more, are helpful to you. Keep only what resonates with you.

- 1) Your work should be the same thing whether no one is looking or if everyone is looking.
- 2) There are messages that are meant for you and only for you. Learn to listen to them and receive them even if no one else can hear or perceive them. If you listen to and are guided by your messages, others will be able to see the result of your actions.
- 3) Know that being a Woman Artist takes a long time... a lifetime. Small gestures, made every day, add up to works of art. And works of art have the power to change your life. Being an artist is a life of accretion.
- 4) There are some days you will spend 100% of your time being an artist and some days only 10%. Aim to average 50% of your time being an artist.
- 5) Be kind to yourself at the end of each day. Tomorrow brings a fresh start for the work you left unfinished today. You are your own best collaborator.
- 6) If you feel like a Maserati stuck in traffic, build your own road. Don't stay on roads that don't allow you to run your motor.
- 7) As you are making your work, ask yourself: Are you responding to something that already exists, in protest or reason, or are you making something imaginary, fantastical, and new? There is nothing wrong about being reactionary, but even artists who are making art in protest don't make their best work from a reactionary place. They create from a place of what is not yet, not destructive of what is.
- 8) Take care of your needs. Being a woman and an artist immediately puts you in an economically marginalized category (and this is without asking if you are a woman of color and/or queer). Focus on building a strong foundation for your en.re life, the other 50% of your time. Get health insurance, marry whoever you want, adopt five cats and have children, but never stop making art or identifying as an artist. Real life both takes away

the time from your art practice and gives the stability you need. Having love in your life — self-love and close relationships — is what will give you sustenance to take the risks you need to in your imagination.

- 9) Participate generously in your art community as much as you are able, but do not sacrifice your own career to take care of others.
- 10) Being an artist also means being an administrator. Some days you will be the personal assistant to your Young Woman Artist and “work on working.” This is everything from organizing your communication, paying your bills, focusing on another job, to researching ideas and meeting people.
- 11) Comparing yourself to other artists of your generation can be a useful metric of your career but should not be a permanent state. Use your feelings of envy to indicate areas where you might want to grow. If you haven’t won a prize or gotten a show, embrace the motivation you feel when seeing others who succeeded in those aims. Be envious of the goal itself and not the person.
- 12) Get in the practice of taking uncomfortable steps. Send letters of inquiry. A museum curator friend of mine told me that in 25 years not one woman artist had written to her for an opportunity to show their work, but she regularly received inquiries from men. Understand that sometimes the personal discomfort that comes when asking for opportunities might be conditioned rather than real.
- 13) You can’t avoid tragedy, misfortune, or failure, but you can be aware of how you handle them. Perhaps not in the moment, but later, in the studio, or workshop. The gift of being an artist is to be able to rework and reorder the raw material of life into something meaningful. It’s good to remember that many people don’t have work that helps them process and reorder their reality.
- 14) Take care of your body. Being an artist, like being an athlete, requires long hours of disciplined action to achieve goals. It’s the practice of this discipline that makes the finished work so satisfying. Your body, the instrument for your work, will flourish

with good food, exercise and taking care of your health.

- 15) Most importantly, do work that makes you lose yourself to joy. Do whatever you can, in your way, that makes you riotously, awkwardly, and explosively joyful. Only you can define and celebrate what that is.

Have fun out there and if we run into each other, please say hello!

Lots of love,
Alexandra Grant

Dear Young Womxn Artists,

I'm writing to you within the current contentious backdrop, where we are still fighting for our bodily autonomy. Our bodies are also aggregated with the way we treat the earth, violently mining and extracting her resources, leaving her depleted. We still haven't had a female president in the US, and many women still get paid exorbitantly less than their male colleagues. We've still got a long way to go to reach an equitable status. I hope one day this letter will feel very dated.

I want to write to you from both a personal place of experiencing many slights and from a place where I try to cultivate an inner power as an artist. I'm also writing as a woman in my early fifties. I always laugh at the part in Hito Steyerl's *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational Mov. File* when she mentions "being female and over fifty" as one of the strategies for becoming invisible by disappearing...so painfully true.

The issue of visibility and invisibility is so complex for women. I've always struggled with my self-worth and much of this is gendered. I grew up in the South at a time when there were still some very messed up ideas about how women should behave, a hangover from the 1950s. It was hard to cultivate a real sense of self. Like so many women, I was shy and insecure, keeping myself small and bottled up, going through the world observing and absorbing a lot. Looking back on my own experience, I think this helped me hone my ability to speak visually and sensorially with sensitivity.

It took me a while to feel confident in using the sense of insecurity, precarity and vulnerability as a strategy for building sculptures. There was an irreverent attitude embedded in balancing things or making things look like they could fall at any moment. So much of what I knew about sculpture was that it should be strong, overbuilt, and technically perfect and so many of those ideals seem to be tied to patriarchal ideas of exhibiting strength. It also felt rebellious to use photos as sculptural material, because imagery is so weaponized when it comes to the female form. I can't imagine growing up with selfies. I've always leaned into thinking about photos sensorially rather than in terms of representation, trying to get at something that can't be captured; a viewpoint more akin to the way women see... relational, haptic and multiple.

Getting over the mindset of keeping myself small and allowing myself to take up space has been a personal hurdle that I also overcame through my work, as well as using my own body to do it. Part of the motivation to make the piece *Mirage*, was the idea of peripersonal space, the embodied space mapped at its outermost reaches. Making the molds for these kinds of sculptures are always done by a group of women and the overall spirit involves caring for one another, laughter and hanging out talking. Creating this sisterhood and helping each other succeed is so important and a much better model than the competitive individualism that Gen Xers inherited.

So please read this whenever you need encouragement to perceive your weaknesses as your biggest strength, to be brave and irreverent, to subvert something that has been weaponized against you, to take up as much space as you want, and to cherish and build your relationships with one another.

With love,
Katie Grinnan

August 1, 2023 (Full Moon)

Dear Young Woman Artists,

First of all, thank you.

Thank you for your vision, your voice, your truth, and your mind.

Thank you for your courage, your perseverance, and your energy.

Thank you for sharing yourself with us and with the world. We need it.

We need your experience, strength, and hope.

I imagine that you will feel the full spectrum of emotions, in this pursuit of a life as an artist – from the exhilaration of manifesting a brilliant piece exactly as you had imagined it, to frustration and self-doubt when creative constipation hits. You will be thrilled, furious, jealous, giddy, and stupefied. You will be congratulated, assaulted, rewarded, and dismissed. And they will tell you ‘you’re too emotional’.

You are not.

The joy, the trauma, the ecstasy, and the brilliance that you hold in every cell of your body is not ‘too’ anything. It’s just right.

Know that systemic gaslighting that is so deeply interwoven into the structures of patriarchy that you will, at some point on your journey, doubt everything. You will doubt your ideas, your body, your words, your worth. Please remember that this is a centuries-old system designed to silence you – and please don’t let it.

I have a litany of maxims and sayings, and I know that as a list, they will seem trite (but aren’t lists such a hallmark of women’s experiential essence? What lists do you keep?).

These are the ideas and maxims that I think about often. They are the things that I feel are urgent. And in no particular order:

Be self-supporting, by your own contributions – in all of the ways you can interpret that. Believe in yourself. Support yourself.

The personal really is political. The more you live and create, the more you will understand this. You, your body, your life, your thoughts, your person, are important, political, and powerful. Use them.

You are not alone. Whatever your troubles, we have had them

too. Do not be ashamed of your experiences, your thoughts, your perspective. Silence = Death.

Think globally, and act locally. Do what you can, with what you have, in the place where you are – in this moment, now. Act locally, at a *cellular* level– take care of yourself, know your body, know your mind, know your materials. And know and love your neighbors.

You might feel powerless, but you are not helpless. Your lived truth is your power. Make work about it.

Plastics. Plastics are the future – and our demise. Do whatever you can to avoid them, and to stop their proliferation. They are already killing you.

There is no Planet B. Take care of the planet. You are of the planet. Listen to what the plants and animals and bugs and birds are telling you.

Count. You count. We count.

Hormones have been and will be weaponized. Do what you can to fight for and retain bodily autonomy for everyone.

When you are feeling insecure or unqualified or timid, will yourself to have ‘the confidence of a mediocre white man’.

Capitalism and patriarchy are inextricably linked. Resist them both at every turn.

Misogyny is profitable. Bigotry is profitable. War is profitable. Ask yourself often, ‘Who profits from this?’

Dismantle the gender binary.

If you *don't* see something, say something. Who is not in the room? Who is not on the walls? In the books? On the screen?

If it feels wrong, it probably is. Trust your instincts.

Build a longer table, not a higher fence. We will only survive if we can feed each other. Share and collaborate. It's NOT a

competition.

Your body is a temple. It's a vessel, a vehicle, and a tool. Learn everything you can about it, and love it. Be kind to it. Take care of it, and defend it fiercely every day.

I simultaneously want to tell you everything and nothing. I want to be profound and inspirational – to impart all that I have experienced and learned, and spare you at least *some* of the pain. But it really is the living – in it, of it, through it – that is the point.
I want you to live.

Living is an act of everyday rebellion.
Gloria was right.

Women should take up more space.
Rosa was right.

Women are brilliant strategists.
Joan was right.

Women are fierce and erotic.
Inanna was right.

Women deserve to be valued and heard.
Anita was right.

Women are complex, spiritual, and visionary.
Hilma was right.

Women are magical, psychic, empathic.
Cassandra was right.

You, you are all right.

I love you.

in solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Micol Hebron', with a stylized, flowing script.

Micol Hebron

June 25, 2023

Dear Artist,

As an art history undergraduate in the early 1980s, I studied with Moira Roth who taught the Feminist Art Program, Faith Ringgold, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Yayoi Kusama in her classes and was at the time editing *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America 1970-1980*. Under Moira's supervision, I researched the Gutai Group and learned about Tanaka Atsuko. Moira's pedagogy and all of my research, which included meeting both Kusama and Tanaka, introduced me to artists who were active at that very moment—mostly women as it happened. I was in my early twenties and didn't yet realize that the education I was receiving from Moira was highly unusual. I was lucky, and I now wish this education for everyone. The artists I studied, and Moira herself, showed me the significance of working according to your own definition.

One more thing: "no" is a useful word.

With respect,

Margaret Honda

Dear young woman/woman-identified artist,

Hi. I'm finally old haha. And after three and a half decades being a woman artist, I am at once more unhinged and more sane. Being a woman artist in this world, you will live on a precarious edge, always in the dialectic, exuberant, full of insight, stressed out. This of course gives you ninja-like reflexes and foresight as well as a few frayed nerves and overworked amygdala. Like an animal at the wildland-urban interface. I will offer a list here so you can take what's useful and leave what's not. This world doesn't want you to know yourself, to know what you want, what you think, what you believe, what you feel. So I hope I can remind you of your agency, the power and legitimacy of your lived experience, by offering a selection of things you can pick from.

But first: As a young woman you already know about the gaze on you. The world has been looking at you since you could walk, but perhaps hasn't been seeing you. You have been surveilled and regulated

by every institution including the family and the phone. This capture has already hurt you and also made you very strong. You now have eyes in the back of your head. The world will encourage you to spend more of your energy on how you look than what you make, think and feel. It will try to flatten you into an indexable thing but you are a complex, multi-faceted being with multi-dimensional worlds inside—impossible, in fact to flatten. You are already a bit of a monster (a good thing, or, just an unavoidable thing.) The efforts of the world to fold you down into a neat package to contain you will become tiresome, draining. You can turn inward and rest in the shade of your forest, cool your head in one of the many streams of the vast wilderness inside you. I know this sounds cheesy. But I'm 54 now and can tell you it's true. This shit is very real. You have whole universes to explore inside. You have chasms and abyss too, don't get me wrong. Fissures, spooky, echoing nebulae, dark tunnels and caverns to get lost in. Friends and community are vital to keep you anchored, connected. Nurture IRL relations. People are real. They will be important beyond anything in a career. Museums, galleries, institutions, the press will never care for you the way your community will. Always keep one foot out of the "art world." It is not a real world. It's an unfixed, phantasmagoric, and ephemeral intersection of money, power, lives, and art. Some of it is wonderful. Some of it is poisonous. As I write this, museums and art magazines are posting on Instagram about Barbie, doing free marketing for a mega-corporate movie which is just a long ad for a toy company that invented the object that is the ultimate representation of woman-as-object, stuck forever on her toes, tits up, ass out. Her fingers don't open but her legs do. The institution is not a real place.

You're already a step ahead if you identify as an artist. It has taken me decades to believe it's ok to call myself an artist, to believe that I am an artist and it's ok to be one. And the great thing about being an artist is that you can get old and still make things! You can become gray and invisible (finally!) and *still* make things. Making art is innately life-giving, even when you feel awful about being alive. Making is generative, making connects you to something bigger than yourself and is an offering to other people. Making is making.

Here is a list of thoughts. Not exhaustive, a starter you can add to. Take what you like and leave the rest:

Make a lot

The first thing you make is often not *the* thing (although sometimes it is). The only way you know is to make more.

A lot of making is like keeping the faucet flowing. Feeling stuck? Make

something else. Try different media. You don't have to be good at it but try. Making is making. There is pressure to be masterful. That's a lot of pressure. Just keep making. When you leave school (if you went to school) no one's coming over to the studio unless you invite them. Have your friends come in and look. Return the favor. Community is crucial! Didn't go to school? Also good. Keep making.

Be critical but don't beat yourself up. Challenge yourself because you are worth rising to it. Can't afford studio space? Make things anywhere you can. Scale down if you have to. Switch media. Making is making. Be nice to yourself. It's ok! It's ok. Just make some more.

Go to therapy, get healing for the hurts, they can really get in the way. Can't afford therapy? 12-step meetings are free.

Feel.

Also take breaks from feeling when the feelings take up too much space and energy. Abyss has a lot to teach but don't fall in.

Take breaks.

Work hard.

Practice. Rehearse. Improvise.

Go big. Go small. Go loud. Go quiet.

Have a physical thing you do. Being in your body, developing its strengths does wonders for making. Not just stamina but thinking, ideas, creative flow, energy. Your body is alive and how it feels informs the making. No money for sports? Walking, dancing, and push-ups are free. Weirdly, giving actually begets. Your generosity will be generative and bring things your way. Good things for your heart. Things that can last a lifetime.

Friends are more valuable than money.

Rinse the MFA out of your head. It will take multiple cycles. The things that stick are the useful things. Even if they hurt. What's the lesson (You are good no matter what they say.) It's all up to you.

No one is responsible for your feelings or your making.

Have to work long hours to make ends meet? Make one small thing before bed: rubber band, paper clip, piece of toilet paper, a melody, blood on the tiles, a text unsent. It all counts. Faucet open.

Art is a wonder. Careers are not.

Yes, money is crucial. Try to work as few hours as you can afford to.

Don't sleep with the curator.

Yes, that guy got those shows because the curator thought he was cute. You're not imagining things. Move on.

Levity over bitterness!

Try not to compare. Compare = despair. You are you, they are them. Go at your own pace. Don't slack.

You know what's really true? "This too shall pass." Some other shit is

right around the bend, and it too shall pass. And so on. Remember this. We can really get trapped in catastrophic thinking and it doesn't help. Even in catastrophes.

Listen.

Read.

Read with people is even better. To talk about it.

Read histories. Learn some of what has come before.

Write.

Make lists when writing is hard.

Draw when writing is hard. Sing when writing is hard. Write more when writing is hard. Show where you can. Start small. A friend's garage.

Make on your own time and not on the time of dealers, deadlines. If possible. If you're always making, you're always closer to ready.

Make what you want to make, not what dealers or trends want you to make. Those too shall pass.

Try to drink less. Or not at all.

Don't do coke with the curators.

Don't smoke weed before studio visits. This is just practical.

Despite what you've heard, addiction doesn't necessarily make good art. It does destroy life. Drink a lot of water.

Patience and kindness go a long way, especially as a woman because if you're even the slightest bit as bossy as the men they will just call you difficult and then you might feel shame. If you're pissed, write it down until you have a cooler head. Anger is fine. Get it out. Privately or in safe company. Usually it's grief.

Same if you're PMS or depressed: they will say "she's crazy." So you have to work extra hard to stay grounded, be mindful, put the feelings elsewhere until it's safe. (Or go cry in the bathroom, drink some water, take some breaths.)

The pressure is real.

Also speak up.

Many people in the art world are racist, sexist, classist, homophobic and transphobic just like in any other world. It doesn't matter if they posted a black square. Proceed with caution. Decide your boundaries.

Friends and community above all.

Keep making.

Patience and kindness feel better to give and to receive.

Be decent to workers. Be decent to staff, art-handlers, shippers, framers, printers, everyone. Say please and thank you.

Consider using a flip phone most of the time to limit the brain suck of social media. If your partner doesn't understand why you spend so much time in the studio, maybe break up. Sorry no I mean let them know that your needs don't mean you don't like them. Making is making.

If you have a kid and you can't make like you used to, let the process change. It just changes, it doesn't go away.

Change is ok.

Learn a new thing.

Work hard at it.

Nothing is easy, everything is humbling. Work.

If it's toxic, wear a respirator! Safety first!

Make jokes.

There are periods where you will disappear. No one will care. Let go.

Keep making.

There is no there, there. Or, you're already there. Either one. Hang in there baby. Keep on truckin'. Just kidding. But also do.

Measure twice, cut once. (My mom was an electrician in the shipyards and always said "Men are eye-ballers. They cut twice.")

My mom also said "Honey, remember: all men are a little bit ret*rded."

I'm just passing this along in case it's useful. Don't shoot the messenger.

It's ok to say 'I don't know.' It's ok to have the info and say it.

Go outside. Watch the animals. Touch the leaf.

Be kind to yourself.

Have fun

Have fun

Have fun

Sincerely,

Stanya Kahn

Where there isn't a school,

We can learn from each other.

Where there isn't a studio,

We can use home and the streets;

Where there isn't a supporter,

We can get a day job.

Where there isn't affordable childcare,

We can create focused time.

Where there isn't stability,

We can stay consistent.

Where there isn't proper caretaking,

We can voice our needs.

Where there isn't accessibility

We can decentralize the art.
Where there isn't a museum,
We can build our own.

Jessica Kaire

Dear Young Woman Artist,

Generally my advice to you as a young woman artist would be the same as for a young man artist. I would tell you to follow your interests and to be careful when taking advice on projects that are still in an early stage. Others might not understand what it is that you're trying work out. I would also tell you to work hard, and to learn from every source available to you.

The distinction "woman artist" seems to matter mostly in terms of experiencing misogyny, gender bias and injustice.

I grew up in Germany in a male-dominated society that had only established equal rights for women twelve years prior to my birth. In the United States, the amendment that gives equal rights to women (ERA) was written in 1923 and approved in 1972, two years after I was born. This means my mother grew up with significantly fewer legal rights than my father. To this day, women tend to be victims of physical and sexual violence, globally women don't have as much access to health care and education as men, and they earn much less than men. Many women work low-income jobs, and they earn significantly less than their male counterparts in higher paying jobs. Worldwide, only 1% of all women own land. Overall there are more women who live in poverty than men. People say that there is a tendency for the women's rights situation to get better, but as I'm writing this, abortion rights have been taken away from American women and I see conservative, traditionalist movements gaining traction everywhere.

Despite growing up in a male-dominated society, I didn't feel like my professional chances in life were worse than those of my male peers. Of course, statistically they were, but I don't think it's ever good to see yourself as a part of a statistic. You do what you love.

My approach to being a woman artist had been to not care so much

about the woman part. I explored what seemed interesting and worthwhile knowing. I did not want to feel boxed in by a definition of gender. I thought that by being who I am and doing what I do, I could contribute to the fluid definition of what being a woman/artist means. Of course I was aware of gender bias early on. From the time I was a kid I heard about things that women were supposedly unable to do. In a draft for an essay about Isa Genzken my friend Chris Nichols quoted Genzken from a conversation with Klara Driessen:

"I saw a documentary that looked at images of women in society, and which also thematized the example of the Stone Age, among other things: cave paintings of that era were made by men AND women. It had previously been said that they could only have been done by men, since they depict hunting scenes, but this was also proven false—women also hunted. It was possible to tell from their handprints that women were also involved. ... I just wanted to tell you that, since it excited me so much."¹

I remember people debating whether women had it in them to be painters! Forget about being sculptors. Our Paleolithic ancestors were dragged into many discussions to justify contemporary gender roles and bias against women. It's funny to think of nature historical displays mimicking 1950's era nuclear families in wild animal fur and rock tools.

I was a late teenager, or in my early twenties, when I thought about what kind of qualities I had to fulfill in order to be taken seriously as a woman and I realized that no matter what you did as a woman, the problem with your work was likely that it was done by a woman. Women's projects were accused of being too soft, too emotional, too thought out, not intellectual enough, not visceral enough, not aggressive enough, hysteric, whatever. It didn't matter. It made me understand that caring about these judgements was completely futile.

I believe that by now we have overcome these biases. At least I haven't heard them in a long time. There are differences in the way people of different genders/sexes approach things, for sure. They're manifold and on a spectrum. They certainly don't make one group's work better or worse than the other.

My entire art education was male-dominated. The Kunstakademie in

1 Jutta Koether, "Women also Hunted," quoting Klara Driessen, message of 15 March 2020, in "Isa Genzken - Works from 1973 to 1983" (Kunstmuseum Basel, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020), pp.54 - 55.

Düsseldorf had six women professors and twenty-three men. It was a master-class system, meaning that you would commit to studying with one professor for several years. It was suggested that your slim chance of ever having a career as an artist would depend on your professor's reputation as an artist: on their success in the art world. Most of us didn't want to study with the female professors since they didn't seem to have many exhibitions at the time. Of course the same was true for some of the male professors. Temporary popularity is a flimsy and brutal mechanism in the art world. The two classes that were known for having mostly male students were seen as more intellectual, or more visceral than others, which in both cases was seen as a sign of quality, if maybe a bit too extreme, or lacking balance. Classes with mostly female students were definitely seen as problematic. I personally experienced the frantic search for a male student to save the reputation of a new class that had only female students. Mixed gendered classes seemed to provide the best learning environment.

The early 1990's were not such a bad time for women artists in Germany: there were a number of well-respected artists, like Rosemarie Trockel, Katharina Fritsch, Isa Genzken, Rebecca Horn, Asta Gröting, Cosima von Bonin, Pia Stadtbäumer, Karin Sander, Katharina Sieverding, Maria Eichhorn, Hilla Becher and many more. There weren't many women of color, which is only in part explained by general demographics at the time.

The discussions about the qualitative differences between male and female art seemed increasingly absurd in light of these artists' work and success.

At CalArts, where I completed my second MFA, the gender bias didn't seem as extreme, and it was definitely frowned upon. The ratio of female to male professors was about even. Still, the better-known professors were male. For the first time, I heard gender bias discussed in a classroom setting. The drawback was that I sometimes felt that people were trying to read too much of a woman's agenda into my work, which I don't think it had, at least not in any intentional way. I didn't want to be pushed into a gendered corner.

At CalArts I started to understand the impact of feminist work on the mainstream. It made me understand that much of the unconventional use of materials which had been very influential to me, came from women who explored their own gender-specific histories. Somehow a lot of this work became more established by men using these methods.

It is often hard to know whether gender bias is the problem, when you experience pushback towards your work. Statistics provide a clear picture that we haven't overcome gender discrimination in the art world yet. But we did make progress. The Kunstakademie Düsseldorf has many women professors now. Most universities do.

So, my strategy to cope is to just do what I do and to include other women in what I do if possible. When I did the Los Angeles Museum of Art (LAMO) I didn't set out to show more women than men. I wanted to provide a space for artists whose work I liked and whom I felt didn't get the exposure they deserved. Most of them turned out to be women. I hope we'll get to a point where women's issues won't be marked by gender bias. All the Best,

Alice Könitz

Hey queen,

Release the flood of your desire. Strength is resistance, a means of freeing your existence. You're not alone, and we make each other powerful. Together, we flood the streets, disrupt the order, cross all borders, and burn the patriarchy to the ground!

Xoxox



Young Joon Kwak

July 2023

My Dears,

As you are aware, young women have more of a chance to make and be what they choose than, well, let's just call it ever, since it was so long ago that circumstances may have been similar. Things have been heading in this direction for some time and I hope you find yourselves not at some vertex but at a point in a continuum as I have. Still, there may never have been more of you. What does this mean for and to you? You will be the ones to show us, your generation and those that follow you. What will you each give? What will you give as a generation?

I have found that it takes lots of time to make art. When I was about 30, I began telling myself if I do something every day (this could be anything from reading, thinking, looking at art, to making, to ordering my space, tools and supplies) I would eventually have an artwork. This is more of a way to keep myself in it than anything else. For me it is a way of life not an occupation. There is a lot involved, and each artist must set their terms. So, what are your terms? What is important to you and how do you want to live your artist's life? Does any of this match with how you can? If not, then start with fiction and see what happens. Little things can add up. You can do a lot or a little and it is still significant. It might take a lot of a little or a little of a lot. You must have the desire to take these risks and accept uncertainty or you may disagree intensely or mildly and this will set you off in the direction you will find yourself in. You have something to give. What is it? Where do you find it? Where does it find you? When you give it can you let it go and be and when you wake up after doing that can you continue? Is a change needed? It is a life. There really is no point in telling artists what to do or how to do it.

In any case you have my esteem for being artists.

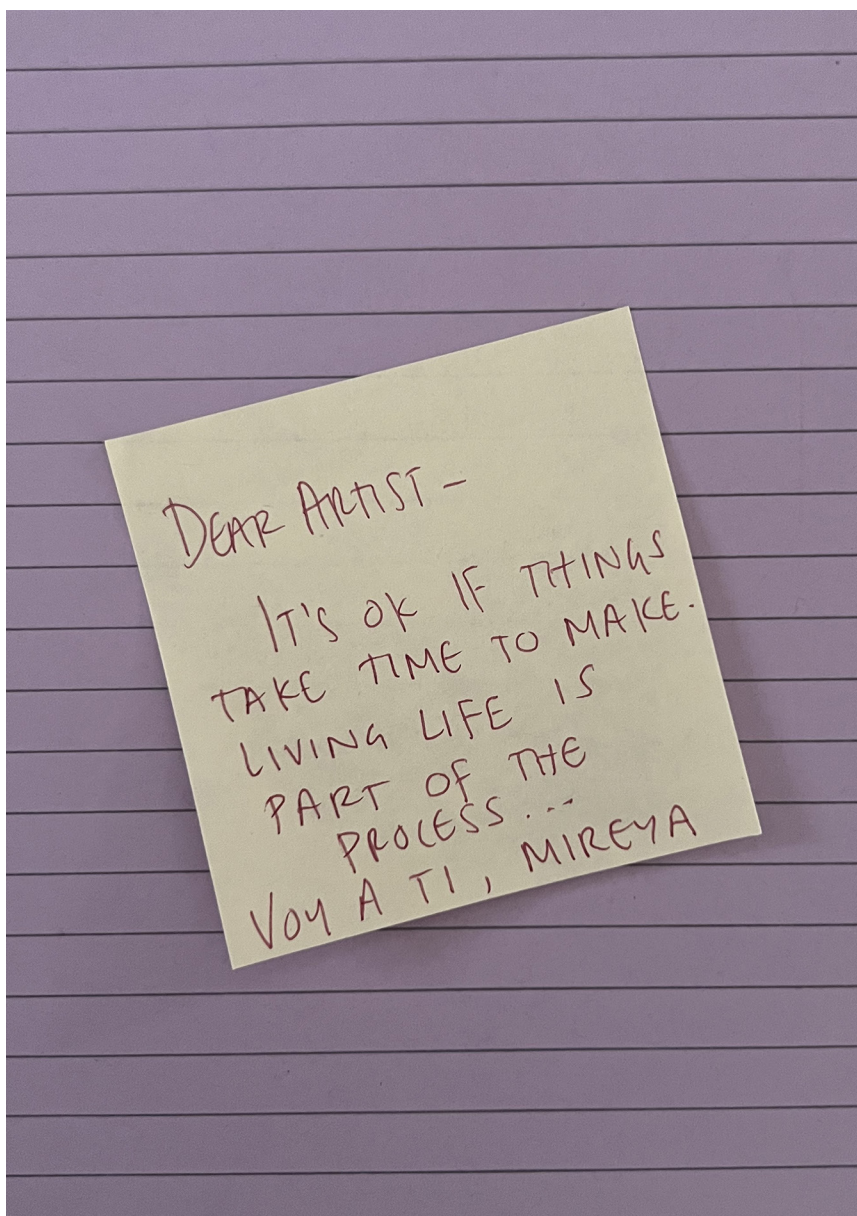
Best Wishes,

Liz Lerner

The symbol of Feeling

The other night as i smoked halfway through my joint, alone, in my living room where it was dark and quiet - and as i moved around my house in silence as not to wake up my child and husband - i had a rush of contentment roll over me while, i physically felt the calmness reach the crown of my head. i was thinking deeply about my art, and how it has accompanied me my whole life. and as i enter into yet another chapter, into my forties, i looked back to think about all the other chapters in which i'd abandoned my practice, the indefinite breaks buried in doubt and neglect. but my art, it has been relentless, still present through my cowering and despair, patiently waiting for the right moment to act, and in spite of the many shifts and transformations i've forced it through, it has been reliable, in attendance, and in constant tandem with my deepest yearnings. as i sat there, joint in hand, i was in total awe of my unfettered state, i started to visualize my art as a figurative companion, my friend who has followed me here, and despite our on and offs, our ups and downs, i know that we can only be stronger together.

july 20, 2023
salida, colorado
maia ruth lee



DEAR ARTIST -

IT'S OK IF THINGS
TAKE TIME TO MAKE.
LIVING LIFE IS
PART OF THE
PROCESS...

VOY A TI, MIREYA

Mireya Lucio

Dear young artists.

Dear young woman.

I write to you this Sunday morning, on the day this letter is due to tell you to take your time with all of it. Take all the time you need with making, with love, with healing, in relationships and in solitude. The world will rush you and the urgency to be, do, and have will weigh heavy at times but no matter what, keep to the pace that keeps you in your joy and curiosity. There are moments you will stand center stage in your world and all the love and praise will rain over you and there will be moments where you will fall to your knees in despair at all the things you cannot change or cannot keep from changing. Be present for all of it, take the lessons in with care and trust. Surrender to the evolutions as an artist, as a woman, and as a growing being. You have the pleasure to experience these emotions. The work emerges from this space of understanding. Whatever form the work comes in, trust that too—learn from it and keep it moving forward. No failure is too big to get passed and no success is too great to be surpassed. And not to be forgotten, allow rest into your practice. A rested woman is a powerful force in the world and resting is a revolutionary act in these systems of more and now. Living as enough is the kindest act you can offer yourself. I know this is a little fortune cookie proverb style advice but these shifts in my relationship to myself have changed my life and I am deeply grateful for these kernels of knowledge I've collected along the way.

Also no more:

I want

I need

I try

Instead:

I am

I will

I have

Maria Maea

Ten Tips for Young Womxn Artists

1. Find your coven

Being a womxn artist sometimes feels to me like climbing a sheer cliff without hand or foot holds: I face a patriarchal world while I pull my ideas inside out, take risks, try to make something from nothing, etc. Over the years I have amassed what I call my coven: colleagues, mentors, and friends who help me find my footing as I ascend. Giving and receiving aid fortifies me and allows me to soar.

2. It must change

"All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change. God is change."-- Octavia E. Butler

3. Say "no" early and often

This tip is self-explanatory, but I just want to emphasize here that the unpaid labor of womxn run the world, including the artworld. This can end if we want it.

4. Nurture patience

I spent my teens and twenties frustrated, confused, and struggling with my artistic output. I felt like I was moving at a sloth's pace; ideas were not coming together quickly enough. It wasn't until I was well into my thirties that I finally started feeling satisfied with the artwork I was making. I still struggle with my impatience, but now that I am middle aged, I remind myself (daily) that art and ideas unfold over time.

5. Guard over your studio time zealously

As Mary Oliver writes: "It is six A.M., and I am working. I am absentminded, reckless, heedless of social obligations, etc. It is as it must be. The tire goes flat, the tooth falls out, there will be a hundred meals without mustard. The poem gets written. I have wrestled with the angel and I am stained with light and I have no shame. Neither do I have guilt."

6. You are not a cow

Shortly after I graduated from art school, I was sharing a celebratory meal with my mentors, all prominent Second-wave Feminist artists. They soon spied my engagement ring and began admonishing me for choosing a life path they perceived to be like

a poisoned apple. One of my colleagues had a famous Feminist artist tell her that womxn who have kids are like cows who are constantly being milked/sucked dry. I know that these elders just wanted to best for me (for us) and I can't say that being a working mom-artist is easy. But I have never regretted marrying and having children, nor have I ever felt any likeness to bovines.

7. Welcome fallow times

It is a challenge to brace against the pull of hustle culture and consumer capitalism. There is a little taskmaster inside my head that commands me to always be working, that if I am not making art, I am not doing anything worthwhile. Still, when I look back over my career, some of my favorite artworks arose after fallow times when I was making very little. Quieter moments that seem inactive serve to cultivate creativity and germinate new ideas.

8. Mother earth cares for us and we must care for her in return

We all have been fed, clothed, and housed with materials provided by our earth mother Gaia. Now we face an existential climate emergency. It is imperative that womxn artists and all sentient beings care for, preserve, and protect mother earth or else all will be lost.

9. Look within, not without

One of my close friends and role models is a Feminist artist in her 70s. She has had a long and admirable career, but like many womxn artists, it wasn't until she was a septuagenarian that she had her first solo museum show. I once asked her what keeps her going and drives her artmaking. She answered simply: "It makes me happy!". She doesn't worry about whether people will buy her work, or how it will be received, or whether it will further her career. She simply strives every day to make the best artwork she can.

10. You are not alone.

Know that I am fighting for you, that others before me fought for you, that you are part of a lineage of ancestors on whose shoulders you are standing. You are not alone.

My love,
Elana Mann
July 2023

Dear Young Woman Artist,

There is no such thing as fair. You will always be treated in ways that are deeply affected by culture, socialization, education (or lack thereof), and personal taste.

You cannot change the world, but you can change yourself.

You can learn something valuable from almost anyone. The most important lessons you will learn from yourself.

You are contagious. Your actions and energy affect everything and everyone around you, if only in minuscule ways. Consider this a great responsibility.

You will need to be stronger than you think you need to be.

You will need to be vulnerable when you least expect it.

You will learn that transparency is a weapon to be wielded wisely.

We are all masculine, feminine, and sexless. Learn to dip into the parts that make sense when they make sense.

You do not need to act like a man in order to be successful. That said, it's okay to be cocky at times.

Ask for more than you think you're worth, and do not back down.

Do not be afraid to feel your pussy in all its depth and power and potential -- let it drive you.

Nothing is more attractive than self-confidence. Self-confidence comes from acceptance of the self.

Self-acceptance does not mean you're done working on you.

You will never be done working on you.

Assert yourself. Articulate. Only apologize when it is merited.

When you need softness and care and warmth, ask for it from people you truly trust.

Surround yourself with people who challenge you and make you feel good about yourself. Distance yourself from people who make you feel like shit. Trust your instincts.

Decide early on what success means to you and you alone.

It's okay to question yourself and the decisions you've made. Every failure is an opportunity to learn and expand.

Seek freedom.

Love,
///emily mast

2023- Letter to a young female artist

Hello young female (or whoever may find this of use),

Being an artist...it's honestly the best and perhaps only way for us to exist. What a fun way to spend our human time!

We, (the artists that came before you) are happy to have you.
Welcome :0)

In the contemporary spirit of listicles, I will use this structure. I will mainly address things like taking up space and encouraging you and your friends to be bold; and to take down days as well. Keep what you need, leave the rest.

Let's begin:

-Make the thing. Decide after if it sucks

-Not everything you make will be art.

-Every artist has made very bad art.

-You will make "process pieces" that will solely function to get you to the next project. Sometimes you won't see it for years.

-Imposter syndrome may look your way. It's normal and most people

experience it. You probably **do not** suck and there **is** room for you.

-Don't insult yourself. Do not tell everyone what your worst qualities are. If they are really obvious, other people will figure it out. ← That one came from my older sister!

-Do things that make you feel uncomfortable. Growth is hiding close to that. So is finding new things you may love.

-Put yourself in rooms where you know the least. Learning is always cool.

-Encourage and celebrate your friends.

-You don't need to be friends with everyone but hold the real gems close. You will also learn a lot about people by who will show up for you in hard times.

-Make as many intergenerational friendships as you can. I have friends that can be my grandmother or my daughter in terms of age span. They are also very special to me and I'm so thankful.

-I like to believe that all of us are doing the best we can and being human is messy. Learn when to bend and forgive. There is no actual guidebook for anything.

-Purposefully interrupt men when they are speaking. Try to never interrupt a woman.:)

-Hold doors open for people, especially women.

-Flawed for obvious reasons... but sometimes, when I don't know what to do in a business situation, I think: *What would a man do?* Not that it is some metric of ultimate permission, but rather some of the entitlement I have seen them carry positively affects their outcomes (assuming their domination of a space or field). So tread lightly on this one, but use whatever methodology you can to perform in whichever way serves you when you need.

-When you are really happy and joy fills you, note it. Often times, our brains are more familiar with documenting sadness. Give the smile side a chance to register.

That being said...

-Crying is great! It's cathartic! It moves energy and actually is you processing whatever needs to shift. If you are ever very sad and crying intensely, I encourage you to cry as hard **as you possibly can**. Be dramatic, wail on the floor, roll around, get snot all over your shirt; be the telenovela. I then think about how fortunate humans are to have such a wide range of accessible emotions.

-I feel that people approach young female artists with lots of "*opportunities*", but so many of them can be fake and have no benefit to the artist. Think strategically. Make sure YOU are getting something from it.

-Not every day is meant for conquering- some are meant for rest. Some days, I don't have any energy to be bold. Instead of being hard on myself, take this opportunity for a different task. For example, some days I will draft emails but I often wait for a more courageous day to send.

-Down days of reclusion are great for recharging. The brain loves when you gaze at moving water and leaves in the wind.

-Stretch. If your art practice is laborious, remember to thank your body and keep it loose and limber. You will last longer. Get as much use out of that body as you possibly can.

-If people that you trust tell you to go to therapy or to the doctor, just go. Therapy will give you the tools and language to express yourself. That will likely make for much better art.

-Do not talk badly about others. If you really must vent, try a diary. If that other person really sucks, chances are other people know. It's not your job to give the updates.

-Don't waste your time thinking about people you hate. Or people that may hate you. Most people are just busy thinking about their own existential woes.

-Time is more important than money.
You can always make money back but time.... Is... priceless.

-Examine every cue placed in front of you that is designed in order for you to spend money you don't have or think negatively about yourself. It

was marketed to do so.

We are so lucky to get old. Age isn't a bad thing, even if the media says it is. Ok I am done for now.

Be nice to yourself and I will try to do the same.

Xo

Jillian Mayer

My seven-year old eye caught magic when I saw a thick book that had been left in our apartment in Monterey, CA. It turned out to be the large Spiegel catalog that was glorious in every colorful page.

There I found us - me, myself and my family. We were there - the perfection - the ideal blonde family. It seemed nearly every day, I created various things to do for the unit - cooking, sewing, making things - all a fantasy that seemed incredibly amazing.

After several weeks, I grew tired and moved on.

At that time, I had art class taught by a visiting teacher. Her first homework was

to make a drawing. I excitedly made a drawing of a Northern Bathroom Tissue, a Brunette, no less, who I felt was the prettiest. When I was finished, I was convinced that I was best drawer ever. The drawing stands as the best that existed.

Yong Soon Min

Dear a young feminist reader,
In 1974 when the first iteration of this publication was made, I was still in Seoul but that would change in the coming year. Landing in Los Angeles, I did not speak English but that would change too. Now, decades have been lived in this country, since.

One constant aspect of the time passed is change. The world has changed and continues to. Not always for the better as you know. For example, here in this country, we have returned to a darker place of State prohibition on women's most fundamental and intimate possession, their own bodies.

On a brighter side, gender discourse, identities and representations seem to be on its way to being more fluid and plural, no longer married to the Christian doctrine. In light of, and hopes for such a future, my thoughts here are addressed to a young feminist reader, perhaps from another place in the world.

To speak briefly about my path to becoming an artist, I will say, as a young person, I was busy assimilating, which usually means that one watched a lot of television. It was not until in my late 20s, in art school that I began to connect to the value and understand the complexity "difference," being from "somewhere else." But unlike before, I took it to mean that things are not always how they appear or seem - that there is always more to it and one may never know it. For the first time in my life, I started to have some semblance of myself as a distinct person in the

world. And turns out making art was (is) a way of being in the world that feels simultaneously freeing and engaging. This process takes ongoing returns to the physical activities of making, observing, thinking, and reflecting.

One of the ways that I've come to think about my practice as an artist is through an analogy of "game," à la Roger Caillois. A kind of game where its objective is not winning per se, but a game where you might want to continue to play for the joy of playing. Imagine a game to be played for life where rules might change along the way, a new set up may present itself, and even a period of long silent pause.

Transparency is only a passage leading to elsewhere. I like remembering J. Lyotard's saying "Who knows not how to hide, knows not how to love." This passage has always given me comfort. Speaking of love, I want to leave you with a passage by Alain Badiou on love and art that's been inspiring for me in the hopes that it is, too, for the reader.

"Love cannot be reduced to any law. There is no law of love. What's more, art has often demonstrated the asocial side of love. As the popular saying goes, after all, "lovers are on their own in this world". They also possess that difference by which they experience the world."

* Lyotard's words are from the Libidinal Economy.

* Badiou's words are from In Praise of Love.

Yunhee Min
July 24, 2023

Dear Reader,

When I first got the invitation to write this letter I was excited. But, I was also in a pretty bad mood—that bad long-lasting kind of mood — I was pretty depressed. It happens. While I imagined imparting inspiring words of perseverance and dedication and TRUTH and devotion to art and its making.... All I could think of were warnings and trade-offs, and struggle, compromise and dumb chance. I felt despondent and was not on the half-full side of these topics.

So, Dear Reader, I might issue you a few warnings. But, since I'm in a little bit of a better mood, I might be able to offer you some more grounding, level-headed points.

...Back to when I was feeling like shit, and like a failure, I went to my studio. I wanted to go, but I didn't feel like it. But I went. I paint, among other things (sift through and arrange photos, tell some stories...) and am starting a new series of paintings. I got into it.

Sometimes they call it a 'flow state' maybe? I like to think of it as a specific feeling happening at the best times when I'm working. It feels hopeful in that I want to keep working. I feel like I'm seeing and doing something that connects with the world I observe, and that I think others (whoever ye imaginary viewers may be) will see and understand it too. It's a zone of communication. And it's got an odd patience to it, because I like the act of what I'm doing. A call-and-response styled dialogue between my thoughts and my actions.

It happens less often than I'd like. And I have to blame the realities of life for that. That I have to work a job (I like but that is underpaid), that I have to take care of 'the shit of life' of doctor's appointments, my mental health, my chronic pain and caring for and about other people. (Okay the last part isn't the shit of life but sometimes it sucks me dry). I have to draw upon my coping skills (eye roll) and work to re-frame my depressed outlook. Mental illness is real. Patriarchy and racial capitalism and all the transgressions that come with it are, obviously, real. Money is real. So is health and physical pain. So are the effects of your family of origin. And so is trauma. I have to remind myself that "it's okay" that I don't work in the studio as much as I want to, that it isn't totally my fault or my failing. For me, that's a tough one to swallow but I really try to believe the truth of it.

My mom reminds me that I've wanted to be an artist since I was three

years old. Maybe because I've spent so long trying to understand what that means, and because of all the time I spend alone working, I have learned that the work and my art are something that's all mine. It belongs to me. And, regardless of the instabilities around me, I've always had it and always will. It's my constant companion; I find that comforting.

Have you ever read Sol Lewitt's letter to Eva Hesse? It's actually amazing, loving and inspiring in many ways. Still, I can't help but notice his paternalist tone—he's so sure of himself! Lucky man. Nevertheless, I do value this letter because it feels like what my conversations with my closest friends/artist/peers feel like (though our tone is usually more in the way of reciprocal empathy). So, Dear Reader, this is a truth I absolutely want to share with you, and it's hopefully something you already know. You need your community. I need my community.

While my practice may be my own, I do need to share it to make it feel real. One reason I do my work is to communicate. And, while I may be spending a lot of word space telling you of struggle and compromise and frustration, I will say there is rarely a bad day that can't be helped, laughed away or soothed by meeting and speaking with an artist friend/peer. They also let me complain – and that is very kind. They are my life-blood. I may get avoidant or ornery but my community is still there. They know me; they'll take me in. You need that.

I teach art to blind and visually impaired adults at the Braille Institute and one of my students, Beth Bachenheimer participated in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts and showed her work in Womanhouse. Beth's work was in the laundry room where she hung *Stocking* which consisted of laminated panty hose hung across the room on a laundry line. And *Shoe Closet* was, exactly that, with the shelves full of painted shoes. She's still dedicated to her work. Using Braille as a studio, she recently covered a pair of men's loafers in broken tiles from Mexico, a mosaic in honor of an ex-lover. She put rectangular mosaic tiles all over a pair of heeled boots with two guard towers emerging from their collars and a fence around it all in response to Trump's "Build a Wall" bullshit.

Next month Beth will be 75 years old; she's lost vision in one eye and is waiting on a new prosthetic. I asked her what she would say to a Young Woman Artist and she reiterated: the essential thing is to keep making your work, the hardest thing is negotiating how to earn a living and keep making your work. She commented how important it is to keep in touch with your peers—she wishes she'd done a better job at that but that "life gets in the way". She wants to show her work more and says it's

frustrating not to. Since Beth lives in a one-room apartment, I learned that her friend, a professor at UCLA and author of the 1994 book *Other Visions, Other Voices: Women Political Artists in Greater Los Angeles* (Beth is one of the 15 artists written about), stores her previous work in his garage in Mar Vista. After speaking today, we plan to set a time I can meet there and see her old work.

I'm sure that day will be a tough call between going to my studio and going to meet Beth – it's always that kind of taught conundrum – but I know I'll go and that it'll be really interesting and rewarding.

And so, Dear Reader, I think we should end all this with a toast: ...to you, to me, to Beth... to Womanhouse, and the manifestation of a Feminist future!

Yours truly,
Simone Montemurno

Dear young beloved woman artist -

I was recently walking in my neighborhood, working through some heart-leveling feelings. I felt a sad, angering, shocked recognition that at the age of 43 I consider equity and equality for women still a thing of the future. I feel surprised by this - when I was younger, I refused to believe in anything but the inevitability of progress. There are many examples of historic trends toward better lives lived by many people. And there is simultaneously a deep pain in the relentlessness of misogyny, the patriarchy, sexism. We are living through slips and backward shifts in progress.

I'm overwhelmed trying to write this letter. I've started and stopped and feel incapacitated by the enormity of everything I feel right now in the world. I don't feel very hopeful. There is so much writing etched into our landscapes, in the sky, on the earth, in the oceans, that is not being read and it is difficult to navigate waves of daily despair.

I am a white, American woman who has scoffed and rolled my eyes for most of my decades at the drilled in propaganda of America as the greatest country on earth. I benefit from and marvel at the resources

available in this country. But I am shocked by the lock and key that these resources are often kept under. They should make life easier than it often is. Therefore I live a common split consciousness, a schism of privilege and pessimism. I cynically fear it will always be this way, that patriarchy is inescapable. I fear and feel how hard it is to be free. I think this is because on a larger cultural level we do not collectively investigate what freedom looks like, feels like, is, or can be. Instead, this work is done in micro communities which are our only safe and insulated dwelling places. Outside of these safe spaces, we are marinated in a history that relentlessly repeats the word freedom, in contrast to so many lived realities and experiences. It rings hollow and disingenuous. On my worst days, perhaps I am still stuck in a notion that freedom is something outside of me. On my better days, my more mindful days, I realize this is self work.

Money and capitalism - we live in a time where so much focus is on how to have passive income, how to trick a system that does not support us as a default. We are convinced to become entrepreneurs, to compete for scant resources. There is very little generosity in our system. We know in the US that we can fall through a crack. At the moment, I am trying to buy a house. I have recently achieved tenure. I fight for equity in my paycheck. I speak to provosts and deans who are feminists trying to operate in patriarchal capitalist educational institutions. I see them enact policies that reflect their politics - attempts to make things better and more equitable and yet the system is so inherently tough. Students are weighed with debt and the linked fear of future failure, rather than fully freed by ideas and community that education once utopically promised. I think about my role in this as a professor. I am a former student currently saddled by student loan debt. After I got my graduate degree, I experienced a little over a decade of housing and job precarity. The only thing that was a salve was my relationship to my art.

I want to offer something hopeful. If I have a wide vision of culture and current events, I feel a bit choked and so I retreat to small efforts like kindness and generosity, listening and small acts of self and other love as true and timeless antidotes. Karma - not the mainstream notion - but rather the Buddhist notion - a very deep practice of intention and integrity that is built and shaped through each thought, action and communication is one of the only things that makes sense to me. So from this moment of writing this letter, I am trying to shift from that place of overwhelmed fear to one that is more imaginative, self-aware and actively cultivating.

Here is my advice - as much for myself as it is for whomever is reading. Practice intersectionality. We always learn if we choose learning. We always grow if we choose growth. The fastest paths towards learning and growth are to give attention to things we don't personally know or experience. When someone asks me to tell them how to speak, practice, teach non-ableist words, actions, curriculum for example, I am honest that this is a burden, but I am grateful that they are seeking change and I communicate both. These experiences help me put into practice being a better ally where I am less skilled and experienced.

Be wary of all the forms of peer pressure - for example, shaming bandwagons. Instead, I recommend that we ask for and practice compassionate guidance, and be honest when the scales are getting thrown out of wack.

The amount of times I've said 'cultivate curiosity' could feed a country if turned into food. But of course this idea is sustenance. Cultivate it like a farmer, like a lover, like an artist.

Critical thinking is still of utmost necessity. Think deeply about everything. Be super literate. I crave to see many forms of evidence of a deeper engagement with various types of literacy - financial literacy, media literacy, representational literacy, community literacy and power literacy. Reading the details in between things is so humanizing...and interesting!

Don't be financially secretive. Talk about paychecks with your (male) colleagues in order to normalize this discussion and open eyes about equal pay for equal work - yes, even today, probably tomorrow as well, and seek financial advice and guidance from advisors who care about community.

Cry all the time. (This is from my friend Lisa Ramsey, who is a beautiful pisces.) Feel all the feels.

Give up the hegemony of couple-dominant thinking. This is so shockingly relentless in our culture and quite an invisible issue that really is overdue across all sectors of our society for a rethink and re-design. Let's undo the endless support of pairing up/shacking up and add value and support to solitude and community as viable and profound models of living.

Artists are crucial to the mental, climate, communal health of the world.

Do not retreat into solo object making without pulling society into that practice, and simultaneously be like one of those multi-tasker feeder fish that grabs onto a whale and cleans her barnacles while also gaining sustenance. A gallery model that only benefits the rich is a harmful model. Work with gallerists that care about social justice already, or ask them to. And not in a performative way. And don't be anti-rich. We all need to work together.

Live life and make art like a doula or a mid-wife. Consider yourself a guide for something to move from one plane of existence into another. This could be a project that starts and grows and becomes and evolves. It could be a way of thinking about an idea or it could be a practice between humans or nature. It is definitely a role of care.

And most importantly, do no self-harm. Find good therapists, good friends, good financial advisors, good veterinarians, good colleagues, and speak good self-talk. Say ouch when it hurts, and trust yourself to find the medicine you need, to build or design access to reach that medicine, and the wherewithal to then take it and grow.

Love,
Alison O'Daniel

dear one,

it is not an exaggeration to say that i write during a time of fires and floods in alternating (read: every) direction. it is not an exaggeration to say that the concept of a woman or a feminist is not a monolith, so i write especially to the heart of your Black, oceanic, queer, misfit self that tosses kisses across binaries and countless storms. the you that remains undefined and undefinable after all facades have been peeled away. i believe in the peeling.

i always wanted to be part of an open wild. i also wanted to be an architect. according to my mom, i wanted to be a whole damn ballet, a whole cheer. there's a point here: on the edge of this path lies an invitation to meet and manifest [(y)our] totalities and [(y)our] monsters. from the cracks whisper a dare for you to unfurl [us]... a space to vessel [(y)our] unlearning. a chance to we your i/(eye)s and retrieve something sacred (shh) from a world of capital. wonder us under.

okay: material and the material afterlife of a work matter. the copious amounts of waste and chemicals and egos and cobalt-laden devices and blood money and unnecessary bloodletting that goes into producing something made to prove a certain point is the incredible hypocrisy of this realm, one long overdue its dissolve.

certainly to consider who's on a given board at the same time that you question whose ancestors' bodies decay in the archive and beneath the institutional foundation will have you always turning over your left shoulder. and the realization that what happens under the tide is as essential as that which occurs on the shorefront will cause you a few forward somersaults. that the surround sometimes carries the greatest potency will swivel your pelvis. but through this dizziness come stars. by which i mean the capacity to see in the dark, because of the dark. black pearl your eyes.

the myth of the independent artist continues to fail us. i hope that your generation champions collaboration as a given and that your bio concerns itself less with professional accolades and more with the people, things, and beings that have held you up. it's okay to wish to work alone, but let us also hold the complexity that everything we touch is the product of many hands and much labor, visible and invisible. and do make friends with peers who turn you on and open you up. be unsatisfied with the alcoholic tendencies of art schmoozing and find something anomalous to do/be. together.

i dare to fret this because i believe in some things: beneath its shiny skin is a soft underbelly where you might find the comfort of your own flesh, where you might moan-sing-quake-act up & out straight into the marrow of those who are ready to lean in.

your succulence un-ends.

be boiling over and embarrassingly honest.

but always keep something for yourself.

to be offered to the rising oceans and the falling skies.

with roots,

taisha paggett

aka

twilight ascending insight

soliloquy holy-hold me

anew

July 26, 2023

To a young fem artist,

This letter goes out to future young female artists, but most important those who are trans feminine. Even to this day I have not spoken to a trans woman mentor about her artistic career, we have had dialogues around transition, relationships and occasionally sex, but as an artist, not yet.

When I was asked to be included as part of this group, it took me a moment to process, I paused. I am often asked to speak on being queer, trans, but never as fem. I am still newish to being included in such a group. I was left puzzled wondering what my contributions have been to such a group of artists, I am still figuring this out for myself.

In two days I will have been on hormones for three years, though I began biologically transitioning before then. I think about this anniversary, how my own physical body has changed and how I have changed as a person. I have now been single for the longest stretch of my adult life after leaving a gay man who tried, but could no longer be in love with me after I became female. I have learned to live alone and I have learned to move through this world again as a new body.

I write this as reruns of Sex in the City plays in the background. Carrie has to find a way to afford to stay in her apartment after ending a wedding engagement and is uncertain if she can afford her apartment after a life of shoe spending habits (I can relate). The movie Barbie came out just a few days early and everywhere I go I see others dressed in pink, me as well including last night where a trans fem group I host came over. We sit in my apartment with drinks and cactus tacos. A standing once a month group that began the week I moved into my apartment almost two years ago. I was scared to be alone and asked this group of trans fems or dolls which we call ourselves to bless these walls in femininity. I will be moving out of this space in a few weeks, so we gathered one last time to remind ourselves what this gathering has meant in this specific home. Change. New apartments, new neighborhoods.

So what does this backstory have to do with being an artist, nothing and well everything. Is that not what being female is? Constantly living between personal life, work, home, self and all while being an artist? The past month has been met by stacks and stacks of cardboard

boxes which sit next to now empty bookshelves. My bedroom is filled with racks and racks of clothing getting ready to be rolled on moving day. At the same time I am attempting to make a body of photographs in this space for a solo exhibition in September. The photographing makes packing more difficult and the other way around and both making living here more difficult. I thrive while hating to live within the complexity of messes, but always choose this state whenever possible. Boxes are shoved to the corners for dinner guests then back to work, photographing and packing, bigger and bigger messes.

I am starting to feel good about these photographs which is a relief. The past few years I have really struggled to produce my own work and barely meeting deadlines, there will always be a hell and value to having deadlines. The reserved energy I once had after a full time day job no longer exists. I am tired from my day of being trans, the effort of getting dressed, make-up etc to then living in the world with my body. The looks, stares and emotional and physical harassment and occasionally assault. Never quite knowing what any next interaction will provide. I am left most days feeling that my body has been fully digested by the greater world. Quiet evenings instead of work, I may call a friend, watch bad tv or online shop. My own practice has become fits and starts and while I may not be working on the same scale as before I transitioned, I am working to get there project by project.

Though I speak about these struggles, the work feels more honest, more awkward, more vulnerable. The practice which has always been personal continues to respond to self, from adversity to respite to celebrations.

Before I transitioned all I could see was work and this work solely an extension of my personhood and value. It now feels complicated, it's both me and outside of me, it's something I'm emotionally attached to but also I have learned to let it go at the end of my day. What I have learned most through my transition is to sit within my body and find out what it means to just be. What does pleasure feel like? And my art no longer has to consume me, my life happens for good and ugly and I then feed the work following, but always leaving some energy for myself. I am not just my work, I am a friend, neighbor, sibling and occasional sexual partner.

What was this week: second nose ring, bad tv reruns, dressing in pinks, tiki bar with friends, getting up at 4am to buy shoes that went on sale in London and ordered the wrong size... twice, trans friends for tacos,

puppy sitting and cuddling with puppy babies, crying over stupid pop songs, oversleeping a therapy appointment, packing, hot hot days, and photography, photography photography.

Learning to love my life... myself as well and allowing the art to come from that.

Pau S. Pescador

Hello my dear,

I wonder what I could possibly say that is of any use to you. Which doesn't mean I don't have things to say to you. Generally speaking I am not someone to use silence wisely. Much rather be wrong than miss my turn to speak. Just in case I am not asked again. Not that I am someone to ever wait to be asked to speak, which doesn't mean I don't like to be invited. This sort of 'yes I can do it' thing has gotten me into a lot of trouble lately. More on that in a second (or two depending how fast you read).

Maybe you have had this experience too.

Whenever I am asked to imagine I could pick to be born in another era I think to myself: -"this person clearly doesn't know their history, have they noticed I am a woman, and if so, why on earth would they think I would renounce all the achievements of previous generations?". Clearly I feel privileged to have been born at a time where I could speak my mind, vote, be considered, have a career. Now, this exacerbated notion of what a privilege it is to be (potentially) able to do it all has gotten me into a lot of trouble lately. More on that is coming in a bit less time than in the above paragraph.

Yet I think I believed my mother too hard when she said we were all equal. I mean, I thought this meant we were all already treated equally. It took me years to unpick this. Youth is powerful and all that unwanted attention that got me into trouble back then, well it also helped create a mirage of equality. I thought I was being heard, not just looked at.

It turns out at 44, having gone into surgical menopause and sporting a double mastectomy I have a newly discovered superpower: invisibility.

And it feels great. Like a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. I should say my tits really. Yet, isn't this the thing we were complaining about in the first place? I know now I was never invisible when young, I was just looked at so much it made me feel seen and what a mistake this was. I learnt this the hard way, like we all do. Even when the creepy old curator took no for an answer, they just didn't invite you to show again. So was it my work that got me invited in the first place? The thing is he was so much older, I just didn't see it coming. And I did have things to say, so I just didn't see it coming.

I am sure it often was my work that got me invited. Or I like to think so. Yet this idea that having a chance is to have been given a chance, which is then in turn something to be grateful for, might be what has gotten me into so much trouble lately. I am exhausted. You can have it all but then you have to do it all you see. And all I want is to have a nap!

A hard thing to talk about (not someone to use silence wisely you see): no one has to have a kid, and not everyone can but if you want one it is ok to want to be a mother. and if you have one then your child will have you. You will be had by them big time. And yes it is hard but it is also beautiful and amazing.

And when you are tired and you are angry and you just need to take a nap, a friend will come and help you.

Thank dog for female friendship.

Is this of any use to you at all? Let me know if you want to talk about it further, even at odd hours, I will probably be awake.

Yours,

Amalia Pica

Dear artist,

The terms have changed so much and still many things still look the same as last time we spoke. I like thinking about being nested into endless generations of us, past and future and existing as a collective author. Like an octopus with infinite legs, each with our own minds and circumstances, but still tethered to a singular mass. We can exist in the 4th dimension, talking to you or ourselves infinitely, holding the circumstances of our contexts gently. An idea of what the world is like now that is different than before, fortunately our terms are not as set as before, the taxonomy of our bodies has become looser as we are not set as young/old/he/she/they/we... but what is still constant is our own designation as artists. This I believe is still based on some self determined rubric which is constantly changing even within ourselves. I feel like I am always unemployed unless I have some sort of side job and I'm hoping that being an artist will someday be enough. I want to have a better relationship with the studio to find a good compromise between wanting to make work and forcing myself to go for consistency, but what I can say has always been a constant goal is to remain rigorously curious. When it feels like something is set, ask who, what, when, where, why one more time, suspending the 'obvious' answer for a moment.

Also important to find people that will have constructive conversations about your work and to always be searching to find your own oversights. Having these people is not only good for the work but for your own internal life. They can also be your "No committee" that will help you clarify what you actually want to do or what you feel you have to do which hopefully are not too far apart from each other.

Let yourself think of a family and a life where being an artist is not in opposition to other things you might want, but always surround yourself with people who will support a schedule where you're never working and always working at the same time, or be better at setting art/life boundaries which I think it's harder. I hope you do well and stay calm, and find the octopus arms in your context which you can have in person conversations, see you soon!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gala Porras-Kim', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Gala Porras-Kim

To young female, trans, nonbinary artists,

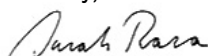
A note on moving through space and seeking pleasure, joy, affinity. Several years ago I took a class with dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin, who was over ninety years old at the time and had been teaching and refining versions of this particular workshop for over sixty years. Our task in the workshop was to improvise by identifying channels of open space between bodies and moving toward open spaces. At one point, we paused for Anna to give notes, and she said if she's at a party or a meeting and someone is talking to her and she wants to exit the conversation she simply observes all the open space, even in a crowded room, feels the scale and proximity of those spaces, and then swirls out into open space following her own velocity and affinity, always knowing there's room for movement even in a crowded or uncomfortable zone. I think about this exercise all the time as I move through the world, particularly when I'm confronted with patriarchy, I look at all the open space around me as I pivot and spiral away into wide open, wilder, sweeter, spaces— recognizing that I don't need to explain my trajectory to those who would slow me down, undermine, or misrecognize. Sometimes this tool is a metaphor and sometimes physical. I use this move everyday in all kinds of social settings. As a result, I am not stuck or trapped in conversations or encounters that I don't have interest in pursuing. The idea of seeking the interval, locating in between spaces, has always been important to my work— and the medium of video in particular. Video is a machine for thinking, articulating a language of relationships, exposing the intervals between different fields of knowledge and production—a structure that feels related to how I learned to dance that day.

A note on seeking spaces organized around support and solidarity. It's possible as an artist to create and exist in spaces where patriarchy and other forms of domination are not the logic— what a relief. Find your people. If you don't know where they are right now, keep looking, don't give up. Seek spaces of care and solidarity, and extend support to other artists. The genuine friendship and generosity that I experienced as a young person in queer feminist spaces sustained my spirit and informed my work ethic. Experience working with DIY and artist-run spaces is invaluable as a young artist. Take joy in selecting who you work with and spend time with— growing an ever expanding family around projects and new bodies of work, sharing skills and showing up for other artists in your circle. One aspect of being an artist is recognizing that the work involves so many others. I've received so much support from other artists in my life, it's a wellspring of care that I draw on when times are

difficult. What a joy to multiply some of that care received and help bring other artists' work to life or into recognition. My advice is to be generous with your peers as you advance through your career, to show up as you are able in whatever form you are able. Consider issues of accessibility and care as central to your work. Reach into the past and precedent, read and research voraciously, building a pantheon of female, trans, and nonbinary thinkers, an artistic family tree to guide you. Practice feminist citation, citing the layers of thought and research that lead to your own, leaning on the work of artists who preceded you.

I address young female, trans, and nonbinary artists here, because I am a genderqueer person, nonbinary. My sense of my own gender is expansive like an ocean. I want to preserve a sense of the beauty and profundity of gender difference and gendered experience when not limited and infringed upon, when given space, seen, and supported—when we move together it's so powerful.

Sincerely,



Sarah Rara

I have been having dreams of flooding, tsunamis, crumbling buildings, fires, and the roof falling on top of me for as long as I can remember. This has the daytime effect of creating a feeling of calm and maybe even satisfaction in the quotidian, the unspectacular everyday. For me, happiness and satisfaction comes from avoiding catastrophe and most years I have managed it — this kind of luck doesn't last forever. A psychoanalyst might also say I confuse being poor with being honest and perhaps I have a childish aversion to money (read:*shit*). I'm not sure if this is true, because generally I am ok with shit. But money is indeed a problem, not in others pockets but when it lands in my bank account. So is recognition. The more I have it the more I doubt myself, and the more I need to change course, to put some kind of hole or bomb in the middle of whatever it is I am doing. I've even been thinking about working under pseudonyms, one for every new work. So, as you can see, a money-and-recognition-averse person is not the right person to get any kind of *practical* advice from. Thankfully, I know that even the people who tell me they love my work have not seen it, or maybe they've seen one or two films but not many, and certainly not more

than once. So I don't take their praise personally. (*Coincidentally---I just read a Cynthia Ozick interview in which she says this very thing—that she 'knows' no one reads her! This is even after winning prizes, etc...She's not obscure! It's perhaps more convenient for me to feel like no one has seen my work. Something to think about.*) There are exceptions of course, and those are the 10-20 people *over your lifetime*—I'm being generous here— who you can have real conversations with, who will never tell you they adore your work but rather that they understand that you are working through something, whether it's formal, conceptual or even singularly existential, and they respect it enough to talk nuts and bolts about it with you. This is a kind of conversation that in the professional art world is really only allowed when you're in school, afterwards you get it just from your very close artist friends, who have the patience and interest in art making to really get into it with you. I love critiques, even the brutal ones, but this is not necessarily a critique. This is more the 3 hour meandering conversation, the working-next-to-each-other and being-part-of a process conversation. These people feel ok telling you to change the color or size or angle of something. They know that you are making decisions, and that these decisions are not divine. We make things and so they can also be made differently. *These folks can sometimes be a bit dangerous because they can recognize when you're off track, but sometimes you do need to get very far off track for legitimate reasons, and they don't want to see you completely destroyed and they will protect you.* That's complicated because you really don't want to be protected from failure. So, *find these people.* They will share not just a city or a place or a scene but a larger set of questions, running jokes, deep histories, double-entendres, precarious social arrangements, past loves, and curiosity. These are the people who will have something like a long-term view of your work, and who will be able to understand the goal posts you have set for yourself and to bring to it, forcefully, what they read last week, or what they're writing or working on, something that has been bothering or that moved them about some other work they saw recently. Make work for them, with them in mind. They will expand your view. Because you share these questions, they won't be blinded by the image of the exotic that you might represent to others. It will be very kitchen-table to them, and your needed antidote to the world of so excited to announce my participation in and humbled to be in the company of.

Don't believe your own hype. Good luck,

Beatriz Santiago Muñoz

Hi,

Body changes. Hormones shape and shake up the world. Whether that is the reason or not, I am not sure, but there have been many shifts in my mind and personality. I am astonished how many women I had in me in short forty something years. It is like living with many lives. Perhaps you will also experience multiple portals and be invited to a big party with past you (=friendly ghosts). Not only I get to live with multiple spirits within myself, but I also get to party with my friends' multiple spirits, young and old. Just talk to another woman, and it's a party. It's never lonely. That's cool.

Art is one way to record, that reminds us of these shifts and changes. See you at the party.

Sincere cappuccino,
Aki Sasamoto

Dear young woman artist,

July 23rd, 2023

What kind of art will we need 50 years from now? 100 years? In the spirit of this project, and as a young artist myself, I am addressing this letter to us both. I have spent a lot of time in life ruminating and mythologizing what it means to be an artist in this world today. As a child, I would often resort to the library in search of these answers, pulling dusty books off the shelves from the rather slim art section--monographs, autobiographies, documentaries, interviews, anything I could get my hands on. I remember watching *Painters Painting* on repeat, a slow-moving 70s documentary that highlights a dozen or so up-and-coming white male painters and features a brief appearance by Helen Frankenthaler. Growing up in a small town, conversations about contemporary art were few and far between. I knew early on that I needed to surround myself with artists--to see the art happening now, in person. When I decided to go to this place, it came with a caveat that my world would center around art in whatever capacity made the most sense. Life at this time became a very exciting but necessary experiment, including the art I made. My high-moving tempo led the way and offered me permission to get messy from the ground up, meet as many artists as I could, and never settle for one way of making. There were so many years of enthusiastically reinventing the wheel. It was around this time that I found myself within the historic landscape of prolific women and queer artists, writers, filmmakers, and musicians, and realized the shared content of our work. This lineage has since exponentially grown. Over the years, a few guiding voices have melded into a list of thoughts about making art that still ring loud and true. Everyone loves a list, no?

1. Find a way to match the velocity of your ideas with art making
 - 1A. The more you are making art, the more ideas you will have
 - 1B. It is OK to think with your body
2. A quote from Goethe written in pencil on the headboard of Charlotte Posenenske's bed: "And time and time again they raised theory to the level of practice."
3. Artwork is not only for yourself but must be [tangibly] shared
4. Vulnerability is at times humiliating but necessary
5. Play, experiment, roll around in some dirt... write about your findings...
6. Allow ideas to metabolize by making a few more works using the same logic but made in a different way
7. Study a different (non-art) field as an extensive research project. Remember to take what you need for art. Befriend scientists, custodians, clairvoyants, the person who makes your pancakes, architects!

8. Follow your inner feminine sensibilities, libido, intuition
9. "Good" is not to be trusted

And lastly, a poem written in my last week of grad school at CalArts.

closing statement

in the silence, we laugh
HAHAHAHAHAHAHA
old ideas oscify
becoming the smallest bones in our feet
dirty from the trench we dipped in
of film titles and pdfs
quotations, phrases that travel distances
marked-up, crossed out with LOL's and circled
to look up later

what humored us is probably most important
in the scrappyard of pursuits
desire radiates!
satellites blink
with excitement

i'd like to honor all the artists
who do their rounds
putting up billboards in our minds while we sleep
percolating advice into clouds that move in plain sight
filling houses with everything we'd like to keep, but can't
i love you back
upon the hour we dust off seismographs
swallow outlines of vortexes
one ear resting on the ground
sending waves along a thread of silk
we trace the pendulum with our eye
a backyard theatre
of folded turf and membrane-pink roses.

Yours always,
Michelle Sauer

Your body is transformed into water. Water is transformed into your body. The mineralogical evidence is in the zircon, showing that liquid water and an atmosphere must have existed 4.404 ± 0.008 billion years ago, very soon after the formation of Earth. You are born in the star clusters. You are water ice - the most abundant solid material in the universe. You are H_2O . You are a shape-shifter.

The Great Goddess hypothesis theorizes that, in Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic Europe and Western Asia and North Africa, a singular, monotheistic female deity was worshiped. Single celled organism? Where was her habitat? Have her tears been from amber - 50 million years old time capsules? How to find a way back to the peaceful river cultures? What rituals have been lost?

In The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe, Marija Gimbutas writes:

The Fertility Goddess or Mother Goddess is a more complex image than most people think. She was not only the Mother Goddess who commands fertility, or the Lady of the Beasts who governs the fecundity of animals and all wild nature, or the frightening Mother Terrible, but a composite image with traits accumulated from both the pre-agricultural and agricultural eras. During the latter she became essentially a Goddess of Regeneration, i.e., a Moon Goddess, a product of a sedentary, matrilinear community, encompassing the archetypal unity and multiplicity of feminine nature. She was the giver of life and all she promoted fertility, and at the same time she was the wielder of the destructive powers of nature. The feminine nature, like the moon, is light as well as dark" (152).

The Goddess is the most persistent feature in the archaeological records of the ancient world. She is a symbol uniting life in nature and all that was sacred and invisible below and above Earth and waters.

Goddess is a symbol and a counter-myth. She/they is like water in different states of matter, with molecules moving and expanding. She/they is mutilated. She/they is a cyborg, still linked to a human just merged with the fish, submarine, machine, and torpedo. The deity predicates possible non-human mythologies.

The water transmits sound. Is it even measurable? Maybe against your own body. Use your own body to measure the depths of time and space. The ocean is in another unknown dimension, maybe 4th or 5th or 6th.

You are also a shape-shifter. You can freeze, evaporate, pierce through cracks of concrete dams in mountains, neutrino colliders and caverns. Do not stop.



Like many previous nymphs or goddesses of sea waters, lakes and rivers, were shape -shifters: What's your name?

Abnoba, Adjassou-Linguetor, Adsullata, Aerfen, Agronā, Amphitrite, Anahita, Ancamna, Ancasta, Anuket, Arnakuagsak, Arnapkapfaaluk Asia, Astlik

Atargatis

Belisama

Benzaiten

Boann

Bunzi

Calliste, Ceto

Chalchiuhtlicue

Clota

Clymene, Dea Matrona, Divona

Eurybia, Ganga, Gomti River, Ħabūrītum, Hafren, Hina-Lau-Limu-Kala,

Huixtocihuatl, Icaunis, Idliragijenget, Irai Leima

Kianda

Leucothea

Maliya

Manimekhala

Mazu

Moryana

Nabia

Nāmaka

Nammu

Nanshe

Neaera, Nehalennia
Neith
Nerrivik
Ningikuga
Nuliajuk
Nyai Roro Kidul
Ọba,
Oceanids
Oshun
Ọya
Pallas,
Perse,
Pincoya
Psamathe,
Rán
Rhodos
Ritona
Rivers in Hinduism
Salacia
Sarasvati River
Saraswati
Satis, Sedna, Sequana
Shui Wei Sheng Niang
Simbi
Souconna, Styx
Tapati, Thalassa
Theia, Thetis
Tiamat
Tsovinar,
Ved-ava
Velekete
Vellamo, Venilia, Verbeia, Mami Wata, Xiangshuishen, Yamuna, Yemoja,
Yeongdeung Halmang

Emilija Škarnulytė

Dear *feminist* artists (race/gender/disability and age/pronoun-inclusive),

Over many years, for solace and inspiration I've returned to the fierce poet/essayist/radical feminist Audre Lorde, who, as part of a speech she delivered in 1977 to the Lesbian and Literature panel of the Modern Language Association's December meeting, said: "And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger."

One year after Lorde spoke these words, I graduated university with a degree in English Literature, came out as a lesbian, and would not find my way to being a visual artist for another decade. Finding one's voice through the silenc(ing) that results from societal and cultural shaming, parental disapproval, and institutional woman-hang, is a path that is marked by equal parts discovery and danger, and in my case, it took some time.

Just a few weeks ago, on July 26, 2023, the world lost the fierce musician Sinéad O'Connor who died from unexplained causes (presumably suicide?) at the age of 56. Watching the 2022 documentary about her life, *Nothing Compares*, I was struck by how deeply Lorde's words resonate in the lives of so many women artists like O'Connor and countless others who, to varying degrees have been generationally shamed, shunned, battered (physically and emotionally), and isolated when speaking—or *because* of speaking—their truths. Whether or not O'Connor proclaimed herself to be a feminist, her work and life were exemplary of female empowerment and courageous truth-telling. She literally found her voice *through* her voice and did not—chose not—to be silenced, even at the peril of her own commercial success.

As your artistic practice (and career) develop, as you dive into forms/media you feel impassioned by, and find opportunities to share those forms, my hope is for you to be sparked by work passed down by artists such as Lorde and O'Connor—not just their works of art, but the work involved in "self-revelation." It's the continuous work of the latter that breathes life into the processes of the former. The making of work is inextricably bound to reflection and observation, both of self and of the external world, and this is especially true in a world like ours which faces existential threats from without and within.

I will always believe that being an artist is political, even as our field is increasingly dominated by, and emblematic of an ever-stark economic disparity and hyper-commodification. Success as an artist (and its

perception), is increasingly defined by corporates, mega commercial galleries that function like museums, except, perhaps now with even greater power than museums; unlike most museums, for example, they now accumulate and concentrate enormous wealth across multiple international locations, and remain free to the public, all of which further isolates inadequately funded public insurance (and the art historians and curators driven to research within and for them). Money and art have always been uneasy bedfellows, but I'm concerned to observe this uneasiness so often under the appeal of celebrity and its seductive trappings. It is more important than ever that you let your core beliefs drive your career, not the other way around.

I say this from a privileged position; at this stage of life I'm fortunate to own a house and not live in economic insecurity, but I come from a generation of artists who never expected to have huge economic success from being an artist—certainly not celebrity. Much of my career has flourished on the fringes of or outside of traditional institutions, and while that has certainly been challenging, even demoralizing at times, I've not compromised my belief systems, and that continues to feel liberating.

Shake it up.

Find your voice(s).

Make transformation—not complicity—your guiding star.

Make herstory.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Siltan', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Susan Siltan

August, 2023

July 23, 2023

Letter to a Young Woman Artist,

Writing this letter has made me confront the fact that I myself am not a Young Woman Artist anymore. I laughed about it when I first opened your invitation. A running joke in my life is that I still think of myself as 19.

But it's only a half-joke, and my mind keeps returning to it as I write. Why, after more than two decades as a professional artist, do I hear a little voice in my head insisting I am still at the beginning of my career?

The constructs of competition and scarcity are baked into capitalism, but loom even larger in the art world, especially when it comes to women artists. As women, we are given less respect, fewer resources, and fewer opportunities than our male counterparts. We are pushed to compare ourselves to others. We are made to feel that no matter how many shows, reviews, or sales we get, there are others who are getting more. But it's all part of the big patriarchal capitalist distortion. There is no natural law at work here. Besides, the natural world has many more examples of cooperation than competition.

I feel lucky that my own path has become so idiosyncratic that it's often diverted me away from a competitive framework. In grad school, I started chasing a deep sea muse. As a result, I spent 15 years collaborating with scientists at the most remote sites on the planet. The true peaks of my career have been making art in these strange, unexpected spaces: in a deep sea submarine; in Antarctica, scuba diving beneath the world's largest expanse of sea ice; in a tent on top of an active burbling volcano.

As women artists, how do we push back and amplify our solidarity, our brilliance, our subversiveness? For me, it has helped to build communities both inside and outside of the art world, to create new opportunities for myself and others, and to define success not as "getting ahead," but as doing and making what I want.

Yours,
Lily Simonson

Right now, I am reading a biography about the feminist writer, Andrea Dworkin. She is most famous for the work she did in the 1980s, around disrupting the pornography industry. She was much maligned by

pornographers, men and feminists. When I was a young person in the early 1990s, she was held in contentious regard for her ardent position.

Reading her biography now, I see that her work was not about shaming sexuality or being morally conservative. Her work was motivated by caring for women – she wanted women to have agency and to be free from harm. Her research (and her own lived experience) suggested that many of the actresses who participated in pornography were in precarious and unsafe situations. She wanted these women to have legal recourse for this. Also, at the time, labor in the United States was still deeply divided by gender. There were not significant opportunities for women.

Ultimately, Andrea's work against the pornography industry was 'unsuccessful' in its specific ambitions of ending pornography (though there are now labor protections for people who choose that work). Ultimately, she was part of a movement of women who made changes that deeply influenced what is now available to us. That is also her legacy. The time we live in has changed. Certainly, we are curious and open to what it means to be a "woman." We see "women" in every walk of life, holding power, having agency and recourse for bad situations. But we also know that bad situations, harm and inequity are just as poisonous as ever.

It is in this tradition of struggle that I hope to encourage you.

Being an artist is to be a weirdo.
Money will be hard.
Opportunities will be slippery.
People might not understand you.
You might have to fight.
You definitely will get tired.
But your work is important.
Investigate, inquire - when you can, be rigorous.
When you can, and as often as you can, find joy.
Feel your feelings.
Trust your impulses.
Make a place for yourself.
You belong here.

xo,
Jen Smith

Los Angeles, August 27, 2023.

Dear Sister Artist,

Go out and be unapologetically yourself. The art world is ready for you.

We live in the 21st Century: Post-Guerrilla Girls; we have witnessed the ripple effects of the #MeToo movement; the latest Venice Biennial (2022), *The Milk of Dreams*, had a majority of female and non-binary artists and yet it was not framed as a feminist exhibition (thank you, Cecilia Alemani!); masculinity is in crisis; menopause has never been so widely discussed in the media; the art world has never been so self-conscious about its own equality pitfalls; and despite all of that there is no guarantee you will have an easy journey. The current intensification of Neo-conservative forces pressing against these achievements do not help but I can tell you that simply being an artist is hard work and it takes a lot to just be yourself out there.

My name was recently included in an article that listed “Brazilian women artists you need to know about” along with amazing artists I cherish from older and younger generations. I was thrilled to be in such great company and yet, I felt uncomfortable with the need to make one more of those lists. I want to live in an art world where people are just people and artists are not categorized by gender, ethnicity, age, and expected to perform a certain subject through their work in pre-determined ways. Freedom to be the artist you want to be and make the work you feel excited about will require constant shifts and turns. There’s no other way but to embrace this continuous experiment on learning how to perform freedom.

The invitation to write this letter coincided with my reading of Sylvia Federici’s book, *Caliban and the Witch*. In a very serendipitous way this became my summer reading – not exactly a light one to bring to the beach! If you haven’t found the witch within yourself yet, Federici will certainly show you the way. Her analysis of the witch hunt from a class-conflict perspective where devaluation of female labor had to occur for the inception of capitalism to flourish is simply brilliant. Understanding where we come from is extremely empowering. If you are not fired up to go down that route, not a big deal.

Women tend to become more feminist over time as they accrue sobering gender-disparity personal experiences throughout their lives. Hopefully, you’ll be spared too many of those. Going back to the witch within

yourself for self-advice is always a journey worth pursuing – I'm still learning myself how to nourish this safe rebellious place.

Go out and be unapologetically yourself. Approach the art world as a malleable space, a microcosmos testing ground for the whole society, where different voices can co-exist. Otherwise, why bothering being an artist?

In sisterhood,
Clarissa Tossin

The New Bedford Hotel

NEW BEDFORD, MASS.

Letter to a Young WomanLesbean Artist

"A Dead Whale or a Stove Boat"

DT: 2023 A.D.

RE: Letter to a Young Wumun Artist

Dear Wuhmhyn^{Lesbean} Artist,

We wana make this simple: at the expense of utilizing love's exhaust to the point where you're drained of your sensibility and humanity, we implore you to ignore all things patriarkkival and embark on your own unwarranted journey into art's nethermetafuture, what/wherever that is.

Despite the attempt to erase all carbon-based life off the face of Irthe I - which we thought was just a sick joke but turns out to be oh so palpable! - the opportunities to commit gay marriage without the marriage + 24/7 rainbow worship without any dietary restrictions must be advanced!

A.L. Steiner

Within the accelerated and overscensitve bygone eras of just a few minuntes ago, Ridykes challenges you — by the grace of goddesses and cuntemporary institutions — to update both genre and canon from the torturous constrictions of amosexuals, kkkorporate kkkomandos and the literal zillions of bottles of White Out™ that have been used to erase anything and everything loving and responsive from the beautiful and talented muses and sirens of Erth I.

This is the mere beginning of the conversation taking place atop the melting iceberg of modern art's ruins. We have every reason to believe that with your participation, in any and all exxxhibitionists, you and your cowhores can, will and MUST CUNTINUE to subvert the languages commonly used to define LGBTQUIPNBACK2SAD¹ art. Ridykeulous orders you to embark and persist in the erosion attendant limitations placed on culture forced to operate as alt rather than the primary contributor to the twatter conversations-at-large in this non-binary singularity hellscape century we find our lumbering selves in.

Cheers to free poppers + Peyton Tinkles for all attendees with an entrance fee + cannons firing upon themselves. Queerdités and love from the collaborative dreamchild brought to you by your own personal Bored of Directors, we salute you.

Ridykeulous

¹ LesbianGayBiTransQueerQuestioningUnsureIntersexPansexualNonBinaryAndrogynousCuriousKinkTwoSpiritAsexualDead+



On the Couch (and Trail)

Letter to a Young Woman Artist

Dear reader,

In a typical CalArts way, I immediately wonder who reads letters in 2023, and what “young” is relative to, but I will cast that aside for now and focus on “woman artist.” (the CalArts critical methodology has the Feminist Art Program in its DNA).

If you self-identify as a feminist, thank you for holding stakes for our safety and wellbeing, our rights to reproductive choices, voting, equal opportunities, equal pay and our freedom of expression. If you think the term “woman artist” is rather dubious—why not “just artist”—I hear you: once upon a time I was irritated by that descriptor, because who wants to be labeled, or be put into a binder (Romney’s “binders full of women”)?

But then I realized “woman” does not describe me, per se; or my “essence” so to speak. It describes the positionality of a power relation. Feminists object to being placed in positions that are unjust. Feminist Art often shifts that position or shapes the relation toward justice.

Once we understand the idea of an isolated individual with properties is a myth perpetuated by the hegemony-white supremacist, phallogocentric, colonialist, and capitalistic—we will know gender justice is not separated from racial, economic and climate justice. We absolutely need intersectional, intergenerational collaborations to shape-shift the power relation together.

Yours truly,
Shirley Tse

Dear Young Woman Artist,

Your path is a difficult one, littered with inequities, humiliations large and small, struggles that are physical, psychological, and financial in nature. But you chose this path for a reason, probably because you listened to a part of yourself that articulated a need, a truth, a piece of knowledge that must be shared with the world, or otherwise wither in some unknowable place.

Throughout your endeavors, you will find people who will shift some of the weight of your burdens onto their own backs when things get dire, who will contribute small shards of wisdom to stash in your trove, and who will need you to drop whatever you're working on to care for them.

In my experience, so much of being an artist is about care and observation, less about actively doing or making. It is a decision to dedicate attention to something outside of yourself. It is the understanding that art is a part of your life, a way of being, not some ephemeral thing that disintegrates if you put it aside for a time. It is not a day job, though some artists are able to make it work as a day job. One of the most important moments of recognition that I had was understanding the distinction between work that earns a living, and work that contributes to my sense of being. Both are necessary, but being an artist doesn't always (or ever, in my case) check both of these boxes.

In this country, where so much of how we define ourselves is shaped by the work that we do every day, this distinction feels especially important. Define your values, and attempt to disentangle them from the values of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that we operate within. You will likely have to look outside of the bounds of art history to find examples of artists who lived by their own values, and in doing so tread a narrow but compelling path for you to follow.

I found solace in the notes and novels of Octavia E. Butler, who used storytelling to write her own likeness into a history that had time and again attempted to erase and exclude her. Her practice of constant, vigorous, written affirmations revealed that she had to be her own advocate for much of her career, and that this persistent self-advocacy was one of the most powerful tools in her creative arsenal. She struggled immensely with the financial difficulties of a creative life – her imperative to care and provide for herself and her family's immediate needs was often at odds with the pursuit of making written work that was accessible to the broad audiences she wanted to reach. Her writing has a prescience that I haven't encountered often, in part because she was such a masterful observer and reporter of the world around her. She articulated clear-eyed projections of how history would unfold if we left our societal values unchallenged, and crafted plausible alternate realities that offered other ways of being.

The paintings of Paula Modersohn Becker, whose frank depictions of women, children, flowers, and fruit were described by her own husband as "angular, ugly, bizarre, wooden...Hands like spoons, noses like cobs,

mouths like wounds”, have an incommunicable quality that comes through in the physical gestures of the subjects she paints. The work embodies her lifelong endeavor to become someone, a phrase she used over and over in her attempts to define herself as distinct from her husband and from the social constructs of womanhood. Marie Darrieussecq’s beautifully written biography, *Being Here is Everything*, traces Paula Modersohn Becker’s lifelong act of becoming in her translation of the artist’s words: “I’m not Modersohn and I’m not Paula Becker anymore either. I am Me, and I hope to become Me more and more” (pg. 106).

I think often of Ree Morton, a mother of three, who came to artmaking in her late thirties and made works behind her washing machine. Her practice was compatible with her care work and her home life, and was characterized by unbridled joy and playfulness. Howardena Pindell’s unabashedly sensual paintings were never easily categorized, and therefore overlooked by art historians for a long span of her career. Her bifurcated practice of politically charged video works and playful abstractions lays bare the impossibility cleaving art from life, and directly challenges ideas of purity and neutrality associated with the abstract and minimalist works of her peers. The photographs of Laura Aguilar are both portraits and landscapes, making tangible a sense of presence that courses through sky, soil, rocks, and bodies alike. Like Octavia Butler, Aguilar endured the immense socioeconomic precarity of attempting to make a living from her work while navigating an art world that was determined to obstruct and obscure her. The writer and researcher Robin Wall Kimmerer looks to mosses to tell us stories about how our environment came to be, and a model for how we might live. The closer you look toward the margins of what is already known and visible, the more brilliant the work you will discover.

Keep at your work and use your own values as the yardstick by which you measure your accomplishments. Cultivate a community of people who share those values, and lean on their strength to protect and enrich your practice. Care deeply for yourself and your people, and know that this care is an integral part of your work.

With love,
Ariane Vielmetter

Letter to a Young Womxn Artist

The moon was blue and full as liquid flowed down my thigh. I hadn't slept and immediately wanted to once I realized my labor was to begin. The circumstances of my son's birth was preparation for me to embrace my life as an artist. All the ways, he pushed me to learn and re-learn, the wisdom that came through his small body with a fiery spirit. I am on a spiritual journey, guided by ancestors, jaguars, descendants of wolves, *guacamayas*, turkeys, sea lions, and plant medicines. I commune with water spirits wherever water can be found. Young Artist, on this planet, Terra, (earth), everything is mutable. Everything you need, you already have, trust and love yourself. Be confident, exercise discipline, and build toward your goals daily. Listen to your heart and ignite what is burning within you. When melancholy is thick and the depths to climb feel insurmountable, remember who you are, call upon your ancestors, and artists in other realms who have created portals and paths for you to create during your lifetime. Put your hands in the soil, charge up your spirit with song. Immerse yourself in the flow of the rivers, oceans, hot springs, and the ecosystem of your emotional body to release any wounding that may be holding you in stasis. Allow the languages of your art to grow with the infinite wisdom of the waters, the cosmos, and your inner knowings. As I write, the heat of summer is here, the animals are mostly still, turkeys hold their mouths cupped open, the wind blows messages across dimensions and topographies, the nest of swallows full and voluptuous. Kira Ori (dog) is resting. When the evening shares its shadows, in the light of the coyote moon, the little wolves begin the ritual roll call. It is a cascade of interspecies communication between the domesticated and roaming. In my dreamtime the deliciously multilayered messages drop into my consciousness as visions, riddles, codes, or phrases. Young Artist, Remember your interconnectedness with all living beings. All that is consumed by and through you is food and water for other species. We are cyclical creatures. Ocean and rivers are polluted with plastic from our single use conveniences. There are many art worlds, and you must choose how you want to participate, challenge, contribute, or rebel against current imperialistic structures. Dance the revolution, love is the evolution, collaborate with other artists, access the power in the sensual, an open heart of infinite possibilities is before you.

Suné
Woods

July 21, 2023

Dear Artist(s)(s)(s),

Our feminism unfolds like this:

Friendship as survivalship / intimacy with others for learning and understanding the world / curiosity, about each other, about us together, about us with others / *the success of our relationship constitutes success in the art world.*

Some experiences:

1) The Origin of Our Shared World started with a friendly provocation in 2005, shortly after we started school at CalArts. We were new friends, visiting Anna's home for the first time for a clothing swap, nervous and giggly. A pile of clothes, rummaging, trying on. We both were interested in Bridget Riley's work and the potential of invoking the "embodied eye." Oh, and also because Riley's work had been stolen for printing on fabric, made into clothes and furnishings. Jemima slipped on a pair of Anna's stretchy trousers, pulling them up too high. We were in each other's company with Bridget, like magic, a snug *Houndstooth Cameltoe*. Anna said "I wish this was my art." Jemima said "It can be." So we started. CamLab made an op art drawing of the origin experience, with a matching video of gyrating houndstooth-covered legs that are drawn open and closed (like a curtain) from different angles, forming an oculus—a starting point. Funny bodies celebrated, comfy together, with strength to shout (in numbers (the two of us feminist company)).

2) Early on in the collaboration we made a work involving having sex, each with one other person (who also formed a collaborative duo). For a long time the primary audience was only the four of us. Over the years we've made "the Johns" piece more or less publicly visible as part of our practice, but have always considered it to be a strong and rigorous artwork, one worthy of critical response. At one point we proposed to a feminist journal that we conduct an *October*-style roundtable discussion between the two of us, about the piece, for an issue on women's pleasure. We thought this would be funny, as well as an opportunity for us to talk about this sexual work in critical and theoretical terms. The magazine's editor took issue with the artwork, denying that it was sufficiently about women's pleasure to be included in the journal. I think we still did the roundtable, or maybe we're imagining it—Anna has a strong vision of the back-and-forth conversation formatted like the *October* ones, in that iconic typeface. This work (and its reception) shaped our collaborative ethics going forward. We've never shied away from doing work for, or with, small groups, or even just one person total.

Sometimes a one-person engagement is the best-case scenario.

3) Our hazy collective memory is trying to stretch back together. Recalling a “Stone Soup” crit group meeting (run by Adam Feldmeth) in relation to our solo show, *Permissionary Work*, at Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock (Los Angeles, 2013). During the group conversation something was pointed out, previously overlooked by both of us, and bang, we publicly realized we have a collaborative unconscious. That was eight years into the collaboration— the making art together, shared storytelling, being in proximity for so many heightened hours. We have developed an art collective unconscious.

4) Although we’ve done engagements with 300+ people, one-on-two experiences have been the most rewarding. Intimacy is so valuable to us; it is exciting to be vulnerable while processing complex information. The triangulation of our collaboration is where we learn the most. First we open an invitation to each other, and then another. For instance, coffee dates with Leslie Dick, when the conversation meanders into different crevices of humor, knowledge, psychoanalysis, art, mothers, and teaching. CamLab in conversation with one another allows time for one of us to reflect on the conversation at hand, dipping in and out at a comfortable pace. We can pause and breathe and reflect while still being in the group. We enjoy asking people to witness us, to let us witness them; all the while witnessing each other.

5) Jemima was pregnant with Santiago at the same time we co-taught a class called *Power Play* at Occidental College. We taught collaboratively as part of a residency on campus. We were each paid what an adjunct makes for teaching a class; when we’d taught together previously at other institutions we were asked to split the wages. That fall we spent so much time together that we imagined Santi knew Anna. He was hearing her voice, mingled with his mom’s, and was present for our collaboration in so many bodily ways. He was in the photos we shot, in all the meetings we did, he ate what we ate, and perhaps felt the hot days we spent walking between institutional buildings. It feels complicated to say this publicly; it’s complicated to personify a fetus. We both believe in access to abortion and bodily autonomy for all.

6) We’ve had different moments of realization that we are now three. In some moments it tickles us; in others it feels quite profound. Santi’s arrival pushed us to acknowledge that we’ve always been more than two: we are supported by our partners, our bio families, our community of artists who give us opportunities and participate in our work (and

we in theirs), the artists and writers we've never met. The monkey-as-a-relational-object we made for a durational bedroom performance!

Parameters we work with in the collaboration:

- Feminists need joint humor, laughs, to make it through.
- Micro daily experiences have philosophical and critical art potential, the personal is always political and vice versa.
- There is value in time spent together and in invested listening.
- Our pleasure in making/participating is equal or greater than providing for institutions and audiences.
- New bodies shift dynamics.
- In our current culture of domination, curiosity is increasingly important.
- We make opportunities for ourselves with the means we have.
- Always propose what we want to do, even if it means not participating, ultimately. There is pleasure in this exclusivity, in having an embodied exchange that can't be fully translated.
- We're strategic with budgets, not over extending the artwork or labor to the detriment of ourselves and our relationship.
- Don't be afraid at the last minute to change what we're making (if it isn't doing what we need it to).
- Our friendship comes before any collaborative undertakings—this is not a corporate “filling in each other's gaps” situation. We do not want to instrumentalize.
- Check in with each other about life-does-goings before we start new works.
- There is no knowledge without emotional intelligence.

With curiosity,
CamLab

New Letters to a Young Woman Artist - Feminist Art Program, CalArts

To young femme artists everywhere,

Lately, I've had a persistent question in mind: how can you best realize your goals and aspirations from an inner-directed place? I'll admit that this question is tinged with a decidedly pronounced sense of confidence. It exudes steadfast energy that can only be ascribed to someone, or something, that is self-assured. Maybe even self-contained. Something as gooey and enigmatic as an egg. Big Egg Energy, if you will.

This is not to say, of course, that confidence, or Big Egg Energy for that matter is inherently gendered. On the contrary, I think Big Egg Energy is full of potential precisely because of its ability to challenge gendered conceptions of what it means to embody the conditions for one's own validation. A fluid internal life-support system. To possess Big Egg Energy does not mean falling into the biologically essentialist traps of old—the kind called out by thinkers such as the anthropologist Emily Martin, who notes the tendency of Western science to apply troubling metaphors of society onto the gestational capacities of the egg. Big Egg Energy is for everyone—exceeding anthropocentric gender constructions.

Turning away from these tired tropes, we might draw inspiration from multitudinous forms of Big Egg Energy, such as the egg-caretaking behavior found among seahorses and emperor penguins. Or the mysterious, gelatinous green of spotted salamander eggs; this is the mind-boggling result of symbiotic algae which provide oxygen in exchange for nutrients. Eggs in nature can be translucent and alien-like, enormous or microscopic—yet they all radiate with radical possibility. Or perhaps we might look towards the kindling of affective relations found in queer kinships, which illuminate new models for collective labor. These binary-breaking blends of roles and materials echo Mel Y. Chen's description of the exchanges of land and sea in the movie *Ponyo* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2008): "a sensible exchange of breath, fluids, and parts."

After all, the self-possessed egg, while establishing its own set of firm boundaries, actively facilitates the entry of vitalizing elements in order to maintain its internal activities. Fearless women artists have been well aware of the potential of Big Egg Energy, as evidenced in the work *Nurturant Kitchen*, where fried eggs dripped from the walls of the

landmark feminist exhibition *Womanhouse*, curated by Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago. These artists parodied gendered stereotypes and questioned essential and constructed meaning around societal roles.

Finally, Big Egg Energy is about taking your time to incubate new ideas—slowly, assuredly, in resistance to the constant pressures of more extractive processes that can only lead to burnout. The apparent slowness of the incubation process is in reality highly-active if internally focused, self-sufficient, necessary, and remarkable. My series of kelp pod sculptures, often compared to insect pupae and first debuted in *May You Live in Interesting Times*, 2019, are borne from this gestational multispecies feminist future—big egg energy from the deep unknown.

Sincerely,
Anicka Yi



Image caption: Anicka Yi, installation view, "The Postnatal Egg," Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, March 15 – September 17, 2023.

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(The previous letters have been re-typed as close to the original as possible; this, in an effort to maintain the original spontaneity and intimacy.)

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