

MAKING ART

AS AN

ANTI

CAPITALIST



This pamphlet was written as advice to myself.

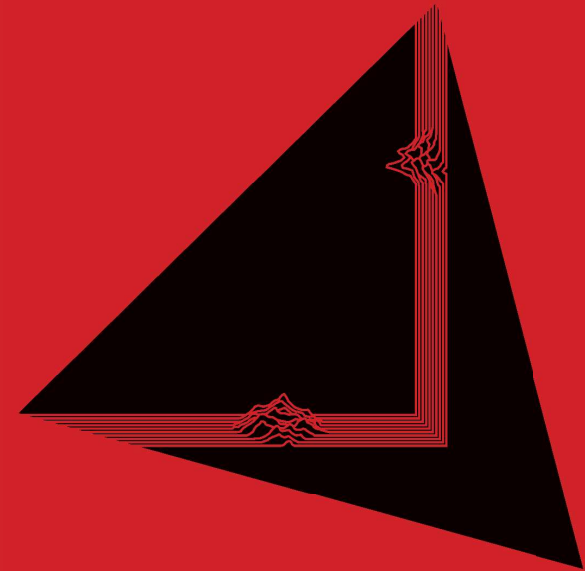
The advice in this pamphlet should not be followed.

You might find it helpful.

YOU'RE AN ARTIST.

For reasons you only partially understand, you're consumed with a desire to make art. You want to make more art with more of your time. You want to do less of the other bullshit (a job) that eats away at your time.

Maybe you're absolutely possessed by the desire, the need, to make art. You might say you want a career in art, but that would make you sound like a capitalist.



YOU'RE AN ANTI-CAPITALIST.

You're aware of the degenerating state of the world economic system. You feel the chains of capitalism holding you back from pursuing your passions, practicing your craft and realizing your potential. You see the brutality of this system on your friends, family and neighbors. You want to be a part of creating a better world where we can be liberated.

Maybe you just have a growing suspicion that capitalism isn't working, or maybe you've figured out your ideological alternative. Maybe you're an anarchist, or a socialist. Maybe you're a marxist, or a marxist-leninist, a marxist-leninist-maoist, a black nationalist, a syndicalist, a primitivist, or any other ideology in opposition to imperialist capitalism.

BUT YOU PARTICIPATE IN CAPITALISM.

Such is the violence of global capital that it forces every last one of us into its ranks under threat of starvation or imprisonment. You participate in capitalism because you need money. You need to make it, and you need to spend it. You need money to survive.

There is no alternative. Even the unhoused and those living in the supposed communist states are still organized into the cult of global capital, which has enslaved the planet.

As an artist, your work is a fetish for the collector class, another commodity to be hoarded and worshipped by those who can afford it.

HOLD THIS CONTRADICTION.

Until there is a viable method of practicing anti-capitalism— until we bring about the revolution— we live in both worlds.

Constantly fighting this contradiction is a waste of energy. It'll make you curmudgeonly and a bummer to be around. Accept it, and use your energy instead in service of your community, in service of the better world we know is possible, and in service of your art.

DON'T SACRIFICE YOUR IDEALS.

Much of what you have to do will not align with your ideals. Selling your work to bourgeois collectors does not align with your ideals. Selling your work at all might not either. Performing at events funded by heinous corporations doesn't align with your ideals, nor does promoting your work with social media algorithms that suck more of us into the addictive shitstorm.

Should you still do those things?

Probably.

If you think it's the right thing in building your art practice.

If you believe that art should be free and accessible to everyone, you can make it so. You can also make your work free or affordable to your comrades while still paying your bills by extracting from the bourgeoisie collectors and owners.

EXTRACT FROM THE OWNING CLASS.

Use their resources to make more art.

Use their money to start building something new.

Use their platforms to spread our message to the millions of people who are losing faith in capitalism, to tell them about the better world we can create.

We'll get into methods of extraction in section 2.

DON'T FEEL GUILTY.

The first time in my adult life that I had more than negative dollars, I felt guilty. Did I sell out? If I was making money, I had to be doing something unethical, right?

It sounds insane (and it is) that I felt guilty over having a few hundred bucks and no debt to send it toward, but this guilt was hiding something— a fear of responsibility.

I was part of a faith community in Philadelphia at the time that took donations and distributed money back to the community in the form of health and mental health subsidies, rent, groceries and other necessities on an as-needed basis. It was an imperfect yet wonderful model of small scale communism within capitalism. I was terrified to join financial co-ownership of it, and to suddenly be jointly responsible for the health and wellbeing of my comrades. The guilt gave me an excuse to avoid that responsibility, and to stay secretive about my money. The guilt made it so I could fall right in line with the capitalist plan of hoarding my resources and spending them on commodity fetishes.

Guilt will keep you chained.
Guilt will keep you from truly stepping up
as a powerful comrade in your community.



EXTRACT FROM THE
OWNING CLASS

WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE?

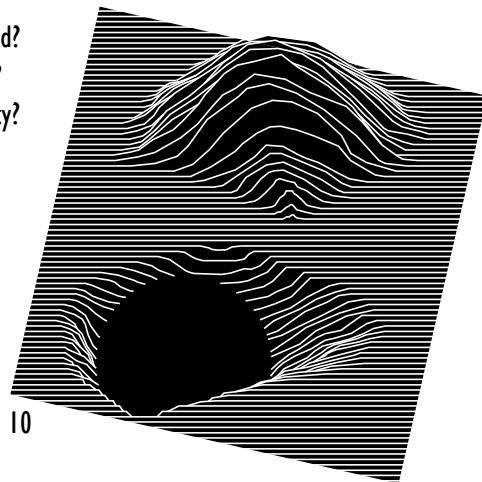
Art without a message is fine as a decoration. It makes good desktop backgrounds and non-offensive gifts for your conservative family. It makes fine murals on the sides of gentrifying juice shops. But you want to make more than decoration, you want to make something powerful. Your message is what gives your work its power.

Being pissed off at the state of things is a good starting point, but it should be more than that. Your message should be more than capitalism sucks. Bad memes can spread that message better than art. (not that memes aren't art...)

It takes a lot of energy to constantly rail against capitalism. Being constantly anti is an energy drain; but being for something is an energy generator. What are you for?

I'm reminded of the line, "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." Maybe it's because we haven't imagined the better alternative (or it's been stamped out of our imaginations by a century of anticommunist propaganda). Can your message carry a vision of the better world? Can you begin describing how we'll build it?

Who are the builders of the new world?
Who are the heroes of the revolution?
How can you empower your community?
How will authentic human connection be reintroduced after centuries of commoditization?



Your message doesn't need to be propagandistic or even support a political agenda—for example, it can be about the feelings of struggle within you and the viewer.

What are you mourning?

How does it feel as you try to decolonize your mind, body, emotions?

How are your ancestors helping you in the struggle?

What lights you up, gives you life?

So, what is your message?

Don't think about it, just write something down:



You might already know your message. You might only have an idea. You might have just scribbled something nearly incoherent. But it's a start. Your message is always evolving.

I'm still discovering my own message. How I'm doing that is by making art. Every day.



TWO

MAKING

THERE'S NO RIGHT WAY TO DO IT.

Anti-capitalist art isn't a genre of art. It's not about fitting into a box, being a culture jammer, or practicing détournement. Or even knowing what those things are. It's about carrying your message of a better world, supporting class struggle and movement building, building up those of us who are beaten down.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT.

Artists have been doing anti-capitalist work for a long time, particularly in non-dominant communities and in the global south. But you don't need to know their work to get started. You don't need to have read every volume of Das Kapital before creating with your message. You don't have to reach the nirvana of class consciousness. You don't even need to know your exact political beliefs.

As artists we often learn by creating.

As you start creating, you'll learn.

YOU'LL WANT TO CREATE A LOT, OFTEN.

Because you're an artist, the act of creating gives you energy. (If it doesn't, thank your gods and go do something more useful.)

Creating something every day is a good place to start.

You can make your own decisions regarding your artistic motives and goals, but trust me for a few pages here.

There are strategies to achieve everyday art making.

DEVELOP A STRATEGY.

I had a motto at my first job as a grocery store cart pusher, making \$5.15 an hour: 'work hard, then slack off.'

I would run around the parking lot to gather all the carts quickly, and then go off to "find the stray carts". Then I would sit in the grove of trees behind the building, look at the clouds, sketch, and write lyrics for my evangelical christian metalcore band (which was amazing and not cringe at all).

Can you develop a strategy to make more art without disrupting your need to keep a job, go to school, or support your family?

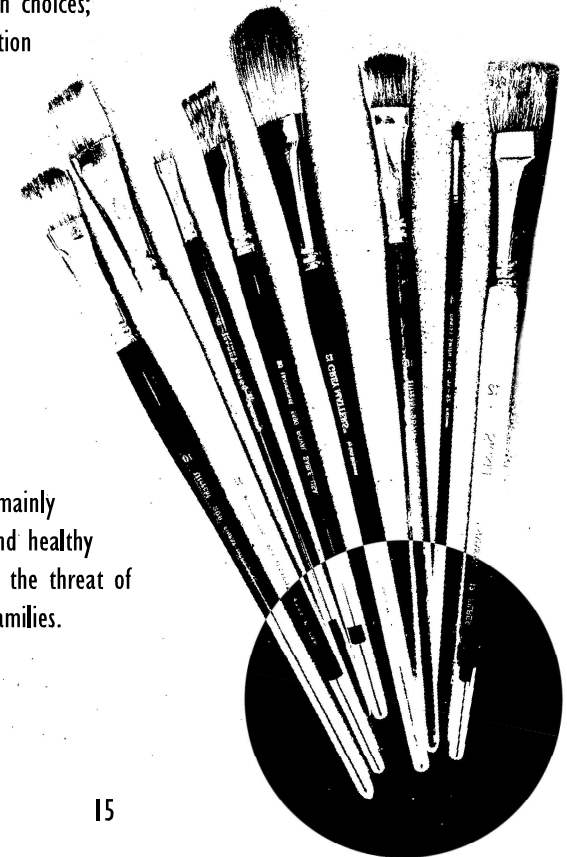
A NOTE ON QUITTING YOUR JOB.

You might be tempted to quit your shitty day job to make more art. I wouldn't recommend this. A steady paycheck can give you the space to experiment and make the bad art that will inform the good art. However...

Remember that, unwillingly, we are participants in capitalism. The psychological nuances of motivation through capital apply to us as well. In books and podcasts, artists tell you that quitting your day job and relying on your art to pay the bills will force you to go professional with your art career. The agreement here is that we humans are too feeble to make our own choices; we need the threat of eviction and starvation to motivate us.

This is, of course, insane. But artists can be insane. The threat of starvation might work for you. It's your choice.

The following sections are mainly for those of us who can find healthy motivation without needing the threat of starving ourselves or our families.



MAKE ART AT YOUR JOB.

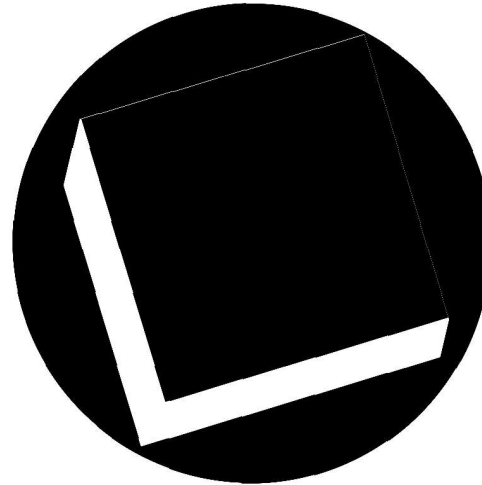
The 40 hour workweek stifles many of us.

They say that we only produce 30 hours of company work during a 40 hour workweek.

Why not get those 30 hours down to 20. Then spend the other 20 hours making art while getting paid at work.

This is absolutely a privileged strategy. For many of us it is not possible - our bosses are hovering over us, the company is hunting for reasons to let us go, or we work at a job with no down time at all. Some of us might also have jobs we care about, or jobs in healthcare where people's lives are on the line. Still, there may be opportunities to make art at your job. Stop taking long trips to the bathroom to scroll on IG, and start sketching, writing, 3D modeling, whatever.

Even if it's just in 5 minute bursts.



I got very lucky in my late 20s. I worked in a university woodshop. There was an ebb and flow to the job— things would become very busy when the students had deadlines, but other times, it would be very quiet. On those quite days, I would spend a few hours in the morning maintaining machines and cleaning tools, and with the rest of the day I would make art using the shop's tools and digital software.

I sat right next to my boss, which was annoying as hell. I would do my best to make art as discreetly as possible, minimizing the Photoshop window and opening the excel spreadsheets when he walked by. Maybe your boss is 'cooler' than mine, and is okay with you using downtime for your own projects. If you can 'enroll' your boss by saying something like, "these personal projects will help me learn how to better satisfy the customer", go for it. Don't assume this will work, because there is no such thing as a cool boss. (This includes you, when you hire art workers to help with an installation. Bosses aren't cool, get over it and do your best to make ethical choices).

Again, this strategy may not be possible for you, but even 5 minutes of downtime can be valuable time to make art, and 5 minutes a day can grow into a life-giving creative project.

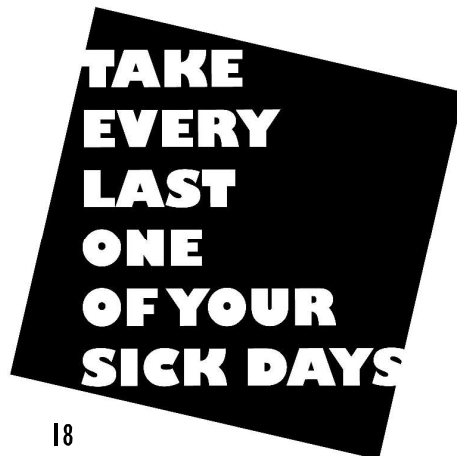
BE MILITANT WITH YOUR DOWNTIME AT YOUR JOB.

Take the downtime more seriously than you take your job.
Extract as much as possible so that your art can grow and flourish.
Creating art gives you more life and rest than scrolling on social media, so develop a discipline or use your phone's screen time settings to block social media apps while at work, so you can use the time instead to make art.

TAKE YOUR SICK DAYS

Take your time off. Use it to make art at home, with your community, or do any other art adjacent activities. Use it to go to galleries or museums (which are often open only during the workday—a service to the bourgeoisie who make their money with our labor).

You know there's no reward for never using your time off, right?
Follow your passion on the company dime.



IF MAKING ART - IS - YOUR DAY JOB:

Congratulations! *clap clap clap*

If you are able to do this because of an inheritance, a trust fund, or an interest-free loan from your parents, I hope you are finding a way to distribute your privilege equitably.

Some suggestions for distribution:

- Create a funding campaign for working class artists.
- Donate a studio space to local artists.
- Host a community meetup.
- Donate to and volunteer with mutual aid.
- Organize classes for free / low cost.

We trust you to practice anti-capitalism, and to lift up your comrades.

IF YOU HAVEN'T "MADE IT",
Imagine you have. How will you use your position to build up your community?

Write down a vision for something you'll create when you've "made it" as an artist— a community building project, a way of building the movement or supporting your artist comrades, etc.
Don't think; what's right there at the top?

SPENDING VS SHOPLIFTING.

More capitalist logic: spending money sets an intention.

If you have money to spend on supplies and equipment, it's good to shop at local art/hardware/music stores, or buy used gear from local artists. If you spend a paycheck on supplies, you'll likely have more of an incentive to use those supplies.

But paying rent comes first. If you don't have the money to both pay rent and pursue your craft, here are some tips.

1. Big corporations only. Shoplift from Hobby Lobby, Michaels, AC Moore, Target, Walmart, Office Max, Staples, Home Depot, Lowes, Utrecht, Mayline and Blick. If you have another target, do your research to make sure you are not harming local artists or people in your community. Never shoplift from a locally owned art store, bookstore, or hardware store.

2. Don't get caught.

Depending on who you are, your class, or your skin color, getting caught shoplifting can have serious consequences. If you are brown or black, the risk is higher. White people often shoplift without consequence. Because of our culture of white supremacy, store workers are less likely to keep an eye on you if you're white. If you're a white shoplifter, grab an extra item to share with your comrades of color (if they're okay with it).

There's nothing ethical about giving your money to giant corporations. You can subtly encourage a culture of less-than-legal redistribution in your arts community.



THREE

LIBERATING

DECOLONIZE YOUR PRACTICE.

As a white descendant of colonizing settlers from Europe, I am not qualified to talk about decolonizing. I encourage you to seek out writing and work by BIPOC artists on this subject, because it's one of the most important things you can learn about.



A great place to start is this article by Amal Amer, the founder of Diaspora Babes. This article is more important than the rest of this zine, so scan this QR code and read it!

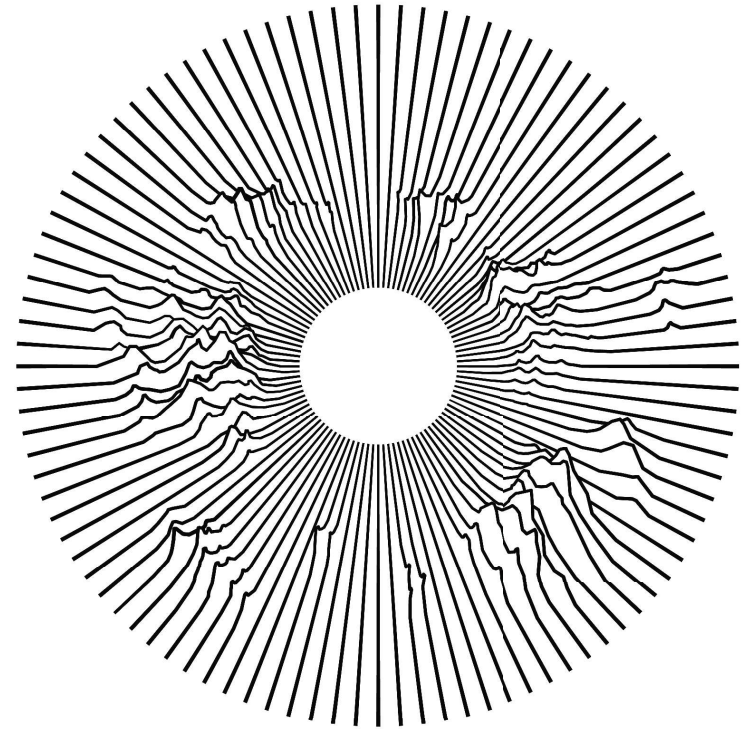


I just want to talk about perfectionism. Perfectionism is a desire built into us by capitalism. It will keep you from making work that's authentic to you, or making any work at all.

When you're building your body of work, exploring your ideas, developing your message, or practicing your skills, perfection is a colonial myth, and done is better than good.

I'm an extremely amateur artist and an even more amateur leftist. Nothing I do is going to be anywhere near perfect. There's a better version of everything printed in this zine. Still, I'm choosing to get it done and get it out there. This is an important step in figuring out my work and my message. Perfectionism would keep this zine as a private doc on Google Drive forever, stifling my own development and any community building that could come of this small contribution.

Getting a lot of work out there will help you learn what works, what your community resonates with, and what your message is.



BUILD TOWARD WORK SO GOOD THAT IT CAN'T BE IGNORED, BUT DO IT ON YOUR OWN TERMS.

Our message is important and urgent. If our message is carried by work that is jaw-dropping, it can cut through all the inauthenticity of capitalist art and find comradery amongst the most notorious artists of our time.

But don't let the goal of making 'good work' oppress or stifle you. The idea should be something that lights you up. If you're feeling stifled by high standards, they may actually be someone else's standards.

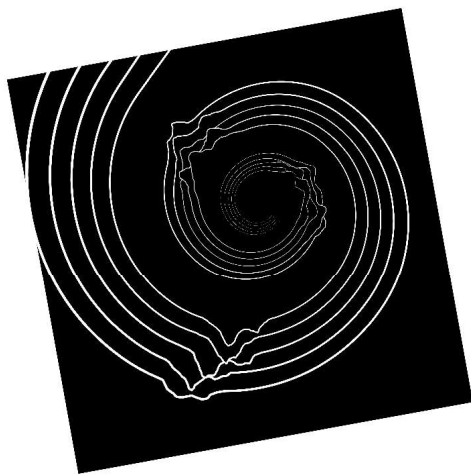
If your need to make 'good work' is getting in the way, toss it aside. Making any work at all comes first. Remember that a lot of 'bad art' is a necessary part of the process.

ON VALIDATION.

The need for validation is another symptom of capitalism, where all our relationships and interactions have been commoditized.

Still, the need for validation echoes a real human need— to be a part of something bigger, to be a valuable member of a tribe. We should work to meet this need in a healthy way within our communities. As for your art practice, it might be a very long time before you feel any validation, or feel like you're effectively contributing to the struggle.

What I've learned from other artists is that validation will not keep you going. Learning to live without it— to self-validate, to feel the joy of creating, to tap into something higher / deeper... this is what will keep you going.



There's only one concrete point to make here:

DON'T LOOK TO SOCIAL MEDIA FOR
VALIDATION.

If I'm not careful, I can get hopelessly sucked into using the number of likes on my posts to validate my existence.

Social media is one of the most deprived forms of capitalist validation. It is a platform where there is no real human interaction— every action is filtered through the algorithm. The companies have learned how to exploit our brain patterns, hacking our dopamine cycles to get us feeling a certain way so we keep coming back. I suggest some sort of strategy to curb your social media usage. I've wasted accumulated days and days miserably scrolling Instagram, time that could have been spent making art or doing literally anything else. I'm trying out this strategy: when I post, I delete the app, and log out of any accounts on internet browsers. If I'm constantly microdosing that validation (or more often, lack thereof), my day's shot. My brain is scrambled. And for what? None of it is real. What is real is the work you're doing in your community and the effect your art is having on real people.

Capitalists are using social media to extract your life energy and transform it into capital. Get away from them and go make some shit!

BUILD YOUR OWN PLATFORMS.

As you're probably aware of, the owning class doesn't like anti-capitalists. They own most of the existing platforms: publications, galleries, music festivals, social media networks, and the internet.

And there are gatekeepers: those who decide what is art and what is not. The petty bourgeoisie curators that serve their bourgeoisie donors. There are also gatekeepers to the left, who hoard a different kind of social capital. They ensure that leftist platforms remain overly cerebral and unapproachable.

Rather than cater to these gatekeepers, we can build our own platforms, our own publications. We have begun in many places. Find your local platform building comrades and partner up.



SEIZE THE BOURGEOIS PLATFORMS.

Sometimes there is an opportunity to get through the gatekeepers and into the halls of the owning class.

A comrade of mine recently got their work featured in the Met. The piece is an epic collaboration with the Occupy Wall Street movement, a sort of road map of demands and visions for a better world. The Met displays works stolen from colonized lands across the planet. It is also one of the biggest platforms for artists imaginable, with millions of people coming through it each year. Yes, it is a problematic institution, but having this communal, foundational piece on display in the Met is a big deal.

I have another friend who works for a celebrity artist. The guy doesn't make any of his own work. He spends his days snorting cocaine in the bathroom and scrolling on instagram, stealing images he sees. He shows these images to my friend and says 'combine these!', and my friend makes the painting. This guy's stolen "work" makes it into the big-name galleries and museums and gets bought by celebrities for five figure prices. What a bunch of bullshit. Our work is light years better and more meaningful than this clown's, and we are going to seize these platforms.

BE A PILLAR OF YOUR COMMUNITY.

The greatest lie that capitalism ever told is that we can all function as individuals. This lie is the source of much depravity and societal illness.

Community is where the foundations for the better world will be built. Right here, right now. We should not wait for revolution to start working in our communities.

While it is good for an artist to have a community of fellow artists, your community can be your neighborhood. It can be a movement organization you're drawn to, the local music scene, or your local leftist bookstore. It won't be perfect, but you can help it evolve and grow.

Creativity has the power to bring people together, but this is a much bigger project than art. Be ready to step outside of your role as an artist to stand with striking workers, help organize mutual aid, or make phone calls to help organize a rally. Be ready also to stand in opposition to the art industry, as bourgeois galleries work to gentrify neighborhoods.

We can begin sharing our resources and building up our communities right now.



28

SUPPORT LEFTIST UPRISINGS AND REVOLUTIONS.

As the disintegration of capitalism intensifies, so too will society's upheavals. Uprisings and revolutions, both left-wing and right-wing, both violent and non-violent, will erupt in all corners of the colonized planet.

As artists, our contribution to the struggle is supportive. We do not have the power to bring about revolution, but we can spotlight the struggle's beauty, accentuate its heroism, help to clarify its narrative and highlight its necessity and optimism. But the real work is always happening outside of the studio walls. Being an artist does not exempt you from the real work.

Our work as anti-capitalists is first and foremost to the struggle. When moments of revolution flare up, don't shy away from them; don't retreat behind studio walls. These are the moments when we can begin the process of building the better world we've been imagining. So let's build!

All power to the people.



29

ABOUT THIS ZINE.

I threw this first issue together quickly and without much outreach, but it's my hope that it becomes a living communal document, with contributions of writing, artwork, poetry, more resources, etc. from any / all of you.

This zine may also be full of mistakes and problematic material, and I'd like to hear any feedback you might have. If you want to submit something, give feedback, or help this thing evolve some other way,

Connect with me on IG: [@art_by_b.y](#)
Or through email: art.by.bmy@gmail.com

Words and art by me, B.Y.

Some comrades who contributed:

Judy Esber, Rachel Shragis, Austin Tate, Michael Guevarra, GQ.

Made in 2021, mostly at my day job.

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