

## UNREALISTIC REALISMS, MAGICAL REALNESS AND OTHER ADVICE FOR THE ASPIRING UNICORN

Artists are like society's mythical creatures: no one is quite sure of their purpose, yet no one wants to believe the magic isn't real. Calling yourself an artist in public, without an art school for cover, can feel a bit like confessing to being a professional unicorn.

You will find it is a deformed profession that is not a profession at all. Art is not work; that's why we have to call them artworks. Artistic labour is unquantifiable and cannot be charged by the hour. You may stand still for many months and then cover cosmic distances in a single second. Two hundred years of capitalism has failed to find an appropriate place for artists in its structural definitions of value, pushing artists to the fringes of societies where they lurk like romantic maniacs pursuing a pseudo-religious calling that is part delusion and part obsessive-compulsive affliction in search of the impossible. You will be forced to create your own value system for what you do, stemming from your own mythological understanding of what you are. You will become pastors of a church of your own design in which art is the highest form of hope.

Much of life is about how to endure doubt. Many artists exist under the duress of doubt, on career trajectories structured like lottery wins, pursuing a complex vocation that is both intuitive and enquiring, rigorous and underpaid. The inherent contradictions of the art world, in all its self-regarding splendour, are overwhelming; like Venus, it seems to rotate in the opposite direction from other planets you could call home. You will

have to choose how you face down its tyrants and tastemakers. Humour helps. You are not in competition with your peers, even though the funding structures that put relentless emphasis on the individual will make it feel as though this is a point-and-shoot death match. Don't lose sight of the balance between the personal quest and collective endeavour. Have respect for the other poor suckers with the misplaced idealism to become artists. You will all suffer from the demented impracticalities of this choice while fielding questions at family reunions about what you paint pictures of and whether you have a pension.

No art will ever be adequate for the problem. Nothing you make will ever feel quite finished. Beware of the affirmation of endless indeterminacy. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Be wary of the market for fetishistic merchandise. It will eat you up. You will start to mistrust your own intentions. All artists dream of effecting real change with their work, but feel they can't because it's just art, so instead many dream of being relevant in this giant beauty-pageant-from-hell that they are stuck in, left wandering in circles like mad drunk misfits muttering "I can't go on, I'll go on"... Never wrestle with a pig - you'll both get dirty, but the pig likes it.

Art is art-thinking, fashioning ideas from objects and objects from ideas, turning answers into questions and questions into answers. Art is reassembled thought just as snow is unassembled snowmen. It is a witchcraft of manifestation



where there is untold power in suggestion. Successful ideas have the appearance of simplicity because they seem inevitable. You cannot tell which way the train went by looking at the track. Trust in the power of the imaginary to manifest new structures. Create the logic of your own conclusions. Perceive the meaningful patterns between unrelated things with the fervour of a paranoid believer. Art is a dangerously illogical abyss to hang out in. Remember that you don't need a parachute to go sky-diving, but you do need a parachute to go sky-diving twice.

All art-making is an inherently optimistic act, wrestling form from flux, pleasure from doubt, a certain psychosorcery that searches for ways to show us things we already know but did not know we knew, or things we knew but could not show. Optimism supplies the momentum of a creative act, but pessimism supplies its poetry. You will need both. Peanuts are one of the ingredients of dynamite.

The poet Anne Carson has a description of reading poetry as 'the movement of yourself through a thought, through an activity of thinking, so by the time you get to the end you're different than you were at the beginning and you feel that difference'. Feel the power of art-thinking to bring people into new rooms in their own heads. Art-thinking as a means of re-making other forms of thinking, an obsessive seeing of connections, applying ingenuity to the unknown, tracing the outlines of voids, embracing rupture and its productive uncertainties, fathoming new realities. The definition of a self-fulfilling prophecy is that: if you define a situation as real, then it can be real in its consequences. We are living through an unprecedented moment that calls for the articulation of radical new subjectivities. We may fail gloriously in our attempt to find new forms to

accommodate the mess, but we can do so with a wry-smiling, speculative utopianism.

Hold each other's hands. Be brave. Have belief in the attempt, even if the outcome is so uncertain. Admire your loved ones for their patience with your choice to pursue this mad quest. There is no happy ending, or river crossed or heaven at last. For many the present is structured by the desire for a future that will never arrive, but there is no future you. There is just the endless pleasures of thinking and doing and making, with and for others.

Take this occult chemistry of yours and go and actualise some imaginaries. The hope dies last.

