

Living Art During and After a Pandemic: A Manifesto

This manifesto stems from our duty to communicate our perception of the world during the COVID19 pandemic. It is also an attempt to articulate our thoughts on the meaning of making art, which is inseparable from the way we understand life overall.

Although this pandemic has made our realities more difficult in certain aspects, especially the loss of loved ones and unsettling uncertainty that has come with it, we are hopeful that coming out of this we shall have a better understanding of what it means to be human. The manifesto thus does not only apply to life under this pandemic but hopes to point out how capitalism strips us away from our artistic capacities and mentalities and how vital it is that we resist its forces after COVID19 is over.

Pandemic or no pandemic, what truly kills us is the system that ingrains us with a sense of competition against our fellow humans, that breeds individualism and otherness into our minds in order to push us away from focusing on what truly matters: our uniqueness, our similarities, our love and creativity, our compassion, our curiosities and peculiarities.

I. Everyone is an artist

Art is built upon creating associations and so is human consciousness. Therefore the artistic process belongs to every conscious and conscientious being. If we all start treating ourselves as artists and appreciate our thoughts of and affinities for the world, life would become more of an adventure rather than a pre-carved path. This mindset equips one with the tools to deal with uncertainty in a lighter way and to perceive things differently - attempting to grasp the meaning of an ever changing world but not clinging on to it. The artistic process has now become - being our own sculpture, paintings and films. The way of thinking and getting attracted to objects, spaces and ideas is a consequence of our memories and surroundings and our task is to unpack those or find comfort in their mystery.

II. Our bodies are the antidote

For too long we have been accumulating the burden of capitalism on our ailing bodies. It is time to heal and perhaps what might initially appear as a restriction is actually an impetus to find ways of caring for our bodies and selves. The slowing down of life has brought new respect and awareness for our bodies. It has also given rise to an urge and necessity for mindful movement to become part of our daily lives in whatever form our bodies and surroundings allow us to. Currently in this hyper-virtualized world, our bodies anchor us to the earth. Beyond movement and physical fitness, our consumption of food has become a more exciting and creative part of the day. The importance of nourishing the body makes it the object of art, the object of appreciation.

III. Daily practices as an art

Our present moments are filled with our histories and our histories have not stopped being written just because of this pandemic or because of our confinement to the “private” sphere. Our time in quarantine can be a reclaiming and reconfiguring of the bourgeois conception of the home, transforming it into a place where we can nurture our sense of self while exploring the universal impetus for a more just, more caring world. Withdrawal does not have to suck the life out of us. Domesticity can be energizing and help us clear out the lens that connects us to the rest of the world. Record your days, appreciate their simplicity, there is richness in subtlety. Mindfulness can exist within a simple routine, a lazy movement and a recurring surrounding. Every day we wake up with different emotions, acknowledge them and let them evolve into a new dance. At your own pace.

IV. The drive is to communicate

To find in conversations the drive to dream with family and friends about the “ideal” spaces and realities we want to live in, still learning even as we are dealing with the isolation and discomfort of this time. The art practice now is to think mindfully about production and consumption and the desires that drive both. Where do these desires stem from and who has control over them? We are isolated but that does not mean we can not be socially engaged. Now is the time to share, to learn, to grow, to tell people I love you, to use our imaginations on building community resilience that will defy not only this pandemic but also whatever struggles may be waiting on the other side.