

## **Notes to Artists**

### **Artists of the world, Keep at your posts! Unite!**

**Peter London**

**Word count, 1476**

Were you surprised at the outcome of the recent elections? I was.

Were you upset, saddened, disheartened? I was. Feel an unexpected ominous change in the weather, climate ahead? Me too. Trustworthy sources of what where how and whom no longer trust worthy? Yes, of course.

As an artist; are you asking yourself what now? Where and how might I engage my gifts to advantage? Me too.

Much is still to be determined as the next administration takes its place and enacts its agenda, but the early signs are already in; what the incoming President has promised during his campaign, he is fulfilling in his appointments to high office and legislative priorities and they are profoundly disconcerting. Family here from somewhere else? and whose isn't? A shade darker than white: and who isn't? Your beliefs different than your neighbors? Truth and accuracy given you the slip? Freedom of the press, the fate of the EPA, International allies and foes now all topsy turvy ? Indeed, how might we as artists engage our individual and collective skills, knowledge and powers to preserve our values and freedoms, our own sense of worth and dignities, as well as do like wise for others? What role now for the arts, for artists, art teachers, literary and performance artists and the institutions that present and encourage our work?

Sure, let's join marches, write letters to the editor, call our Congressman, boycott things that repel us, sign petitions, give even more money and time to good causes. Resist, promote, and never give up. Never, ever give up.

But, at the same time, let us not put aside our particular gifts as artists. For the arts, all the arts, as practiced and witnessed, stand in the way of the closing door. Our art provides a piercing light that oppressors are at pains to extinguish, for every art form shamelessly blurts out the truth that there is always something more and better. Always. The arts proclaim by their very presence our endless capacities to imagine, care, and to create alternative visions of what is good and what is just. And, who and what gets invited.

We know, as demagogues surely understand, that the arts serve deepest and best both its creators and enveloping civilization, when the artist, with the fullness of their mind, their body and their spirit pour all their efforts into creating work that reveals the exhilarating view that everything, *everything*, and everyone is different than and more than and better than anyone ever supposed. And will ever suppose or know. The astonishing forever new face that the arts presents proclaims the inconvenient truth that everyone and everything is merely one iteration of an endless succession of possibilities. Demagogues hate this.

Yet, that is what you and every artist have always been about. That is the quality of art, and artists that drives potentates left and right into a frenzy. That's why we are so dangerous to those who only like their own stuff and want their stuff to become everybody's stuff, or no ones at all. By

lifting the veil- every veil- artists call into question every second-hand account, every complete account, every final solution.

So, what is an artist to do in these times? What we do now. What we always do; make art. Make our art in the teeth of everyone telling us not to, telling us to step back in line, to watch out step. Watch our mouth.

Artists of the world, Keep at your posts! Unite!

Keep practicing your art with the same- perhaps enhanced- fullness and exactitude our gifts provide. Make it more, make it better.

Daunted, correctly fear full, be daunted, be fear full. No matter, stay at your post. Hold closer to your core beliefs. Don't compromise an iota. This drives potentates crazy. Keep at it. Hold your place for as long as you can until the next artist can take your place. Hone your craft, make it more piercing, more and better than you have called your Self to do. This too drives them crazy. This will be hard. So what.

So what? Hard is nothing, merely hard. Endure, persist, this is our work. This determination to practice our craft keeps the door ajar for the next to arrive. And they will, at some point in time, arrive.

The impending administration hand picked by this dangerously flawed fellow to carry out his nefarious agenda, is not the first of such. Nor are these the darkest of times. Nor have the arts contended with such for the first time. The struggle for more light has been a constant struggle for all time and for all people and most members of most civilizations at some time or another. This is now our time.

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Something else. Yes, art serves the world as the magnificent foot in the closing of the door, in the unabashed affirmation of the right to choose to be and to become. To say, out loud, what one has come to hold dear and to hope for. That is why we are in the streets with our art. Thus we serve others.

But art also vitalizes something else; art feeds our soul. I don't mean this metaphysically or poetically, just here, I mean actually. If you are an artist, you already know this; we eat art. We go into our work places hungry for something. And we leave pooped, bruised, from time to time delighted, but always fed. What gets fed is our soul. The objects and sounds and gestures and words which we *combine just so*, nourishes us like no other "cooking." Those who dine on our efforts, our readers, audiences, they too are nourished, if perhaps in another form of satisfaction. What does the soul want? It wants to knock you out so you can see the stars, make you slap happy so you are in a state of wonder. The soul invites this to be intimate with that, to set aside your finite and local attachments and to lift your gaze. Lift your Self. To join a larger family, one that includes everyone and everything. To observe that everyone and everything is dancing, wants you to dance too. Strange as this may sound to those who do not practice the arts, this is not strange to us. It is not strange as long as we practice our art.

These impending times may be scorching, there will be hunger, many forms of hunger in the land.

Learn to feed your Self. Feed your Soul, making art feeds your Soul. Witnessing art feeds everyone's Soul. Stay at your post. Feed your Soul. Make your art

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Finally this; in these disorienting and dispiriting times, when everything seems unraveling, loose, disempowering, the creation of art contends. By initiating any art enterprise, we hurl a desire into the already made world and we insert a new vision and so, not imperceptibly, we enlarge the scope of our collective possibilities, *and* we increase and strengthen our own.

When so much seems and is awash, and boundaries failing, each stroke we artists make to hone the form of our desires, just and so, we delineate our boundaries, set a task and see it through. We set the agenda, We establish the criteria. We say good. We get to say.

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Having both thrived and endured many such assaults to the common good as our own and every civilization lurches through the many stages of their rise and fall, rise and fall, (and rise?) this, our period, Artists know how to thrive and endure as well as helping the next guy, the next generation to do likewise. Little comfort to be sure in this, but our predecessors can provide us with perspectives and strategies – in the arts own vernacular forms- to contest the dimming of light while encouraging the inalienable right to choose and choose again. To imagine. To say.

As such, may I recommend a visit to the collection of my professional papers now archived in the Special Collections division of Southern Illinois University, and are available on-line <<[archives.lib.siu.edu](http://archives.lib.siu.edu)>> then to Peter London. Everything I have written, taught and created these last fifty years has been opposed to the values, administrative style, and rhetoric of the incoming President and his minions and offers alternatives there to. The issues in the collection of articles, books, lectures, courses and correspondence address many of the major social issues of the last half century in which the arts and education are significant contributors: the Civil Rights movement, the war in Viet Nam, nuclear disarmament, the Free Speech movement, as well as the arts and their social responsibilities, the Arts as spiritual enrichment, Art speak as empowered speech, Art and ecology, and more generally, the arts as bastions and founts of broadening and deepening the endless experiments of becoming humane.

In solidarity,  
Peter London  
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