

Artist for Hire Performance Script
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To start...ask XXXXXXXX if she will...if you don't know a word that I say and you'd like to know what it means, just raise your hand.

[XXXXXX, XXXXXXXX, XXXX, XXX passing out pre-cut otter pops]

PART I

Gatorade seller, dog sitter, consignment store salesperson, hair salon receptionist, painter, gift shop attendant, barista, museum intern, art non-profit intern, archaeology non-profit intern, model, nanny, real estate assistant, personal assistant, home organizer, babysitter, house sitter, ax company operations manager, backpack company operations manager, first assistant director, graduate assistant, artist in residence, guest curator, curatorial assistant, gallery manager, teaching assistant, instructor, summer camp co-director, co-curator, program manager, artist services coordinator, artist, lecturer, workshop leader, adjunct professor, writer, public school teacher, museum educator, residency consultant

Do you ever wish you could have more control over the work you do and how you do it?

You need to decide if you want to sit, stand, lay down, be alone or embrace someone you're with, right now. I encourage you to eat your popsicle on the ground with your eyes closed because who knows the next time when you'll be able to rest. I'll wait for you to decide [Grace lowers the lights, keeps one on the pyramid]. This isn't just me standing on a pyramid, but it's actually all of us trying to see over the edge. But sometimes the best way to reach the top is to lower your head between your knees and pretend you can't hear anything.

I know artists who take jobs outside their practice to support their projects and their life, and I know artists who work as artists and have nervous systems that are crumbling because of financial insecurity, and I know artists who live free and do whatever kind of art they want because of financial privilege...and I know that the last two and a half years have found me doing jobs I never thought I would do (and ones I never thought I could do). In the month of July, I put up fliers and I bought ads in the local newspaper using a grant from the university where I work, and people emailed and called to hire me for skills listed there: a mix of art related and non art related things—to expand what people think artists can do. I worked outside of my 9-5 on nights and weekends. I chose

to be unavailable for skills that I have but would prefer not to do, and I was also unavailable for any of the most common “women-dominated jobs” including, but not limited to: childcare, administrative work, hair or nail care, and preschool education.

And why would we as a society continue to let artists wonder how they’re going to pay next month’s rent?

I hear people defending the invaluable contributions of artists throughout history and yet those same people are unwilling or unable or unaware of how to support living artists who consistently contribute to making the life we live a little more tolerable, meaningful and tender.

Working together and as part of a team reminds me why I love people, and it gives my life a purpose that’s bigger than myself. And for that, I am forever indebted to work.

People had to set their own price, to show me how they value my time and my labor within their own economic context. More effective than a sliding scale because the ceiling is not predetermined, and people are honest.

If I have no market value, does that mean I have no value? Or do I mean to say that my work has no value? It’s more a living value than a getting rich value.

I started this project as a way to see how much money I could make, that was the only goal. Trying to make something out of nothing in a show about labor and exchange and exploitation. Could I make a direct line from money to me with limited exploitation in between?

There is always someone in my mind when I make something new, a primary audience. At first this was for me to prove that I could balance at the top of something small knowing that I was able to financially support myself and my ideas this month.

But on the final day, my audience changed and I realized this is for a four and a half year old girl that I’ve never met. Her mom wrote to me after seeing my ad in a retweeted post on Twitter. The mom’s first note said, “Would you be willing to record a video about how you work on the art that’s most meaningful to you while juggling other work, creative and not?”

I realize that most kids never have the opportunity to have a custom video from an artist, and I decided to dedicate this project to her and to all the people who’ve wanted to ask that question but never could.

I try to work for free when I can: with friends or family or students or curious people. But that's a luxury I have because of my full time job and my generational wealth and my partner's salary and my not having children or family members to support or other major life responsibilities or health issues or debt.

PART II

I got these sneakers for free when I worked at Nike and they hired me to make my online drawing class into a program for Nike families—I saw many homes in Zoom rooms. They paid me well and gave me Nike gift cards plus a hat and a record of a harpist's music. As a former nanny and house sitter in Oregon, Nike homes have been part of my work life for sometime, and what I've found inside is a lot of expensive ceramics and linens, nice snow jackets, huge closets and deep bathtubs, elegant bedrooms, night lights, big windows, gentle and considerate and overworked and misunderstood and exhausted people, and underused dining rooms.

If I'm working in bed, and I'm wearing these shorts, and I go to work, and I'm wearing this shirt, and my shoes aren't allowed, I slip into loafers because in the elevator someone said I should consider wearing sunscreen to prevent such rosy cheeks, like having a red face is a poor person's trait, and being at work gives me a stable paycheck and an upset stomach.

Apparently Queen Victoria said, "Beware of artists. They mix with all classes of society and are therefore most dangerous."

A call for help that I couldn't answer that made my body sink that made my heartbeat faster.

I got a mix CD from a crush and when we were laying in the dark and got to the final song, I closed my eyes pretending that I fell asleep so I wouldn't have to respond to the playlist. We have to develop protection rituals, our own life procedures.

Accepting normative conflict as an important part of daily life while confronting my own fear of addressing the abusive kind of conflict.

If I asked your child how much money you make, what would they say? Would they know the answer and know that they shouldn't tell me?

If you're supposed to protect your wealth and hide it and also flaunt it and grow it, what is the problem?

There are many implicit biases launched towards artists, and generalized assumptions about their skill sets (or lack thereof) can leave artists feeling useless in society or like they have to settle for jobs that don't utilize their full potential. This is a threat.

Nobody knows when their potential will be reached, and sometimes people give up. I know that each choice I make leads to the next thing, and that's just how life is, but when I hear someone say, "I could never be happier than I am right now," I become jealous as if I'll never know that feeling. Obviously happiness is relative.

I've heard someone say the world needs discontented artists, but I wonder what would happen if each artist tried the goal factoring exercise:

I want to be a famous artist.

Why do you want to be a famous artist?

So my only job is as an artist.

Why do you want your only job to be as an artist?

Because I want to work for myself and use my creative thinking skills.

Why do you want to work for yourself and use your creative thinking skills?

Because when I work for myself, thinking creatively makes me free.

Why does thinking creatively make you free?

Because I can look out the window and see a stranger opening a bag and feel anything I want to feel.

Why do you want to feel anything you want to feel?

So I can be myself.

Can't you be yourself today?

And that's a reality I have to hold in the complexity of my discontent.
A reminder that for many, care is more fleeting than we want it to be.

Rushing to the hotel parking lot with my fist closed tight. Standing still and opening my hand to two hundred and fifty dollars.

PART III

Time with friends is restorative, but time working on my own terms can also be restorative.

Walking in circles on the phone telling my personal career narrative to a stranger. She sighs and asks me how it feels.

When I was in highschool, my grandpa used to say that I reminded him of Edna St. Vincent Millay, and she once told a reporter, "When I am working on a book I work all the time. I always have a notebook and pencil on the table at my bedside. I may wake up in the middle of the night with something I want to put down. Sometimes I sit up and write in bed furiously until dawn. And I think of my work all the time even when I am in the garden or talking to people. That is why I get so tired."

Thanks to a husband that managed her day to day life and the benefits of land and home ownership, she was free to work. Free to be tired. She said, "When you write a poem something begins to be part of your thought and your life, and you become more and more conscious of it. It forms as if conjured out of steam."

Go to work and the pattern becomes part of the pleasure. An acquaintance working at the garden nursery explained that working all day amongst the calming plants gives them the opportunity to snowboard like people in National Geographic magazines. A one to one exchange, feeding two birds with one scone.

Millay carries on, "I can spade a garden and not get tired, but the nervous intensity attendant on writing poetry, on creative writing, exhausts me, and I suffer constantly from a headache. It never leaves me while I am working, and for that there is no cure save not to work. Doctors advise me to go away for a rest cure, but who wants to lie stretched on one's back idle for months at a time?"

Don't I want to lay idle on my back with friends on a blanket at the lake? I wonder what we'd talk about if we weren't working. If we only had to relax, it might be something like life at Versailles, and maybe we'd end up with our heads cut off.

The most common thing keeping me up is anxiety. It will dissipate as soon as I accept that my situation can only change when I acknowledge and use my own agency. When I can stand up for myself with poise and assuredness.

But last night I had a dream that I went back to my first elementary school teaching job, and I had no clue what was happening. I refused to work hours outside of my contract, so I arrived on the first day without doing any planning. I didn't know what my class schedule was or who was coming or what we were going to do. I couldn't find the paper or pens, and I hated the decorations there. Between classes, I looked out the window and this is what I saw: a giant silver, dimpled ball glowing like the altered text in Photoshop with a halo all around. There was a wavy blue and silver background and quivering lines of force coming towards me. The ball hit the ground nearby and everything shook. We didn't immediately die, but the windows exploded. Over the next few days, things got worse and we knew the world was ending. My principal was upset with my response and my desire to go home early to check on my parents, and she said my choice was selfish. I texted her today and she said she misses seeing me around campus with a single tear sad face.

Staring at a young man with a more hopeful future than my own wherein I'm responsible for capturing his beauty and essence and fervor and it feels like a mirage. A portrait, a marketing tool, a mentor, a coach, a promise, an exercise in optimism.

Working through the weekends in the most special month of the year to prove to myself that my time and my skills and my labor as an artist is valuable. Also maybe to prove this to the little girl I told you about. And maybe to question self-optimization and the idea that there is ever a pyramid to climb at all.

When someone asks me over and over to give them a price, my power accrues, and I remind them, "Due to the constraints of this piece, it's your turn to project my worth." As if I'm saying with an inner evil, "You wouldn't want to offend me, would you?"

If I could stand on an upside down pyramid, I would, but I live where I live and I can't. Instead I could sit down on the horizon line and think about what is straight in front of me, not above or below.

I guess this project is like a resume where I show you what I'm capable of and you decide if you can hire me to make your friend's next birthday present. Or whether or not I can help meet the expectations you have for yourself. I'd rather trade my energy and skills for something besides money—both to evade taxes and to create a more

sustainable way of life. Your freshly baked baguette for my lesson plans. Your apartment for my programming. Your trust for my trust.

It could also be a self-portrait, or a portrait where you see yourself. Yesterday a physicist told me that if he made a self-portrait it would express gratitude for everything in the world, but especially for the fact that he gets to be a scientist everyday.

Today I accepted that I will never be a scientist. What I want can't be measured. It moves like the night sky. What I do and how I do it is completely defined by my insatiable need for living a life that makes me ask questions, fret, feel defeated, be absorbed, develop intrigue, encounter other people's vulnerability, and in general connect in ways I might never if I only have one job.

[see if I can get someone to come on the pyramid with me to have a private conversation...ideally XXXXXXXX]