

# Transformation is non-linear

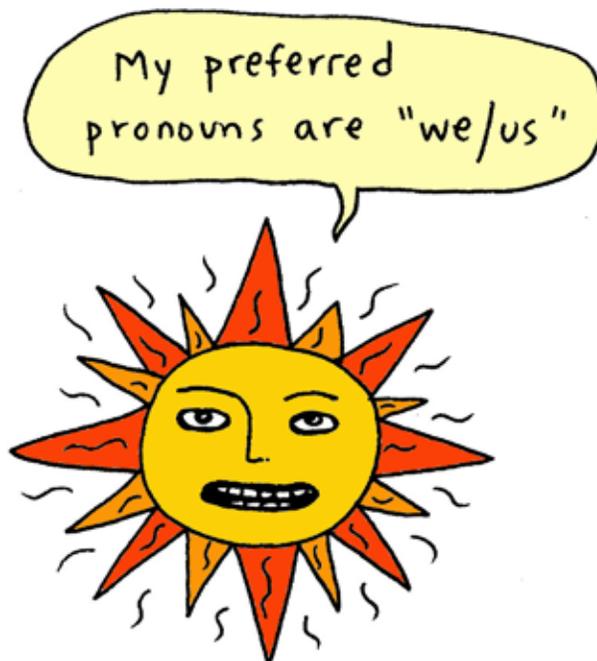


some  
collected  
words  
&  
images

Stephanie McMillan

# Transformation is Non-Linear

some collected words & images  
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**Thanks to Chris, whose unconditional love and fighting spirit strengthen and inspire me every day.**

ForwardSpiral.org  
StephanieMcMillan.org

Forward Spiral  
P.O. Box 460673  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33346  
hello@forwardspiral.org



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"The Universe is Held Together with Life Energy,"  
16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018

# Introduction

Hello. I've made a bunch of art and written a lot of things in the past few decades. I fear losing them in a heap of disintegrating data, so I decided to compile them. There's too much to share all at once, so I'm starting with this partial collection right here. It contains a fairly random assortment that spans a wide range of topics, time periods, and approaches. I grouped some pieces that seemed to gravitate that way.

Part of me wants to organize my body of work into neat categories, separate volumes compartmentalized by topic or in chronological (or some other logical) order. Political art in one volume, written commentary in another. Cute animals in a third. Flora & fauna of climate zone 10B, interviews, cartoons, each grouped on their own.

But things always bleed into each other and overlap. How to isolate art from politics from love of plants from self-expression from connection to the world? The little things from the big things? It's a big interlocking web, and one part makes no sense without the others. Let's say I gathered all my drawings and paintings of cute animals and put them in a collection by themselves: then where's the context? Wouldn't it be one-sided to love life without also confronting the death-based system that exploits and destroys that life? And the reverse: wouldn't it be depressing as hell to constantly rage against the system, without also letting ourselves be enchanted by all the beautiful living beings, the reasons we care in the first place?

For me, everything braids together: love for the living, hatred for the omnicidal machine. The pain of the past and hope for the future. Anger and wonder and sorrow and silliness. These weave the patterns of our lives. They can't be separated into neat boxes. So my work, taken as a whole, is by nature messy, inconsistent, and perpetually incomplete. So is my head, so is my heart. I have to finally accept all that. Trying to make it otherwise just frustrates me. It is what it is.

So. I'm 56; I just made it past the age my dad was when he died. I take it as a milestone, a sign that I may make it at least partway into old age. It's a transition moment. I feel that if I'm to offer my work in collected form, it's now or never. I need to take advantage of this brief and elusive sweet spot between being old enough to have figured out some longterm patterns, and being on the downslope of losing my faculties or dying. In the brief months of my dad's decline, he tried frantically to write down everything he wanted to say. He started too late. I've spent my whole

adult life with his death on my shoulder, squawking in my ear: don't make the same mistake, don't waste time, don't hold back, don't wait. Be who you are, say what you need to say, do it constantly.

So I offer this batch of some things I wrote and drew and painted and made at various times throughout my life, the first of other planned collections to come (there's a heap more of this stuff). Creating and sharing it has always been my way of connecting and communicating with the world, with you. Receive it, or not, as you will. Thank you for being there.

Love & solidarity,  
Stephanie  
Fort Lauderdale, FL

## WARNING:

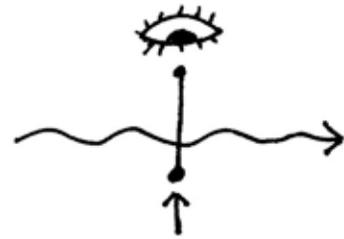
The Following is...

- Non-linear
- Not systematically organized
- Non-chronological
- Lacking a coherent structure
- Contradictory
- ~~True~~ at the time  
Honest



"Trying to Get My Relationship Right with This Ground Right Here,"  
16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020

# Writing



Writing something down  brings it out of chaos and into clarity. From the imaginary to the concrete. From thought into communication.

It solidifies ideas. This can be both helpful and harmful. Helpful in that it opens minds to one another for better mutual understanding.

Harmful because it freezes an idea as one solid moment, instead of part of an evolutionary process. What was a wave becomes a particle, for better or worse.

11.15.2018



"World in Flames"  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"  
2018

"The Conscious Universe"  
Acrylic on canvas  
30"x40"  
2019

I had two separate visions years ago (and years apart) about the universe. One showed its shape and composition ~ which I can't figure out how to translate in a painting but is here roughly portrayed by the pink lines, which represent notes of music as the foundation of what the universe is made of. The other was little flying bits of light, which I understood to be the energy flowing through everything.

Someone asked me who or what the characters are. They weren't planned, but happened. One started in raw rage and terror; the other came to offer healing, love and calmness. The charged connection between them sparks the creation of our Earth, that tangle of green. They are god/angel/demons, as well as facets of ourselves, or elemental forces that run through us. The one above their struggle sees everything impassively, and closes one eye to also look at nothing, or perhaps within. I didn't know this in advance; it's just what I observe and think about them after they appeared.



# What's Wrong with Capitalism?

*...and why we must overcome it!!*

Capitalism is a mode of production, the whole arrangement of society organized for the production of goods that meet our needs — like food, clothing and housing.

It's not only an economic system, but it also includes a political system, and a system of beliefs, that all reinforce each other. For example, how is it that one person is allowed own a factory that a hundred people work in? It's only because we have been taught to believe in the right to private ownership.

Capitalism is based on class divisions. Under capitalism, there are two main classes that are in conflict with each other: capitalists and workers. The capitalists own the means of production — the factories, land, and raw materials. They own it not because they worked for it, or because they're better people or because they deserve it, but usually because they or their ancestors stole it. The wealth of the capitalist class in the US was built on genocide, land theft, and slavery. Most wealth is inherited from those historical crimes. And today they increase it through wars of conquest and the global exploitation of workers.

Capitalists dispossess the working class so they can force us to work for low wages. Because we don't own land or factories or raw materials, we can't produce what we need. So our only option is to work for them.

Our labor increases their wealth, while they pay us as little as they can get away with. Wages are supposedly set at what we need for our survival—to pay our rent and feed our families. But we all know that it's never enough. When we're organized, we can fight for higher wages, but individually we're caught in a bind: we can either work for what they offer, or we can starve.



The big scam of capitalism is that wages are supposedly a fair trade of money for the amount of time that we work. But capitalists are not buying our time—they are buying our labor power, our ability to work. When we produce goods for them, they sell them at a price higher than what they paid us. Where did this extra value come from?

During the work day, workers produce goods worth more than the amount of wages we receive. Let's say that during the first hour we manufacture cars or shirts or whatever that are worth the same as our whole day's wages. That means for the rest of the day, 7 hours or more, we work for free. The new value we produce during those hours (called "surplus value") is not paid for. The owner of the business just takes it. In other words, they steal it. Why do they have the right?

Capitalists don't produce anything. But because

they own, control, and manage the raw materials, factories, machinery, and all the land it's on (which they or their ancestors stole in the first place), that supposedly justifies depriving workers of any legal right to keep the product. Capitalists control the politicians who make the laws, so all the laws favor them. Capitalists control the education system and the media, so they can brainwash us from childhood to accept this arrangement. And if we don't like it, they can force us to submit anyway, because they also control the military and the police.

**The essence of capitalism is exploitation of the majority for the profit of the few.**

This profit is reinvested in businesses as new capital, which causes the economy to constantly grow larger. The economy has to keep growing in order to avoid stagnation and financial crisis. So more and more commodities have to be produced.

They don't decide what to produce and distribute based on what people need, but only on whatever will bring them the highest possible immediate profit. That's why there are 11 empty houses in the USA for every homeless person. That's why millions of children in the world are allowed to starve each year while tons of food are thrown in the garbage.

There are enough resources in the world to provide everyone with food and a home and everything else we need. A rational society would provide that. But that won't happen as long as capitalists are in power, because it's not profitable.

This focus on profit makes them cut corners and pollute our air and water. It makes them put cheap chemicals in our food, destroying our health. It makes them extract more resources than the Earth can provide, destroying the soil and forests and oceans. They care about profit more than they do the very survival of humanity — they would rather destroy the planet before giving up a penny of profit.

Capitalists constantly fight to increase the rate of profit by increasing the rate of our exploitation, to make us more "productive" — by either lengthening our work day or pushing down our pay. They know from historical experience that when we unite, we can push back. So they find ways to pit us against each other, to take the heat off them.

We can't fall for their divide-and-conquer tactics. We need to see that we have a common enemy: the capitalists who exploit us. Alone, we are powerless against them. But if we unite, we can fight back.

If we unite in our workplace, we can fight for higher pay and better conditions. If we unite across workplaces, trades, and borders, then perhaps we can break the stranglehold that capitalists have over the entire society.

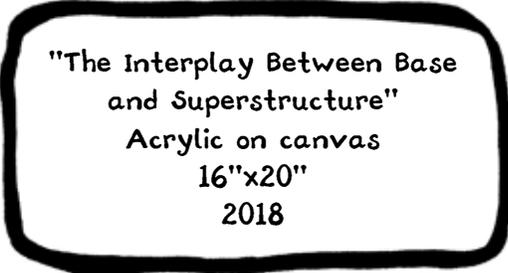
If workers around the world unite, then we can take over and together democratically run the global economy, to fulfill the needs of all of humanity rather than for the private profit of a few.

This could make it possible to save the planet, end exploitation, and get rid of class divisions and all forms of oppression altogether.



(Previous 2 pages)

This spread is laid out as a 2-sided flyer that I include with pretty much everything I mail out. If it resonates with you, please feel free to copy it straight from this book and distribute it.

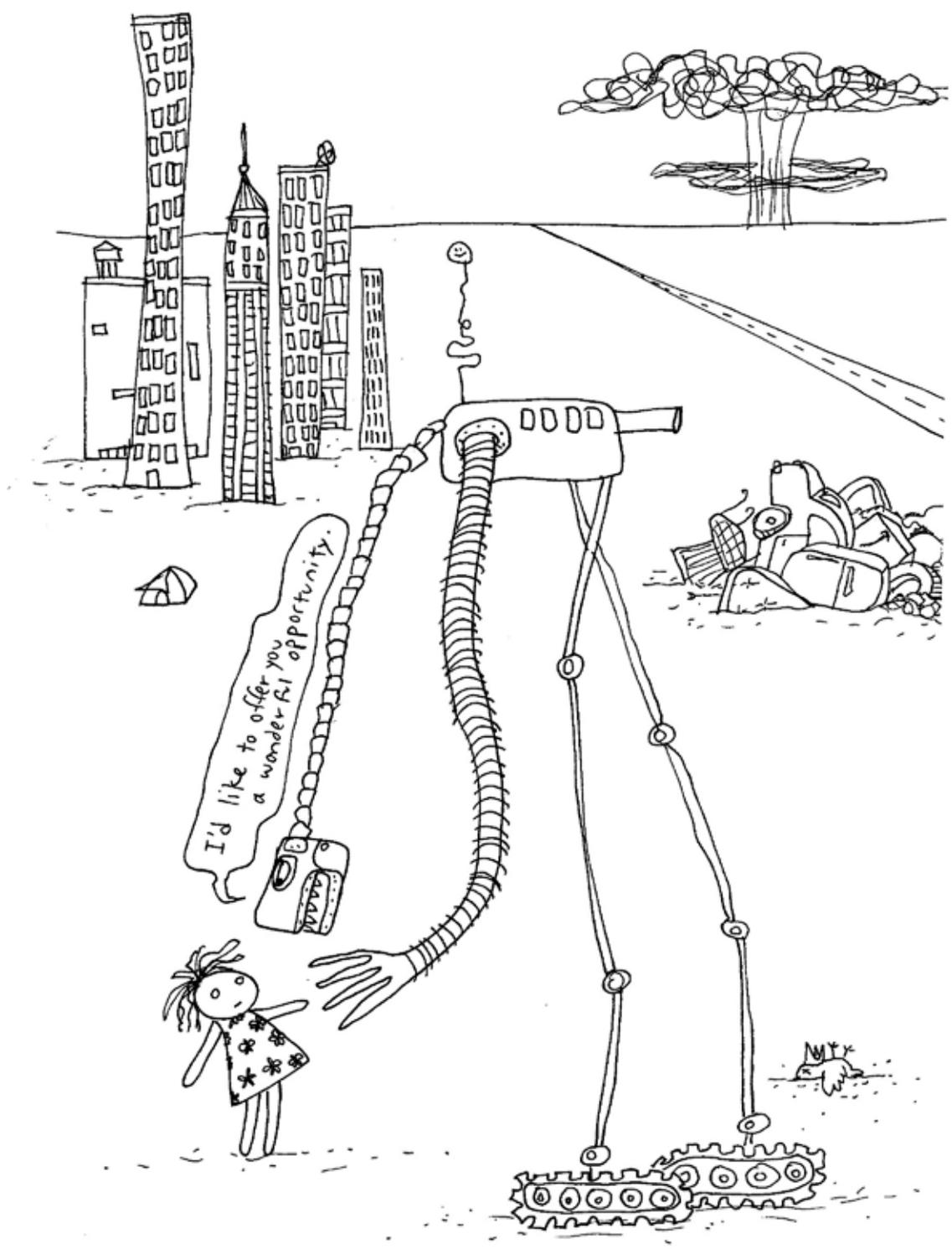


"The Interplay Between Base  
and Superstructure"  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"  
2018

I started this without having any idea of where it would go. Some thoughts that arose in my mind while painting it:

Structure (economic activity) determines superstructure (culture & politics), but not absolutely. Ideas escape the confines that have been set up by economic imperative. Along with its designed parameters, the economy has also pushed for overflow to happen, inevitably and integrally. That's evolution, which is always a process of active contradiction. The structure is still there underlying everything, but it begins to blur and go off-kilter as the superstructure pulls out of it and drags it along, pulling it out of shape even while it's being shaped in turn.





HOSTILE SITUATION

2019



"Cut the Crap," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018





"Tree Love," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2019  
For those who have a beautiful friendship with a beloved tree.

"Profits Are Up!"  
Acrylic on canvas  
30"x40"  
2018

Capitalism can't be held back from destroying the world, because its very foundation is the conversion of life (nature + labor power) into dead profit.

The only way for us and our planet to survive is to stop capitalism. We can do better!!! Together we can overcome this horror show!





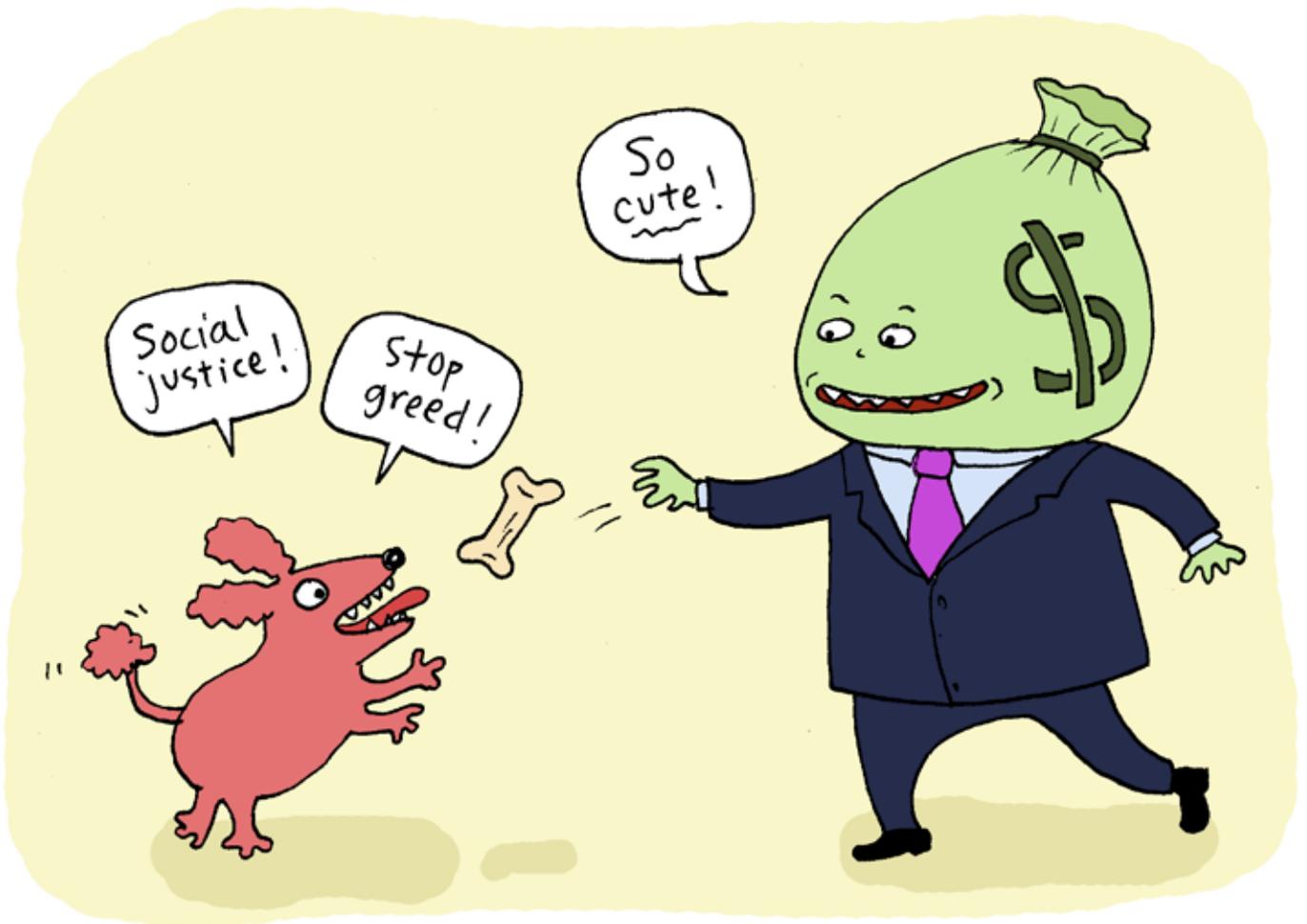
2021, digital drawing. This was created in response to the EPA's 2020 decision to transfer dredge and fill permitting authority to the state of Florida, a move that makes the Everglades more vulnerable to capitalist predation, undermines tribal sovereignty and diminishes the size of tribal lands. The phrase "Defend the Sacred" is inspired by a prayer walk that took place to educate and to defend the land from this atrocity. Let us all heed the call to "warrior up" made by Betty Osceola, who describes herself as a "Miccosukee Grandmother who defends the future generations and Mother Earth's right to exist."



AS the moon rises over the Everglades,  
critters roast marshmallows over a fire  
while flamingos inform a fracking executive  
that his presence is unwelcome.

Stephanie McMillan

## WHEN THE LEFT GETS FUNDED



# Why NGOs and Leftish Nonprofits Suck (4 Reasons)

2015

About 20 years ago, in a conversation with a Bangladeshi organizer, the topic of NGOs\* came up. He spat in disgust: "I hate NGOs." At the time, I didn't really get why he was so vehement about it. I knew NGOs had negative aspects, like siphoning off some revolutionary energy from the masses, but I also still half-believed their claims that their work was more helpful than not. Didn't you have to be kind of a dogmatic asshole to denounce free health care and anti-poverty programs? But I didn't yet fully appreciate how terrible they really are.

Since that conversation, NGOs have proliferated like mushrooms all over the world. First deployed in social formations dominated by imperialism, they've now taken over the political scene in capital's base countries as well. They've become the hot new form of capital accumulation, with global reach and billions in revenue. So while ostensibly "non-profit," they serve as a pretty sweet income stream for those at the top, while fattening up large layers of the petite bourgeoisie and draping them like a warm wet blanket over the working class, muffling their demands.

After much observation and experience both direct and indirect, I now understand and share that long-ago organizer's hatred of NGOs. Just how terrible are they? Let us count the ways:

## **1) NGOs are one of many weapons of imperialist domination.**

Along with military invasions and missionaries, NGOs help crack countries open like ripe nuts, paving the way for intensifying waves of exploi-

tation and extraction such as agribusiness for export, sweatshops, resource mines, and tourist playgrounds.

Haiti is the most extreme example. Referred to by many Haitians as "the republic of NGOs", the country had already been infested with 10,000 NGOs before the 2010 earthquake, more per capita than anywhere else in the world. 99% of earthquake relief aid was funneled through NGOs and other agencies, who made out like bandits, ripping off most of the money that people had donated in good faith with the expectation that it would actually help the people affected by the catastrophe.

This shit is not new. Decades ago, USAID and the World Bank were already imposing export-led economies and concomitant "structural adjustment" programs on Haiti and elsewhere. Even 20 years ago, 80% of USAID money wound up back in the pockets of US corporations and "experts." As the process matured, NGOs evolved into the favored entity of this parasitical form of accumulation, capitalizing and feeding on misery often created by "aid" in the first place.

In many dominated countries, NGO directors have become a fraction of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, using the state as their source of primary capital accumulation. For the past 20 years or so in Haiti, many of those who initiated and led NGOs also came to occupy political roles from President to Prime Minister to members of Parliament, including Aristide, Préval, and Michèle Pierre-Louis.

Now that capitalism is in a deepening global structural crisis, structural adjustment is being imposed on its core social formations as well.

\* NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations, or "non-profits," usually in fact funded by governments and/or corporate foundations.

Like imprinted ducklings, NGOs follow in its wake. There are 30 new ones forming in the UK every day, and 1.5 million of them plague the US. They've become the survival option du jour for unemployed graduates navigating a global crisis economy.

## **2) NGOs undermine, divert, and replace autonomous mass organizing.**

"What you resist, persists"—the cliché is not without strategic usefulness. Accordingly, instead of fighting the Left head-on as they once did, capitalists have smothered it in their loving arms.

By abandoning working class struggle, the Left had already set itself up for impotence—when it swings a fist it hits air; it can't connect with the enemy. This weakened state made it vulnerable, liable to accept when the Rockefeller Foundation or some other capitalist entity hands it a check to "fight for empowerment and social justice and against corporate greed." Boom: capitalists have neutralized their greatest threat. They've bought it, tamed it, pulled its teeth.

They've replaced it with a social phenomenon that appears to be (even sometimes declares itself to be) its opposing force, but which has become nothing more than a loyal and useful pet. Instead of going for capital's throat, it (whatever it is, it should no longer be called "the Left") nips playfully at its new master's heels.

Let's examine what this looks like on the ground.

You're at a demonstration. How do you even know it's real? You have a bunch of paid activists all holding pre-printed signs. They're shouting slogans – but how do we know they even mean what they're saying, when they're following a pre-determined script? How can we trust that if their funding was cut, they would they still be there, that they would still care?

Sincere people often believe they will be able to "get paid to do good," but it doesn't work that way. Capitalists didn't take over the world by being fucking stupid. They aren't going to pay

us to undermine them.

How many times have you seen this scenario? Some atrocity happens, outraged people pour into the streets, and once together, someone announces a meeting to follow up and continue the struggle. At this meeting, several experienced organizers seem to be in charge. They say some really radical, bad-ass things that sound fairly awesome. They offer to provide training and a regular meeting space. They seem to already have a plan figured out, whereas no one else has yet had time to think about it. They exude competence, explaining (with diagrams) how to map out potential allies, and whipping out a list of specific politicians to target with protests. They formulate simplistic "asks" to "build confidence with a quick win."

Anyone who suggests a different approach is passive-aggressively ignored.

Under their guidance, you all occupy some institution or the office of a politician, or you hold a march and rally. Your protest is loud and passionate and seems quite militant.

Next thing you know, you find yourself knocking on a stranger's door with a clipboard in your hand, hoping to convince them to vote in the next election.

NGOs exist to undermine, divert, and replace mass struggle. They're doing an excellent job. I recently spoke with a radical from New Jersey, who said that a protest she attended turned out to be the project of a graduate student, no doubt destined to be an NGO's Executive Director in the near future. Sounding pretty shocked and pissed off, she said that since then, she doesn't even feel like going to protests anymore because she doesn't trust that they're real. That right there is a win for capital.

In Miami, I've attended "Fight for \$15" demonstrations in which the vast majority of participants were paid activists, employees of NGOs, CBOs (Community Based Organizations), and union staff seeking potential members. Black Lives Matter protests in Miami have been simi-

larly led and largely populated by paid activists, who need to show they're "organizing the community" in order to win their next grant.

At these types of mobilizations, when a previously unorganized person is spotted, they're surrounded like fresh meat in a circle of hyenas, instantly devoured by activists looking to meet their recruitment quotas. The next time you see these new conscripts, they're clad in the purple, red, orange, or lime green t-shirt of whatever org brand they've been sold.

These nonprofits pick up and drop campaigns not for reasons of conviction or long-term strategy, but strictly in line with the funding they receive, and confine them to the parameters dictated by foundations. Riding on the grunt work of trusting volunteers hoping to "make a positive difference," many organizers achieve lucrative careers within the nonprofit bureaucracy, or use the experience as a launching pad to climb into high-level bourgeois politics.

Activism is being thoroughly capitalized and professionalized. Instead of organizing communities to fight for their interests, these institutions use them for their own benefit. Instead of building a mass movement, they manage public outrage. Instead of developing radical or revolutionary militants, they develop social-worker activists along with passive recipients of assistance.

Not to sound like a cranky oldster, but once upon a time—believe it or not!—it was normal for organizers to not be paid. Revolutionaries took up the fight against The System from the perspective of international working class interests, from our conscience, and with a burning desire to crush the enemy and change the world. We understood it would be extremely difficult and involve hardship and repression, but would not be discouraged. A revolutionary militant gladly dedicates her/his life to this great cause.

Today, organizing without financial compensation seems to many like an alien concept, even a chump move. When I go out leafletting (yeah we still pass out paper leaflets), people often in-

quire: "How do I get a job doing that?" When I explain that I don't do it for pay but out of conviction, their faces smush up in disbelief.

Sigh.

No wonder we're so weak and scattered. The capitalist class, five steps ahead of us as usual, has been extremely effective at eating the Left alive. Until we break the NGO spell, we're reduced to skeletons lurching around in activist purgatory.

The takeaway (to use nonprofit jargon—my eyes are rolling) is this: If capitalists are keeping us too busy and exhausted to organize our own shit, if we are reduced to being their foot soldiers working on their agenda instead of ours, then we are not going to win the revolution.

### **3) NGOs replace what the state should be doing.**

So-called "aid" agencies funded by large capitalists and imperialist governments have taken over the functions of states in dominated countries that have been forced to cut social benefits as conditions of loans by those same imperialists. Conflict of interest much?

In the imperialist core and the periphery alike, NGOs are taking over state responsibilities to meet social needs. This "withering away" of state-run social programs doesn't mean that capitalist states have become weak (sorry, anarchists and libertarians). It simply means they can devote more of their resources to conquest, repression and accumulation, and less to worrying about preventing the populace from rising up in mass discontent.

We've become conditioned to get our needs met by shuffling from cheap clinic to food bank to a myriad of other "civil society" agencies. Health care, food, water, shelter, childcare, and meaningful employment are basic necessities of human life. They should be provided by any decent society, but we're being made to feel like humiliated beggars as we wade through red tape and argue with functionaries. This is bullshit. We de-

serve decent lives. We need to organize and fight for them together.

#### **4) NGOs support capitalism by erasing working class struggle.**

The structural placement of nonprofits in the economy (as vehicles of accumulation) make them incapable of challenging capitalism. They offer the struggling petite bourgeoisie (the so-called “middle class”) a way out, an alternative to proletarianization, by giving them jobs. They are Haiti’s largest employer. Everywhere they operate, they inflate the petite bourgeoisie as a buffer to overshadow and substitute themselves and their strivings for the struggles of the working class. NGOs seek to mitigate the most egregious effects of capitalism, but never to eliminate it.

The petite bourgeoisie, underpaid in the circulation of capital rather than exploited in production (as workers are), are dominated by capital but not in a fundamentally antagonistic relation with it (as workers are). Thus the natural tendency for the petite bourgeoisie, in asserting their class interests, is to fight for equality within the capitalist framework. The capitalist class relies on them to dampen working class struggle and divert it into reformism, into burying their struggles in establishment political parties and collaborationist unions.

Historically, whenever the working class opens its mouth to call for revolution, the soft pillow of the petite bourgeoisie has been willing to suffocate it. Capitalists always build up the petite bourgeoisie exactly to act as enforcement agents for capitalist domination of the working class. The challenge for the serious progressive, radical or revolutionary militant who happens to be a member of the petite bourgeoisie is to jump from this imposed track, to consciously reject this role, and prevent being used (inadvertently or otherwise) for reactionary purposes.

The horrific effects of capitalism—oppression, ecocide, wars of conquest, exploitation, poverty—can’t be eliminated without eliminating their cause. If we really want to make the chang-

es we say we want to make, we need to strip ourselves of any residual petit bourgeois loyalty to capitalism, and fight under the leadership of capitalism’s fundamental enemy: the working class.

\*\*\*\*

#### **A Note to NGO Employees:**

I’m not questioning your sincerity. Many good young people genuinely want to make a difference. Jobs are scarce, and you need to make a living. It is supremely tempting to believe that these two imperatives can be combined into one neat package, allowing you to serve humanity while ensuring your own survival.

It’s a nice idea. It just happens to be untrue. An established structure will change you before you can change it. “The unity of the chicken and the roach happens in the belly of the chicken.”

Quitting isn’t the answer. We’re all trapped in the enemy’s economy. They’ve created these circumstances, compelling us to work in their industrial sector, their service sector, or their nonprofit sector. All of it is to extract value from us and reproduce their domination over us. We can’t simply decide to exit on an individual basis. The only way out is to organize with the aim of rising up together in revolution, and rupture the whole framework. Either we all get free, or none of us will.

What we must avoid in the meantime, though, is confusing NGO (or collaborationist union) employment with real autonomous organizing. Understand its nature: your job at an NGO is not to organize the masses, but to disorganize them, pacify them, lead them into political dead ends. So do your real organizing elsewhere.

Capitalism doesn’t assist us in destroying itself. Should we actually become effective in building an anti-capitalist mass movement, they won’t issue us a paycheck. Instead, they will do everything possible to discredit, neutralize, imprison and kill us.

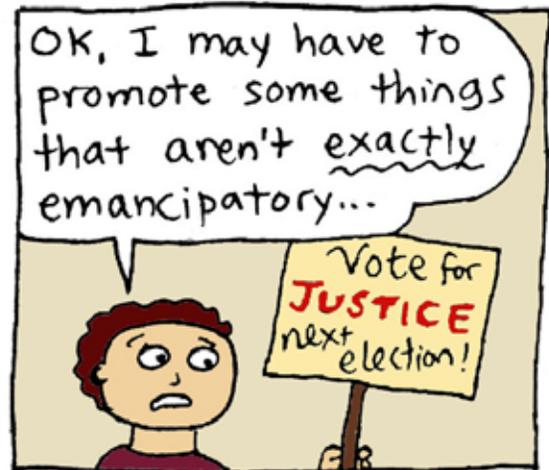
Real revolutionary organizers don’t get paid.

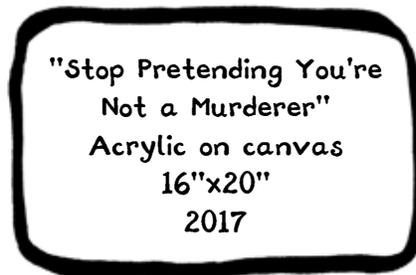
(Left): This article was initially solicited by Jacobin magazine. This is very close to the first version I turned in. A second version exists which is co-authored: Vincent Kelley of Grinnell College joined the project to add his perspective and to help revise it according to the Jacobin editor's requests. We attempted to comply without diluting the content. Their requests included making the language less informal and more "academic," and culminated in what we both interpreted as blatant attempts to erase the working class from its content (the editor disagreed). When we refused to remove what we felt was our central point, Jacobin decided not to run the piece.

Comic for "Briarpatch"  
magazine, 2015

## The NGO DREAM JOB

Stephanie McMillan





With this painting, I had in mind the profit-scrounging soulless wretches who run the companies that put synthetic chemicals in our food or deform it with genetic engineering, or otherwise poison us at the table.

I regard with special contempt the company that manufactured the antifeed "diet" cookies that my Dad ate every day at lunch for 20 years before he died of pancreatic cancer.

His genetically identical twin brother, who ate salads instead, lived 30 years longer.







I need to ~~draw~~ portray the entire capitalist system in this one drawing.

Otherwise it will just be crap.



2020

Facing page:

"Florida Tree of Life"  
Acrylic on canvas  
24"x48"  
2019

Some abstracted fruits and wildlife from around here in climate Zone 10B, including: pineapple, jackfruit, Spanish needle, moringa, sea grapes, Natal plum, mango, banana, sugar apple, passion fruit, the caterpillars who love passion fruit leaves, ants, those gray bugs in the soil who curl up when threatened, earth worms, cardinal, butterfly, canistel, sapodilla, lemon, mulberry, Florida cherry, avocado, some kind of flying pollinator, and an iguana. And the one who makes all life possible: The Mighty Sun.





**Jeff Bezos**

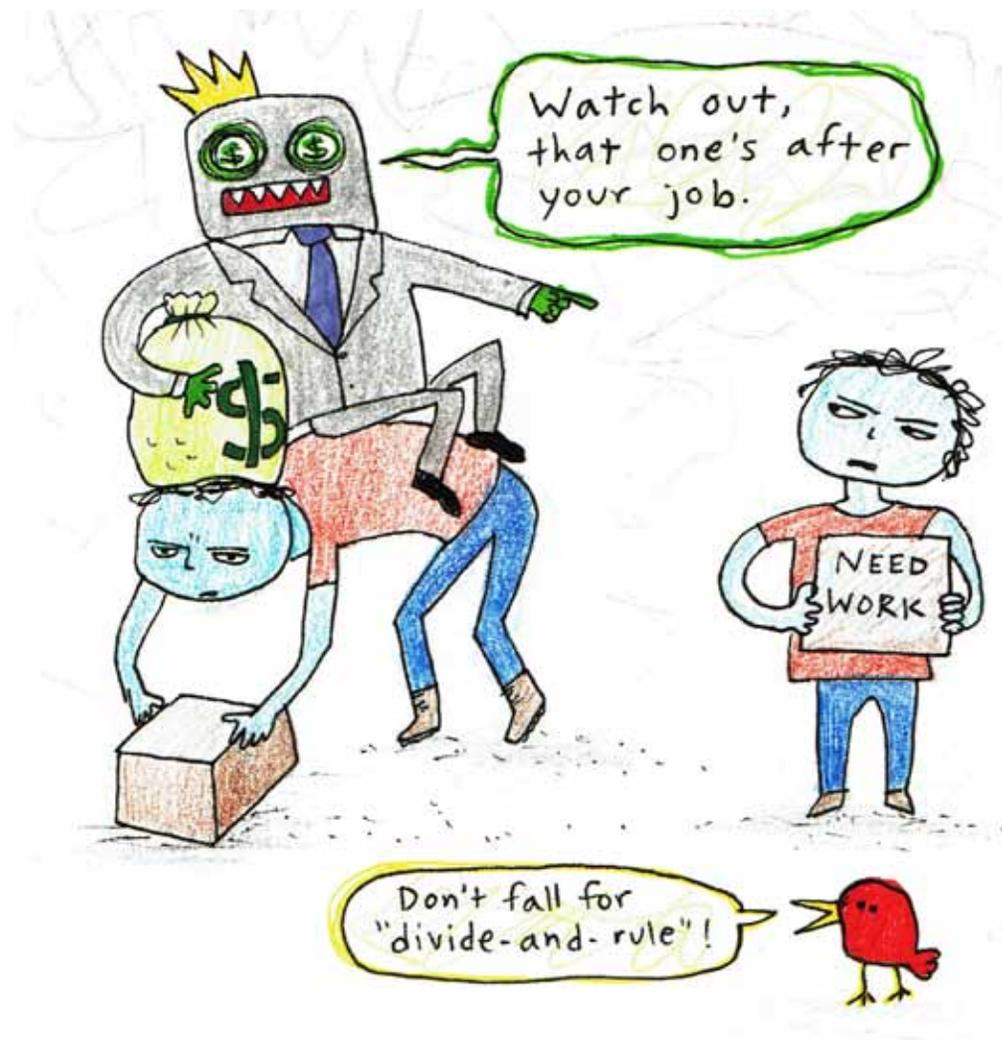
enjoying a refreshing glass  
of workers' tears

2018

Jeff Bezos, the world's biggest and most disgusting and tyrannical hoarder of wealth produced by others, possesses and controls \$112 billion dollars including the value of his huge retail empire. Social norms (laws, traditions, habits) that make it possible for one person to own that much are fucking ridiculous, irrational, outmoded, and should be obsolete. They're killing us. Why do we allow this? Because of lifelong totalitarian indoctrination about the sacredness of private ownership, and because the state violently enforces this arrangement. In a society that would make actual rational sense, all that wealth and production infrastructure would be democratically controlled by those who do and have done the work all along the supply chain, and could be used for the benefit of all.



"Wading through our rivers of tears, we somehow find hope in a simple idea, even when  
bloodsucker capitalists keep winning day after day after fucking day,"  
16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2017



2018, mixed media on paper

Capitalists and their representatives try to make us blame ourselves and each other for being broke, overworked, toxified and tormented. But THEIR system is the problem: they exploit workers and kill the planet for their own private profit. We need to first stop listening to them, and then we need to stop them!!

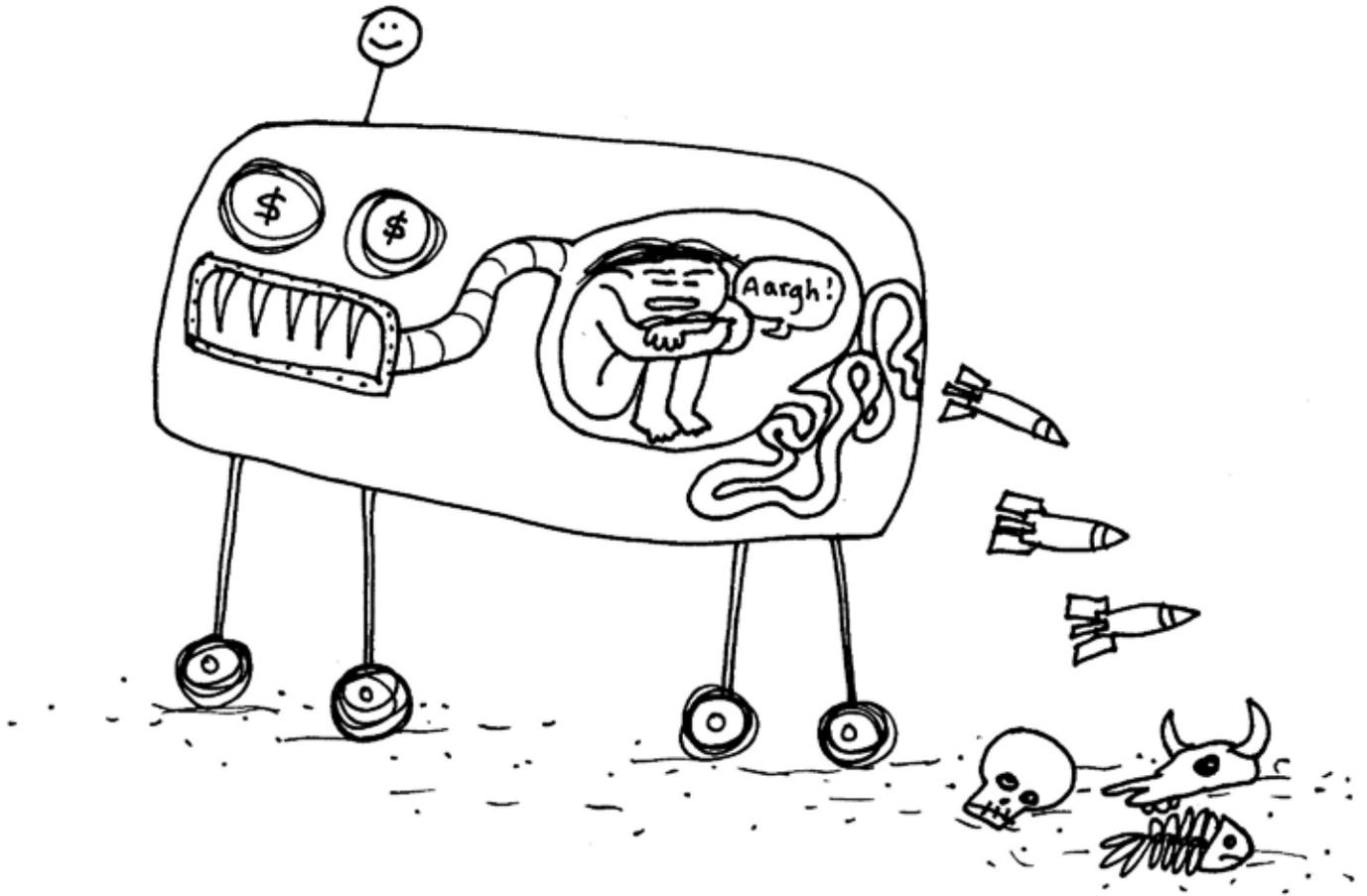
"Capitalism is a  
Death Machine"  
Acrylic on canvas  
24"x48"  
2018

Capitalism inherently involves imperialist wars, oppression, exploitation, and ecocide. Humanity can do better!

We must overcome capitalism and move beyond it to a different kind of economy that allows for a classless and sustainable arrangement of society. The future of our species and the planet depend on it.



inside the belly of  
a freaked-out hangry beast.

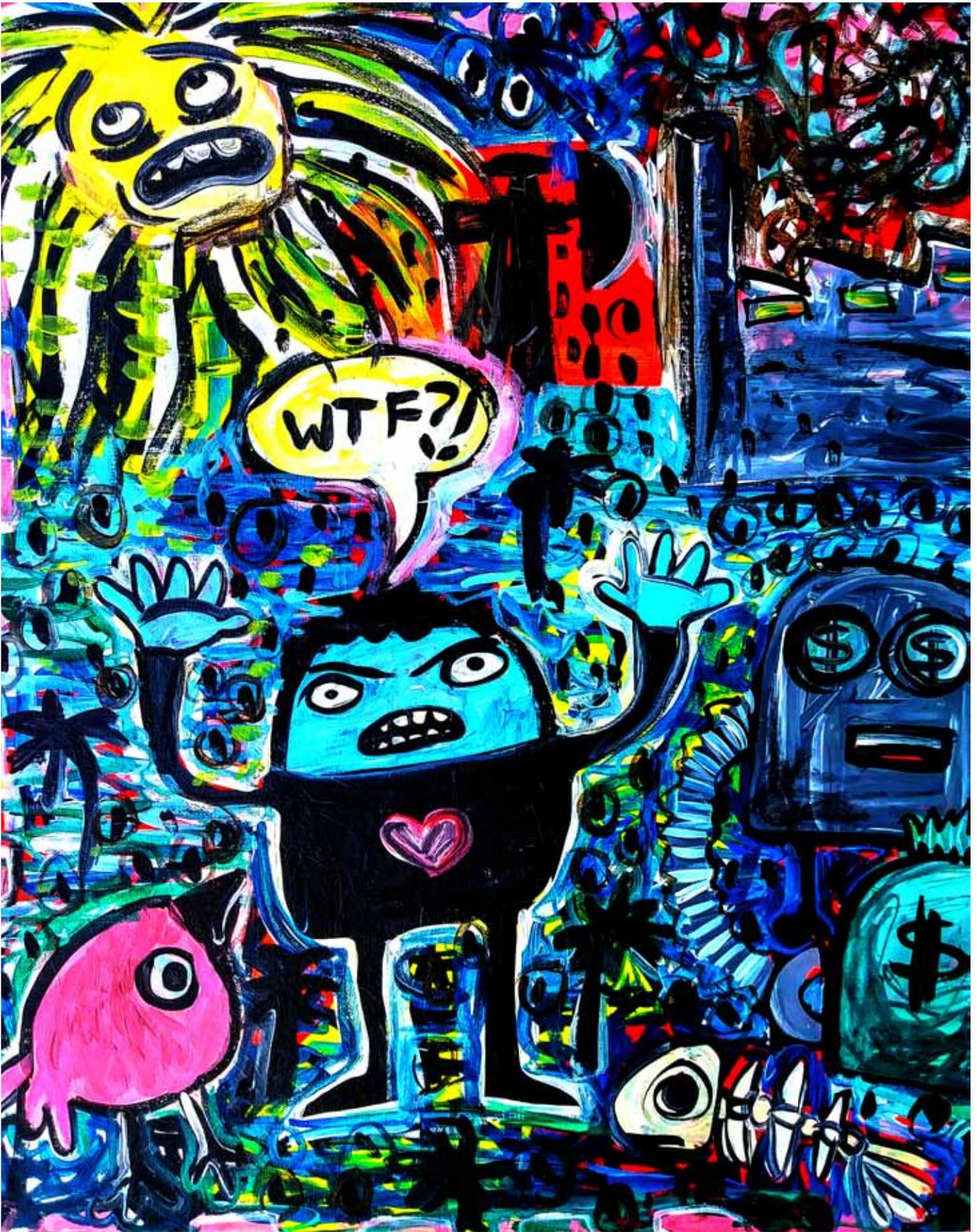


2020

(RIGHT)

What I was thinking about while painting  
"Fuck Off Coke & Pepsi" ...

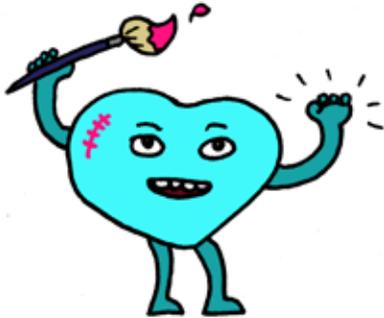
These two companies push their way into every corner  
of the world, take the precious water, exploit and crush  
workers, and finally push their poisonous products onto  
the whole population. Fuck them both to hell!!



"Fuck Off Coke & Pepsi," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018

# Artists: Raise Your Weapons

(2009; revised 1/2014)



In this time of escalating exploitation, poverty, imperialist wars, torture and ecocide, we don't need a piece of art that consists of a mattress dripping orange paint, cleverly titled "Tangerine Dream." In this time, as countless multitudes suffer and die for the profits and luxuries of a few, as species go extinct at a rate faster than we can keep track of, we don't need an orchestra composed of iPhones. In this time, when the future of all life on Earth is at stake, spare us the constant barrage of narcissistic tweets juxtaposing celebrity gossip with quirky food choices.

If we lived in a time of peace and harmony, then creating pretty, escapist, serotonin-boosting hits of mild amusement wouldn't be a crime (except perhaps against one's Muse). If all was well, such art might enhance our happy existence, like whipped cream on a chocolate latte. There's nothing wrong with pleasure, or decorative art.

But in times like these, for an artist not to devote her/his talents and energies to creating cultural weapons of resistance is a betrayal of the worst magnitude, a gesture of contempt against life itself. It is unforgivable.

The foundation of any culture is its underlying economic system. Today, art is bullied to conform to the demands of industrial capitalism, to reflect and reinforce the interests of those in power. This system-serving art is relentlessly bland. It is viciously soothing, crushingly safe. It seduces us to desire, buy, use, consume. It entertains us and makes us giggle with amusement as it slowly sucks our brains out through our eye sockets.

The system exerts tremendous pressure to create art that is not only apolitical but anti-political. When the dominant culture spots political art, it sticks its fingers in its ears and sings, "La la la!" It refuses to review it in the New York Times or award it an NEA grant. Political art is vigorously snubbed, ignored, condemned to obscurity, erased. If it's too powerful to make disappear, then it is scorned, accused of being depressing, doom-and-gloom, preachy, impolite, and by the way, your drawing style sucks. Also by the way, you can't make a living if your work's not vacuous, cynical and therefore commercially viable, so go starve under a bridge with your precious principles.

We're taught that it's rude to be judgmental, that to assert a point of view violates the pure, transcendent and neutral spirit of art. These are lies designed to weaken and depoliticize us. In these times, there is no such thing as neutrality not taking a stand means supporting and assisting exploiters and murderers.

Let us not be the system's tools or fools. Artists are not cowards and weaklings. We're tough. We take sides. We fight back.

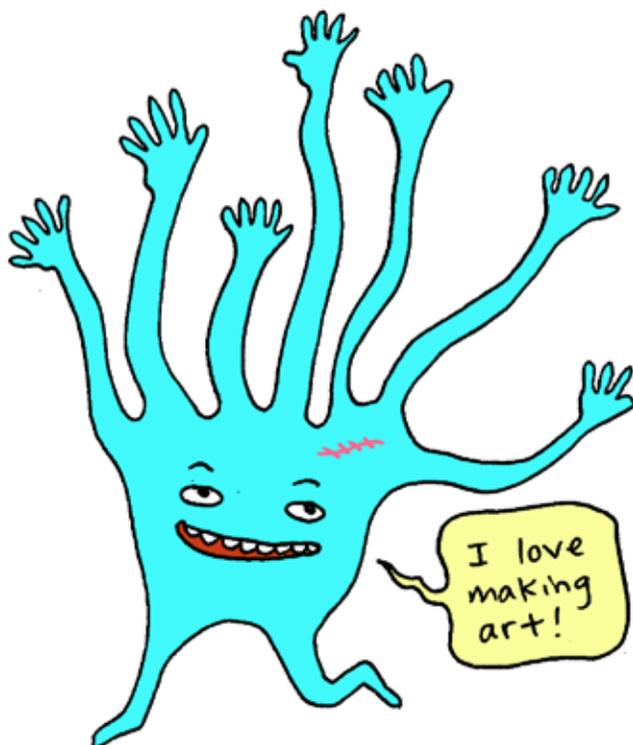
Artists and writers have a proud tradition of being at the forefront of resistance, of stirring emotions and inspiring action. Today we must create an onslaught of judgmental, opinionated, brash and partisan work in the tradition of anti-Nazi artists John Heartfield and George Grosz, of radical muralist Diego Rivera, filmmaker Ousmane Sembene, feminist artists the Guerrilla Girls, novelists like Maxim Gorky and Barbara Kingsolver, poets like Nazim Hikmet and Pablo Neruda, musicians like Thievery Corporation and The Coup.

The world cries out for meaningful, combative, political art. It is our duty and responsibility to create a fierce, unyielding, aggressive culture of resistance. We must create art that exposes and denounces evil, that strengthens organizers and revolutionaries, celebrates and contributes to the coming emancipation of this planet from omnicidal capitalist-imperialist madness.

Pick up your weapon, artist.

## A note about this essay:

This essay came in a time when my thinking tended toward dogmatism, and my tone was very self-righteous. It's single-minded and very focused, as I was then. Today I don't think of it as my last word on the subject; in fact I've later written other things (some of them are in following pages) that recognize that art is far larger than the boundaries this essay describes. Still, I include it here because this furious feeling still arises in me. I still hold it as an aspect of my worldview. While I don't think it's absolutely right, I also don't think it's entirely wrong either.



# Warming Up to (Some) Abstract Art

2017

Until recently, I never understood why anyone could like most abstract art. To me, too much of it seemed merely decorative and boring, if not ridiculous, gimmicky, lazy, and hideous. One place where I worked had a typical giant abstract "sculpture" nearby that I actively loathed -- it looked like a ball of discarded scraps of sheet metal. It irked me, because it seemed like a scam. I thought of pieces like that as fake art, a convenient way to dispose of spare grant funding while pretending to be sophisticated.

What intensified my suspicion of it is the fact that the CIA funded abstract expressionist (among other) artists during the Cold War as a way to depoliticize culture and discredit socialism. They concealed the money's origins by funneling it through foundations set up by large capitalists and corporations. (This is detailed in a book I highly recommend: "The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters" by Frances Stonor Saunders).

There's a common reaction to abstract art: "What's the big deal? I could have done that!" And of course that's often true. In fact just about anyone can make art, if they want to and have access to materials. But we don't believe in ourselves because we're told that it's restricted to "special" people with inborn "talent." (Of course everyone has different strengths and interests, and not everyone wants to make art; but too many people are discouraged from it unjustly).

I think what bugs people so much is the pretentiousness of the commercial art world. Marketers fabricate the fake persona of an "artiste" to arbitrarily inflate the value of

certain art, so they can maximize the profit they can leech off it. Market value is based on mystique, more than on characteristics more traditionally esteemed (emotional impact, beauty, skill, meaning, etc).

I continue to have a hard time appreciating most abstract (and purely decorative) art. It's been my conviction for a long time that in our social context of intensifying crises -- wars, exploitation, environmental destruction -- that artists have a responsibility to contribute to the culture in ways that can help resolve these things. And I still believe that.

But lately I'm finding myself warming up to abstract art. Not in opposition to figurative or political art, but as something completely different. And not so much in a relationship of observer-to-object or product, but more as a participant in a process. Because I tried making some, and it was freeing and fun -- like dancing alone in the living room, like singing along loudly with the car radio, like playing.

Here are a few things I've discovered through the activity of abstract painting:

- \* An appreciation of the fact that materials have their own characteristics and behaviors. We can't completely control them, but learn about their range of possibilities as we interact with them.

- \* The freedom of letting go of preconceived results, and welcoming the fascinating and often beautiful surprises of random chance.

- \* A painting can seem alive. It has movement when the composition of shapes and colors are balanced to draw the eye around, without getting hung up on "dead" (unharmonious, un-

suitable) areas.

\* More aspects of a painting beyond subject: layers, textures, the effects of different tools, colors mixing on the brush and canvas.

\* Fast abstract painting can loosen us up for any subsequent artistic endeavor.

\* It can bring us to a peaceful and free state of mind that's extremely satisfying and simply fun!!



\* We don't have to compare it to other forms of art or choose between them. Each has its own qualities, reason for existing, and social effects. And they can each belong to all of us - we don't need gatekeepers to tell us what to like or what we can or can't do.

In short, while contemplating abstract art still isn't usually very exciting to me, I do see it differently than I used to. I see more than just a bunch of random colors and shapes; I perceive the gestures that made it, the activity in it. And as an activity, I've come to enjoy it.



3 paintings,  
acrylic on canvas,  
2017



Music Finger Painting, 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018

I love experimenting with art, trying out new materials and techniques. Earlier, I tried finger-painting with paint made for kids, and it wasn't that great. The process didn't excite me, and neither did the results. It all felt limited and shallow. A few months later I tried it again with acrylic paints, and it was a totally different experience. I was listening to some loud music, and thought of what synesthesia might be like. I can't see music, but I let my hands follow it anyway, moving to the rhythm and adding colors that felt like they matched the mood of the songs. At first I hesitated getting my hands really into the paint, but then relaxed and went with it. Within a minute I started feeling nothing less than ecstatic. It felt like painting music!

# The ART of ART

- ① Art is for everybody. WE ARE EACH CREATIVE IN SOME WAY. IF YOU HAVEN'T FOUND YOUR WAY YET, ENJOY EXPLORING.
- ② Be yourself. LET YOUR OWN UNIQUE VOICE AND STYLE UNFOLD.
- ③ Art is about life. USE YOUR EMOTIONS, EXPERIENCES, OBSERVATIONS AND IDEAS.
- ④ DON'T FOCUS ON RESULTS. Enjoy the process OF MAKING ART. LIKE LOVE: IF THERE'S NO JOY, WHY BOTHER?
- ⑤ Don't be judgey. FIND AND APPRECIATE THE BEAUTY IN EVERY WORK OF ART.
- ⑥ Perfectionism will immobilize you. A CURIOUS AND PLAYFUL ATTITUDE WILL FREE YOU.
- ⑦ Art has no rules. NO RIGHT OR WRONG. THERE ARE NO MISTAKES. WELCOME CHANCE.
- ⑧ Don't worry about pleasing others. NO ONE GETS TO TELL US WHAT TO CREATE OR WHAT TO LOVE.
- ⑨ Let go of full control. MATERIALS HAVE THEIR OWN MIND. DANCE WITH THEM.
- ⑩ PRACTICE LEADS TO PROFICIENCY, EVOLUTION AND INNOVATION. Quantity becomes quality.
- ⑪ ONLY THROUGH WORK WILL ANYTHING BE ACCOMPLISHED. You can do it.
- ⑫ Art is powerful. USE IT WISELY.

# Some thoughts about art.

2019

Art is emotion made concrete. Art hurts and art heals. Art makes us think, know, and believe. Art is sharing from within. Art reveals and conceals. It alienates and connects. Through art we may discover truths. Art is our consolation. Art is our weapon. Art is more than painting, drawing, singing and dancing; it is also cooking, customizing a motorcycle, raising a child, cultivating a garden, relating history, making an argument. Art is the creative spirit expressing itself through us all. Art is life. Art is for everybody.

Art is not a spectator sport. Art is a process. It's a vehicle for self-discovery and for contemplation of the world's phenomena. Art is transformative. We don't just look at it; we do it. The point is not only "what it means" but "what I thought about while creating it." Art is a doorway. It invites us to relax into an idea. It unravels structured thought into intuition. Observation becomes insight.

This is by no means the entire picture.

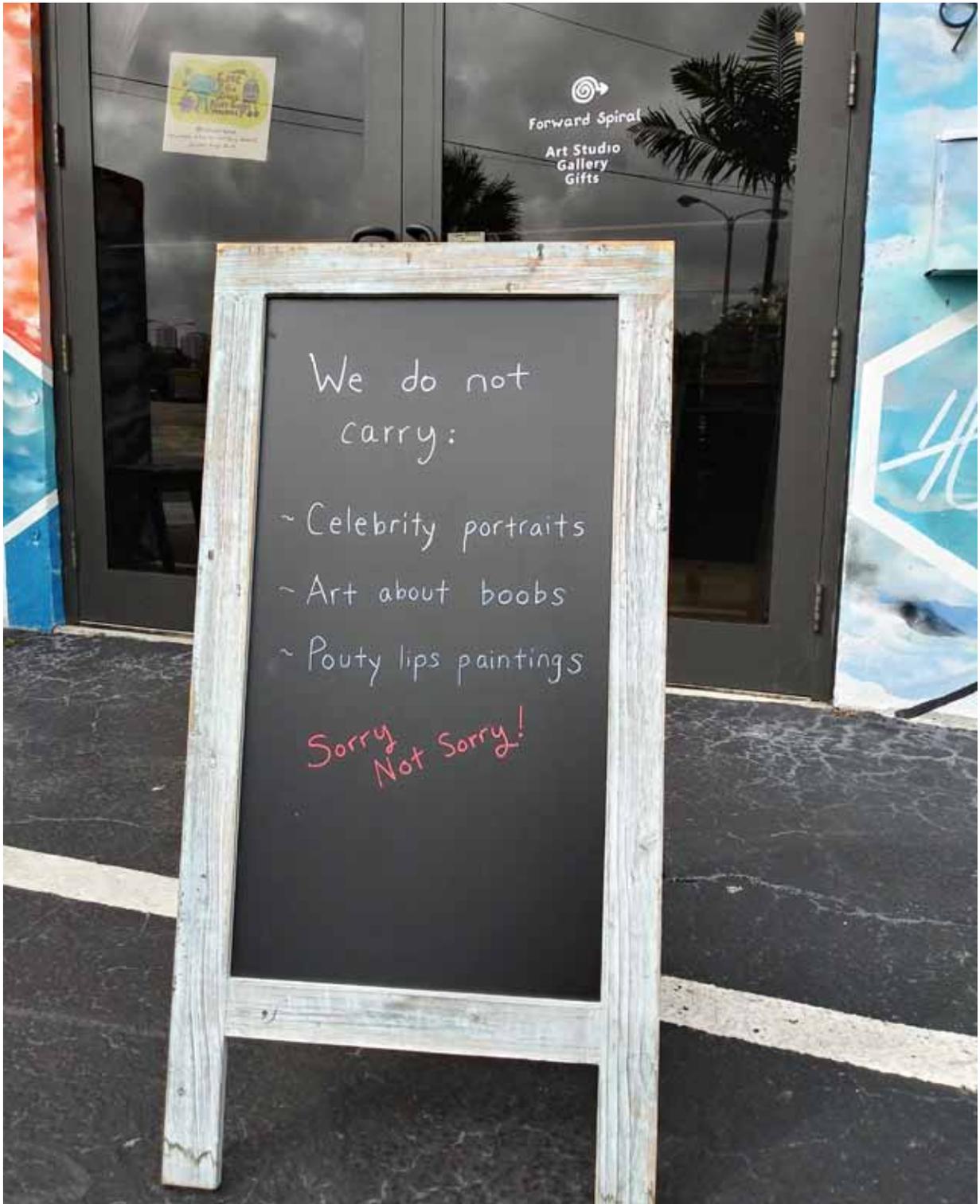




a Flying MUSE.



Let your creative  
spirit FLY!!



Chris and I had a studio in Fort Lauderdale from 2017-2020. This sign was put out for a monthly neighborhood Artwalk in late 2019, shortly before we closed the place permanently to the public due to Covid-19. I also drew a version of this scene (right).

# Art for Revolution

2020

\* Through visual metaphor, symbolism and mapping, art can reveal the underlying structures of a society that we generally take for granted as normal. When we acknowledge that exploitation and oppression are not in fact natural, but deliberately engineered monstrosities, then we no longer feel helpless to accept them.

\* The ruling capitalist culture attempts to co-opt every drive toward freedom, artistic and otherwise, to force it to submit to and serve the profit imperative. When we express ourselves defiantly, we can break that spell.

\* By focusing attention on emerging tendencies of rebellion, art can assist potentialities into existence. When light shines on a path, we are no longer lost. We can start to move together in an intentional direction, toward a future we choose.

\* When we stand strong, express our views, and act for change, others are emboldened to raise their voices too. Then we can find each other, we can come together to build a movement. Alone, we don't have the power to challenge the system. United, we do.



# A note to someone who made assumptions

2019

People sometimes make assumptions about my views based on who uses and shares my artwork, rather than what the work actually says. I'd like to ask you to please stop doing that. Long ago I decided that I didn't have the energy or ability to keep track of and police all the opinions of anyone I allowed to use it, so I publicly posted a policy that anyone can use it freely, as long as they don't try to make money off it. It's been used by many different individuals and groups, and it's impossible that I could agree with all their positions on everything. So to have people make assumptions and label me as one thing or another based on who shares it or uses it or talks about it is fairly frustrating to me. At times, I've had people on both sides of an issue angrily accuse me of taking the other side, simultaneously. It's frustrating.

I don't have views on everything that can be put in a neat box. I don't like labels. I don't believe that thought can or should conform to precise ideological systems. Also, it evolves. I don't think it's possible for every single person to have a well-informed position on every issue at all times. I often avoid speaking if I don't feel like my opinion will contribute to a conversation. Please respect that, and refrain from spreading unsubstantiated rumors about what you heard I might have said or not said to someone once, or who I might or might not have had some relationship with, or what my thoughts are - unless I express them myself. You can find all the views that I

want to communicate where I share them in what I write and draw and paint. Please refrain from making assumptions and inaccurate stories about me. I will have the same respect for you. Thank you.

The alternative is that I'll have to make a new policy that no one can ever share my artwork, because they may have a position or opinion I don't agree with, and it's not possible for me to spend all my time trying to learn everyone's positions. But I'd rather just keep sharing my artwork freely with anyone who may find it useful.





(Above)

Someone used a copy of my drawing on a sign at the People's Climate March, New York, 2014. To me, being used in the service of resistance is the best possible destiny for any of my artworks.

(Right)

I'm honored that someone wanted a version of the same drawing as a tattoo.



# Vulnerable is the new strong is the new cute.

2019

When I became politically active in the early 1980s, the culture of far-left groups in the US was in a defensive mode directly inherited from the 1960s and '70s. Most of the people active then had experienced better days when revolution actually seemed on the table. They were the few hardened souls who had subsequently stuck it out through a period of severe state repression and relative boom economy, which combined to result in a serious decline of forces. Since I was just coming of age and totally ignorant of history when I joined up, I wasn't aware of how these groups had been shaped by their recent past.

Anyway, the previous history of the left, remnants of patriarchal ideology, and the state of the country at the time had produced a certain kind of macho culture, one that demanded hard living and sacrifice. It was also justifiably paranoid. I say this not to judge it, but to acknowledge the reality of it. I recall a comrade who had been requested by an organization to move away from his family to a different city try to make himself feel better by saying, "It wouldn't be a sacrifice if it didn't hurt." This kind of request was pretty standard in the circles I was in. His was the sort of attitude we were expected to have, and we mostly did. We prided ourselves on being strong and ready to do the hard things for the benefit of humanity, which is how we (perhaps grandiosely) saw it.

We were taught to be "objective" and not "subjective" - to be ruled by rationality and ignore our emotions. We sucked it up. We had comrades, not friends. Our existences felt temporary and unstable, as we were moved around like chess pieces. We were trained never to talk about our personal lives, because that would lead us to reveal weaknesses that would inevitably be used against us.

I didn't find this outrageous or alien. My dad was a very stoic and undemonstrative person who had no patience with whining or complaining. I was already pretty reserved.

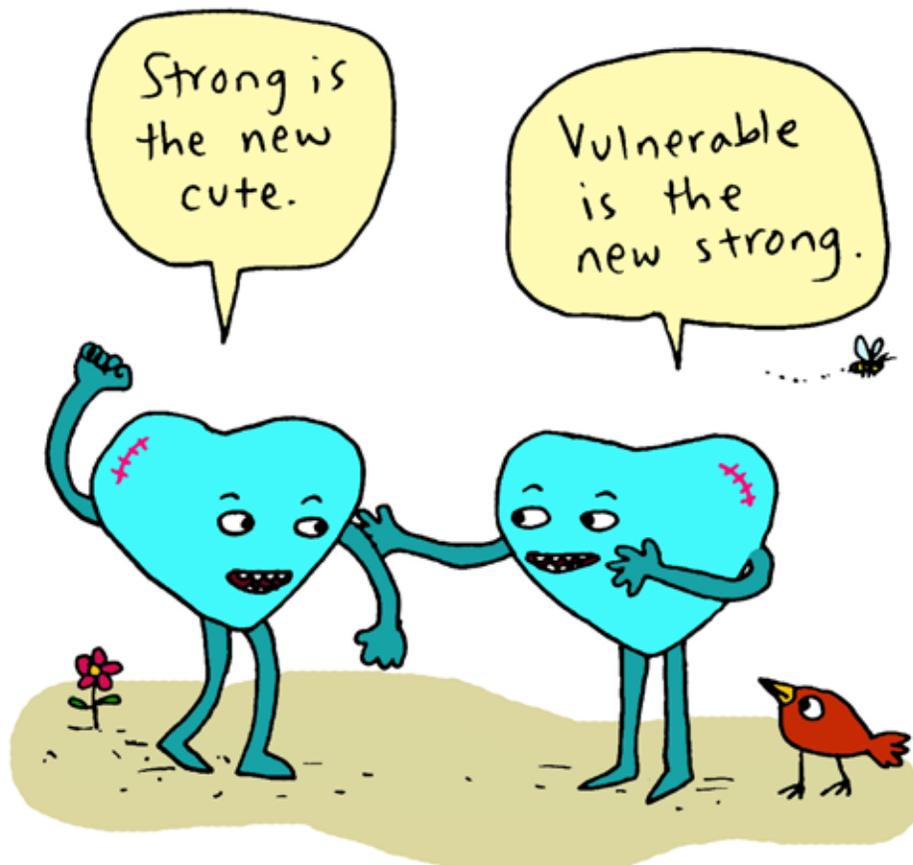
I'm evaluating all this now because that was a long time ago, and over the years the situation has shifted. Technology has broken down our expectation of privacy, so many of our vulnerabilities are now unhideable from the state. And some things once considered weaknesses that could break us if exposed, are now not really considered any big deal. I'm certainly not advocating throwing all caution to the wind (quite the opposite is needed in many parts of the world today). I'm not advocating anything actually, just talking about my own situation, and noticing that I'm finding it necessary to examine some of my habitual ways of thinking in a changing context, and maybe recalibrate to some extent.

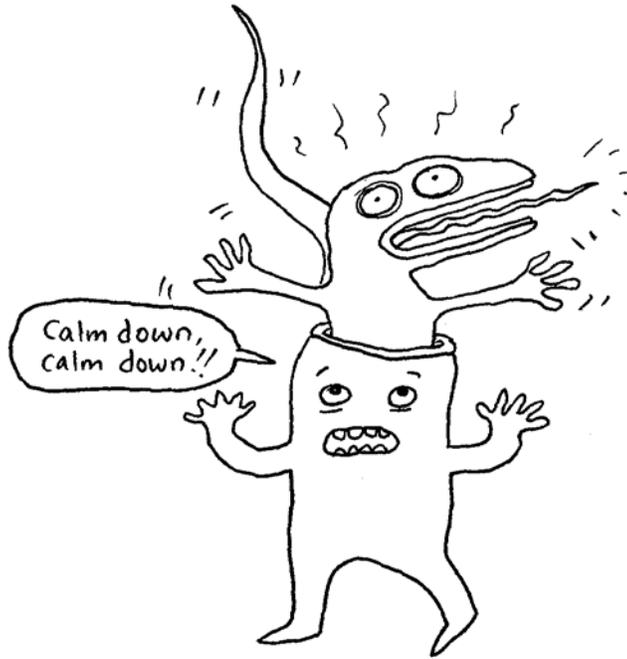
Maybe sharing vulnerabilities and being more open can make a person stronger, rather than weaker. Maybe it's all part

of building a wider net of healthy social connections and mutual support. I don't know - I don't have much of that kind of experience. Even with those I'm closest to and trust, I find it scary. And I certainly don't want to go to the opposite extreme of believing that all my personal shit needs to be out in the world (god no). But I am realizing that I've spent most of my life trying to appear strong when in many ways I am not. I haven't always been real about who I am, but instead have been somewhat in denial and walling off my true self. This isn't healthy, and is taking a toll.

I've been thinking about this privately for a while, but that perpetuates the problem, doesn't it? All this background is really an introduction to get my cour-

age up to being open about having panic attacks and resultant anxiety disorder. And to explain my hesitation about doing so. I'm still not sure that it's a good idea to share this in public. However, I think the fact that I try to hide it - that I've been silent about it for decades is making the attacks worse. I would like to no longer pretend that I'm fine. I'd like to talk without fear, so that I can learn from and commiserate with others who have experienced these issues, and not feel alone while I struggle with them. So I can ask for support when I need it, perhaps, from those willing to offer some. I'd like to be able to say "I understand what you're going through" when others suffer, and maybe hear that too when I am suffering. Maybe we can even find humor in it all, together.





What a panic attack feels like,  
for those who may not know.



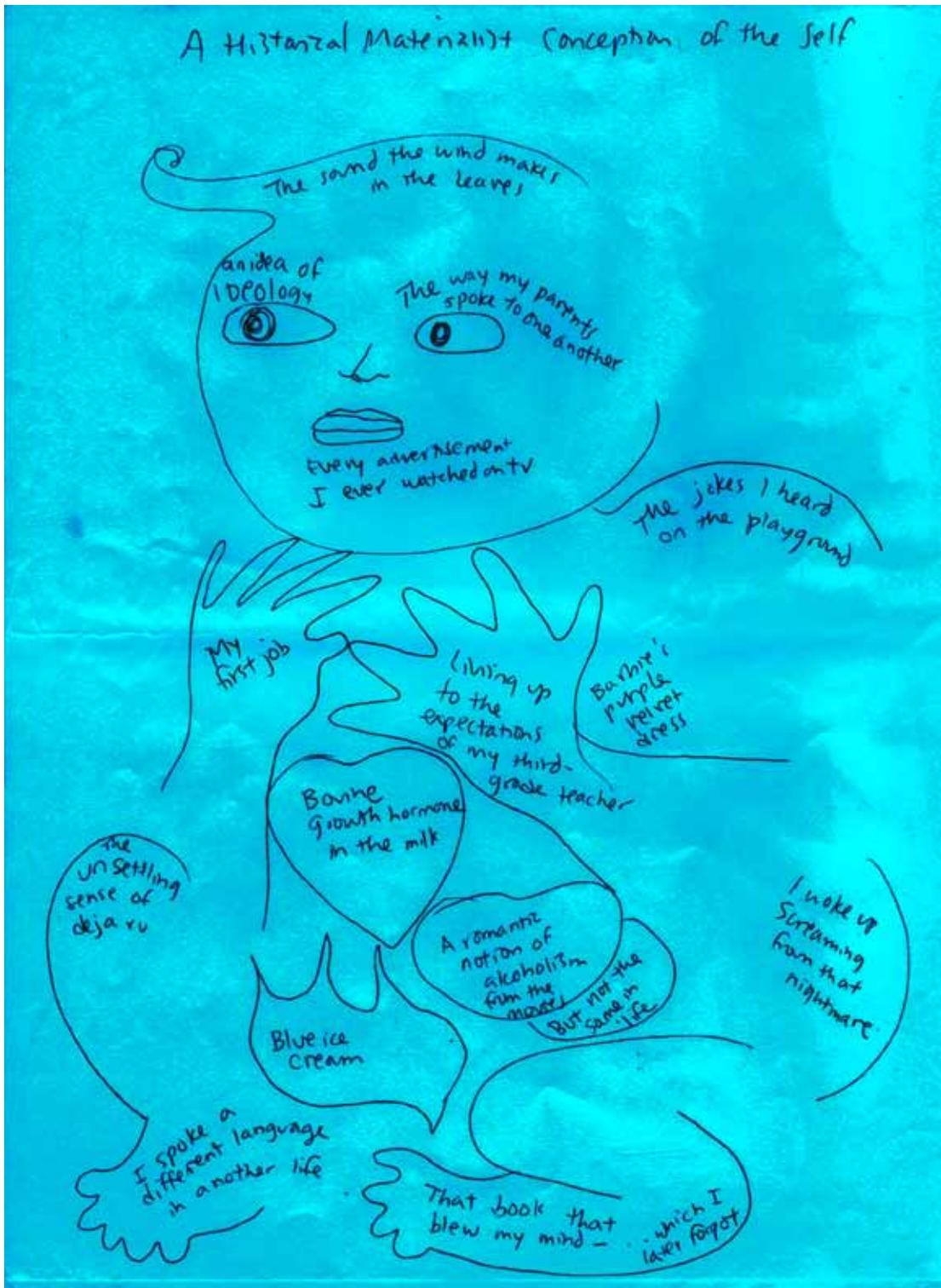
"The Fraught Relationship Between My Anxiety and Creativity," digital, 2021



## Pandemic Atrocities

April 30, 2020

Forced labor until workers drop dead - capitalist extortion is all in the open now, sped up with fangs bared. They've ensured that there are many desperate people to replace those they kill. As long as capitalists stay in power, life will be sacrificed for their profit. They call their victims heroes and give back only enough crumbs to keep us on the hook, barely pacified. But human society doesn't have to be a global death machine. We don't need to accept a system that sacrifices the many to enrich a few exploiters. If workers take over and collectively decide how to run things, then we could all pitch in - no one would have to be overworked or unemployed. No one would have to do without. With emancipation from capitalism, the world could thrive.



"A Historical Materialist Conception of the Self," drawing, 2015



2015, illustration for an article by Dave titled:  
"Does Elon Musk Care if We All Die?"



"Disobey (Blue Heart)," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018



(This is true of most things likely to be inside the cup, as well as the cup itself. Plus the paint and canvas, for that matter.)

"Warning"  
acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"  
2020

# BABY HATS

## A Little Story About YOU, the Capitalist.

If you're not sure why capitalism is inherently exploitative, expansionist, shitty and ecocidal, perhaps this little parable will help clarify that fact.

More people lately are identifying capitalism as the underlying cause of our current global troubles and crises. That's certainly positive: the first step toward cure is a proper diagnosis.

But most of the approaches being offered to treat the problem are placebos, an endless supply of ineffective remedies to "fix" or reform it, to make it "less greedy" or somehow sustainable.

Getting the greed out of capitalism is impossible, and we'll just waste precious time by trying. All capitalism's problems are baked in, integral to the way it works. Capital must expand, buy up or destroy competitors, reach into every corner of society to try to squeeze money out of it.

It naturally accumulates, concentrating wealth in the hands of the few at the expense of the many. That's not a malfunction. That's what it does. There's no other way it works. The problem isn't extreme capitalism, corporate capitalism, or greedy capitalism. It's just capitalism.

Let's try a thought experiment to make this more concrete.

Let's take you through the process of becoming a capitalist. Yes you! Right now!

And because you're a nice person and not a greedy motherfucker like other capitalists, you're going to be different.

...

Ready?

Ok. Imagine you manage to scrape together \$50,000 by scrimping and saving and borrowing money from your parents. (Inheritance is actually how most capitalists get their start - it's not because they're so smart or hardworking, as they'd like to have us believe). ...

Now, what are you going to do with it?

You could piss it away on drugs and fancy shoes. Or you could do what most people would consider the intelligent thing to do in a capitalist economy: make the money "work for you," so you and your family could live on the income it generates instead of being ground down all your lives by shitty-paying jobs. This is a very reasonable goal, which no one would argue with.

Now, while you are not yet a capitalist, that money has become capital. If your plan is successful, it may make you become a capitalist.

Once you decide to invest it, you have to decide what would give you the best return for the least risk. Unfortunately for you, today the economy is in the late stages of a structural crisis, saturated, with every niche overcrowded, glutted with so much accumulated cash that most investment opportunities pretty much suck.

It's slim pickens out there. Interest rates are coughing up dust. The stock market, floating somewhere completely detached from company value, is a casino where the biggest players always win. Inflation causes cash to slowly bleed out. Metals have lost ground, you don't trust bitcoin, commercial and residential real estate is in a bubble, and buying a tract of land in Maine and letting it sit there until it appreciates in value doesn't leave you with enough liquidity to pay your bills. So you're forced to conclude that the return on any kind of passive investment of \$50,000 would just be a joke.

Deep breath. You decide to start a business. Everyone always said they love those adorable baby hats you knit, and you even sold a few to friends-of-friends, so you decide to produce those and sell them online. You pump yourself up into a state of wild optimism, buy a bunch of yarn at Michaels and get to work, spending every waking moment of the next few weeks knitting while listening to high-energy "how to be an entrepreneur" podcasts. You set up all your accounts: Paypal, Mailchimp, Shopify, eBay, Facebook, blah blah blah, and consolidate the

email addresses of all your friends and relatives so you can hit them up when you're ready.

Finally, you launch. A few people buy your baby hats! Yay!

You're pumped. All right, there is a way out of wage slavery! Instead of working for someone else, you can work for yourself! Work smarter, not harder! It's about making ideas happen! Whatever you can believe, you can achieve! And the one about working ON your business, not FOR a business, or whatever. All those slogans are right!

Let's say that after six months or so, with monumental perseverance, a reasonable business strategy, and careful spending, you beat the odds and generate a positive cash flow. You sell all the baby hats you can possibly knit. You even enlist your mom (a kind, patient soul) to help you keep up with demand.

Then you start getting a backup of orders. Finally it becomes apparent that you need to hire someone. Your friend happens to need a job - it's kismet! You apologetically start her off at minimum wage, but hope to increase that as you accumulate more of a cushion. She's understanding, willing to sacrifice by allowing you to extract an obscenely high rate of surplus value from her labor power, in order to help you get your enterprise on its feet.

All your available cash is needed to advertise, buy supplies, and ship. You're starting to see the need for storage space other than your spare bedroom, so there's that expense coming up too. Clearly, with growth starting to happen, it's time to take out a bigger loan. You borrow another chunk from your uncle.

Things are progressing nicely. You're paying your parents and uncle back in regular installments, while keeping your head above water and paying your expenses.

But then one day as you're searching for peppermint floss at Walgreens, you spot something



that makes your blood run cold: a baby hat, eerily similar to yours. On a shelf. For sale. That you did not make. Some asshole evidently saw your baby hats, stole the idea, and produced a cheaper, uglier version of them.

A competitor. Fuck. If you're going to beat them, you need to go on the offensive.

You nervously put down a few thousand dollars to attend a trade show. And get several large orders from retail outlets! Woo-hoo! It's really happening! Winning!!! WIN-NING!!!!

But holy shit, how are you going to knit enough baby hats, even if you hire ALL your friends at minimum wage?

You go to the bank. You secure a hefty loan that'll get you through the next growth spurt quite nicely.

Somewhere you've heard of Alibaba and now you look it up and discover it would be a whole lot cheaper to get the baby hats made in China. You realize that this would be kind of wrong: "Made in the USA" is something you always be-

lieved in as a patriotic American, and China has tyranny and sweatshops and all that. But bottom line, you can't beat the price. And your expenses are rising.

So you arrange for manufacture, and it's pretty easy and straightforward. You start with a small batch to see how it goes. You rent an office and a warehouse. You regretfully have to let your friend go. She really doesn't know how to do anything but knit, and even minimum wage is too high to pay when you have that competitor breathing down your neck. You hope she understands.

She doesn't call you much after that. Ever.

That's ok. You need new friends anyway, go-getter friends who are more on your level as an up-and-coming entrepreneur. Ones you can network with, form mastermind groups with, ones who can benefit you.

As your business grows, it moves into realms of complexity that you don't understand at all. You're losing control of the bookkeeping, the finances, customer service, marketing and sales.

You hire smart, eager young business school graduates to help you run things. They do a pretty good job. This fact is indicated by your growing bank account.

You're moving into a level of profitability that not only sustains the business, but also allows you to elevate your lifestyle accordingly. You feel very happy to be able to buy your mom a new car, jewelry for your spouse, send your kids to a good college. You enjoy making them smile, making them proud of you. Life is good.

You expand your product line: orange baby hats that tie under the chin, magenta baby hats with earflaps, puce baby hats with puffballs on the crown. They're a hit - a home run! Soon you start dreaming: every baby in the United States in your baby hats! Yeah! You start getting orders from department stores in Europe and Australia. Every baby in the whole damn world! You are on fire!!

But competitors are riding your ass hard. Though you've secured the account at BabyMart, lower quality baby hats are appearing on the shelves at BabyCo. They're cheaper than yours. They're made in Cambodia. Their sales are going up. Yours are going down.

You lower the quality of the yarn and remove some of the charming details that no one seems to care about anyway. You dump the China company and hire one in Cambodia that will do it for 2 cents less per unit. (If the factory in China lays off a few workers after the loss of your account and their kids go hungry, you will never know about it, so let's not even mention that).

You like the liaison for the new factory, who is very responsive to your needs and meticulous about getting the product right. You really don't know how they get it done so cheaply, but you don't have time to worry about it. They deliver the goods at the right price: that's all that matters.

Your business expands rapidly with new product lines. Baby toe socks. Baby cravats. Baby

cropped vests. You have regional warehouses set up with state-of-the-art inventory management technology and compliant workers accustomed to working for peanuts (thanks Amazon!). You hire a logistics company to take care of getting all the goods where they're supposed to go. You don't dig into the details of how they do it; that's their headache.

After much agonizing and discussion, you decide that it's time to take the next big step: launching an IPO. It's successful! The stock jumps 26% on the first day and holds up. You go on the offensive and buy up your strongest competitors, but don't raise the product quality back up because people keep buying the stuff anyway, so what for?

Your stock rises nicely with each quarter as long as you keep cutting costs. You give your highest executives big bonuses (and yourself too, you deserve it) to keep them motivated in their quest to constantly locate synergies and eradicate inefficiencies.

One morning you get a memo that some Cambodian villagers are protesting about pollutants from the factory spilling into their drinking water. The dye for the yarn, or some shit. There's an attached photo of a red lake with frothy stuff on the edges and piles of rotting fish. Gross. You wrinkle your nose.

You assign someone to cooperate with a respected international watchdog agency to investigate. They travel over there to wrangle with regulators, government officials, the factory owner, and the villagers, and somehow the mess gets resolved. The water's still toxic, but the villagers have been paid off and relocated. Your stock dips slightly but doesn't tank, so: crisis averted! Whew.

Then the damn workers start rioting over their pay. They bust up some machinery and burn a police car.

You are flabbergasted. Why would they destroy the factory when it's the only thing provid-

ing them a living? You shake your head. Well, that's how people are in those kind of countries: irrational and hot-headed. You instruct your fix-it guy to threaten the factory with relocation. He goes over there with a suitcase of cash to grease the palms of a few key government officials and business-friendly labor leaders. Somehow the problem gets resolved.

One day a factory you never heard of burns down and a bunch of workers are killed. As you scan the article, a passing pang of sympathy runs through your mind: "Poor bastard, whoever contracted with that one, they're in for a media shitstorm."

But when you get to the office you find out that the middleman company you hired had subcontracted out some of your production to that very factory. There's a photo circulating of burned corpses clutching scorched baby hats, your logo prominently visible.

Shit. This gives you pause. You feel kind of bad. Not lose-sleep-bad, but still, for about five seconds - no, eight - you vaguely imagine some sad Cambodians whose families might have been affected.

But you tell yourself that it's not your fault - you didn't know. They should enforce the regulations better over there - it's the corruption. That's on them. You didn't force them to work there or tolerate an autocratic government imposed on them by imperialist machinations along with a layer of rapacious bureaucrats. They made bad choices.

The news hangs in the air for days like a bad smell. Some newspapers aren't letting it go, writing sensationalist things about your company, digging to find every little insignificant thing they can possibly complain about. They're just looking for a story, and if it bleeds it leads.

Your marketing department knows what to do: you don't even have to ask. They make sure all the news outlets attend a press conference to see you donating a generous check and a cargo

load of baby hats to the dead-worker-family fund (carefully expressing heartfelt sympathy while admitting no wrongdoing). They phone the editors to casually inquire if they would like for your company to continue to buy ads on a regular basis. The fuss becomes yesterday's news.

Not more than a week later you're having an important meeting with potential clients in the big conference room, and you hear distant shouting. Everyone tries to ignore the faint noise at first and push through on negotiations, but you see the client rep keep glancing out the window, down at the parking lot far below.

You need to appear confident and decisive in front of them if they're to judge you a worthy supplier, so you buzz your secretary, ask what the fuck. You listen to her explain that there's a protest outside - something about sweatshops.

You tell her firmly: tell security to escort them off the property. If they can't handle it, have them call the cops. Because that's what the cops are for, right? To ensure your safety from the mob, so your business can run smoothly. You can't have social disorder, damn it. That costs money every time.

When you get home, aggravated and sweaty, your sympathetic spouse gives you a whiskey sour and performs some lovely tongue action to distract you. You lie there afterward and reflect on the fact that by your hard efforts, intelligence and grit, you've come a long way, from a lowly hobby knitter to massively triumphant baby accessory tycoon. You remind yourself that making progress just means making bigger mistakes. You resolve to give back, maybe donate some money to a university for expanded business school facilities, to help deserving young people enjoy the kind of success you've achieved. You go to sleep feeling much better.

The next day, more sign-waving protesters cluster in the parking lot. They try to block you from entering the building! That's some fucking nerve!!

A phalanx of cops pushes them back and knocks them around a little. Some are carted off to jail while you are escorted inside, unharmed thank god. The ruckus gets on TV. Some asshole is yelling into the camera, something about justice or whatever, and names your company, names YOU. He uses your name and calls you a greedy fucker.

Not much bothers you; you are generally easygoing. But that kind of hurts. You have never been greedy in your life. You always give more than you get. Hell, hundreds or even thousands of people wouldn't even have jobs if it wasn't for you. Millions of babies would not have adorable hats keeping their precious little heads warm. You uplift the economy, give to charity, treat everyone around you with courtesy and unfailing politeness. You lavish gifts on your friends. You tip generously.

Fuck them. They don't know you.

Your people, as usual, know what to do. A notice is circulated in activist circles that your company's charitable foundation is going to be offering grants to "make a positive difference for social justice and empowerment." As the applications pour in, the noise dissipates. Even the diehard radical fringe straggles out of the parking lot, ignored.

That story, in broad strokes, is the story of every capitalist.

You think you're self-made, but capital dictated every step you took. Whatever your emotions and intentions are or ever have been is now beside the point. Somewhere along the line, you became capital's tool.

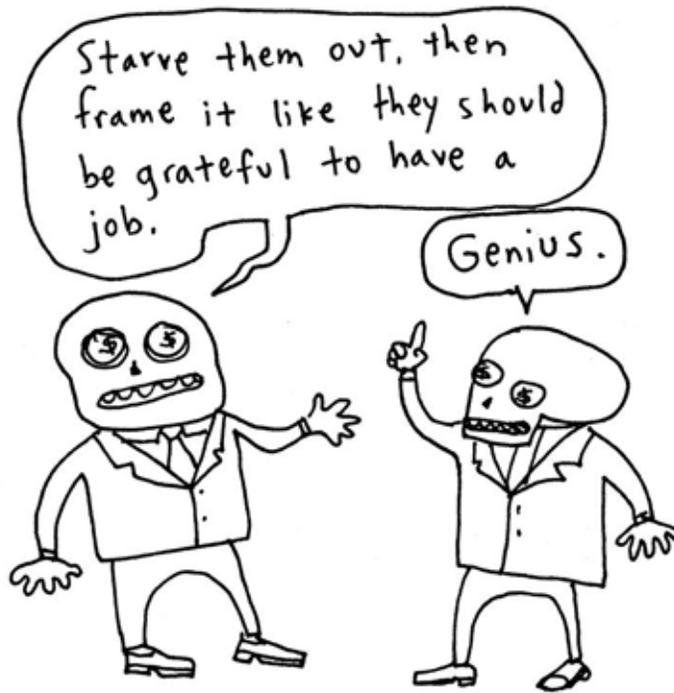
Capital has its own relentless drive, never to be satisfied, feeding ever more hungrily on the life-force of the world while leaving mountains of destruction and misery in its wake. It can't do otherwise.

Forget trying to fix it. It needs to be stopped.



"Roach Bars," 36"x36", acrylic on canvas, 2019

This painting echoes an editorial cartoon I drew nearly 10 years prior, with a similar joke (with concern about the organicness of an apple in a toxic wasteland), updated to include today's trend of "craft" everything. I often depict apocalyptic wastelands in comic, but I love it the most with paint, which can achieve a great dirty look.



"Capitalist Confidential," drawing, 2019  
Going behind the scenes for a peek at how capitalists figure their shit out.



(RIGHT)

The night before painting "Fight," my soulmate Chris and I were in the studio parking lot downtown, listening to a strange, high-pitched call, trying to figure out what kind of bird it was, before we finally realized it was a pair of bats!

They were circling over the buildings, and we caught quick glimpses as light hit them. So when I painted this the next day, it had to be a bat.

The word was inspired by Chris. When we were recently having an intense conversation about what we're about, what ideas have threaded through and defined our lives, he said one word has always been in the forefront for him, especially at work: "Fight." That resonated with me because I had sensed his fighting spirit within the first seconds of meeting him, and it was one of his characteristics (in combination with cheerfulness, kindness, and self-awareness) that made me instantly want to get to know him.

Let's each harness that spirit and fight for a better world!



"Fight," 36"x36", acrylic on canvas, 2018

# HOW TO GET OUT OF JURY DUTY





"Imagine an economy based on meeting the needs of humanity and the Earth, rather than profit. Everything would be completely different," 16"x20", leftover acrylic paint on reused canvas, 2018

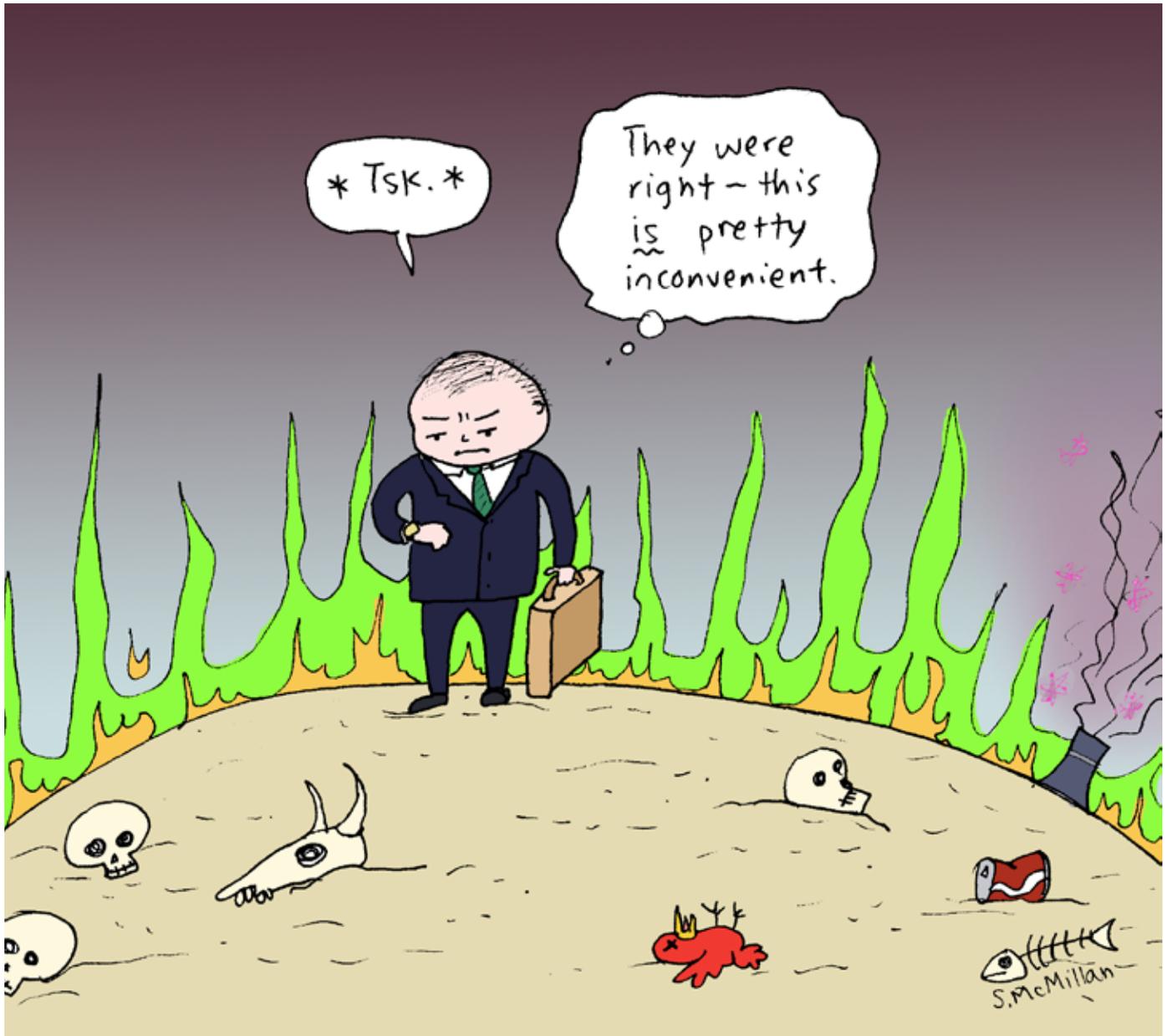
# Defiant Hearts

2019

Before we can be free to live in harmony with a thriving natural world and with each other, free of class divisions and power imbalances, we must overthrow the capitalist/imperialist/colonialist machine through revolution. Before we can achieve revolution, we must build massive and diverse movements of resistance against the system's domination. Before we can build resistance movements, we must find ways to complement, mutually support and coordinate our actions. Before we can act collectively, we must build networks and organizations that can assert social power. Before we can organize, we must develop shared understanding around our intersecting aims and ways of asserting them. Before we can unite, we must locate others who share a common mindset. In order to find each other, we need to communicate our discontent. It starts with a shared glance in response to a violation, a look that says "we both know this is wrong." Before we can connect in solidarity, our own hearts must be awake and responsive. We must know our boundaries and who's side we're on. We must know what we don't accept. It starts when our hearts spark into flame with a defiant "NO."



"No, it's not ok to obliterate huge swaths of plants and animals to build more condos and shopping centers," 16"x20", leftover acrylic paint on used canvas, 2018



ink on paper with digital color, 2014



"Fighting Spirit"  
Embroidered fabric  
approx. 10"x12"  
2019

"Unstoppable"  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"  
2019

There is a fighting spirit in all of us. Sometimes it may retreat or hide, but it will always come back. It's part of the collective subconscious, coming to the rescue for each of us as we struggle to survive and live with dignity under this dystopian nightmare of capitalism. This collective spirit will rage to the forefront when we get the chance to take the whole system on, together!

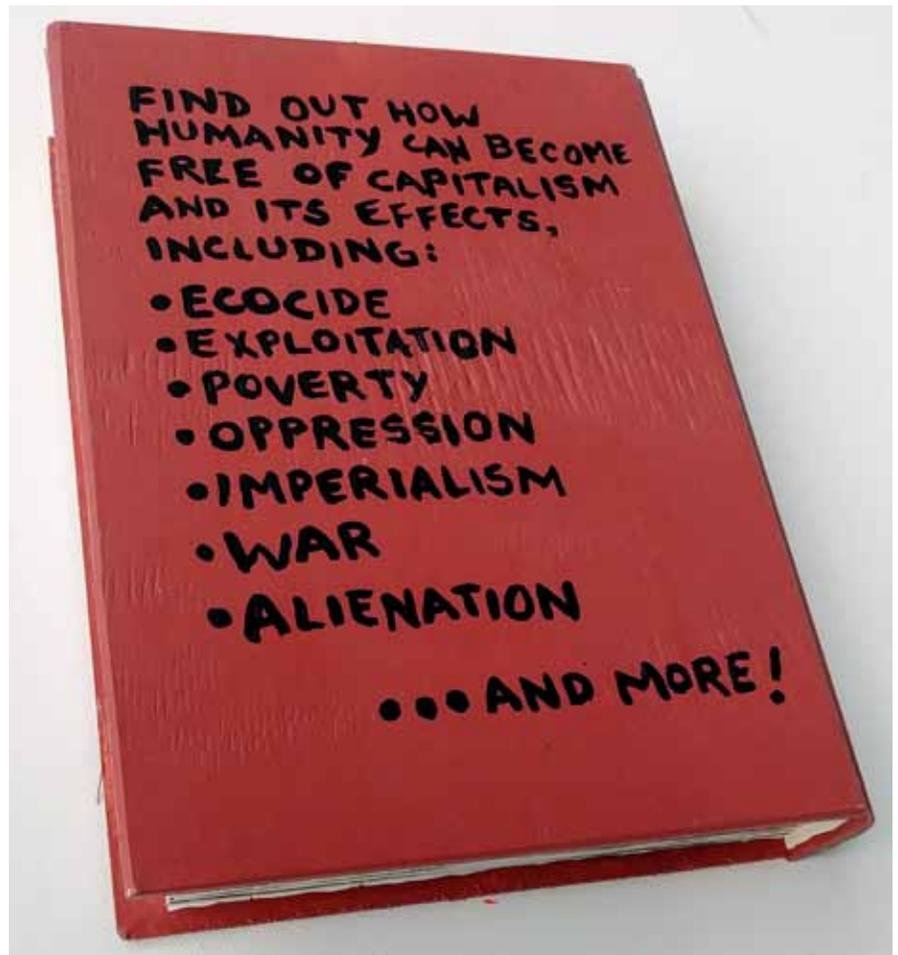
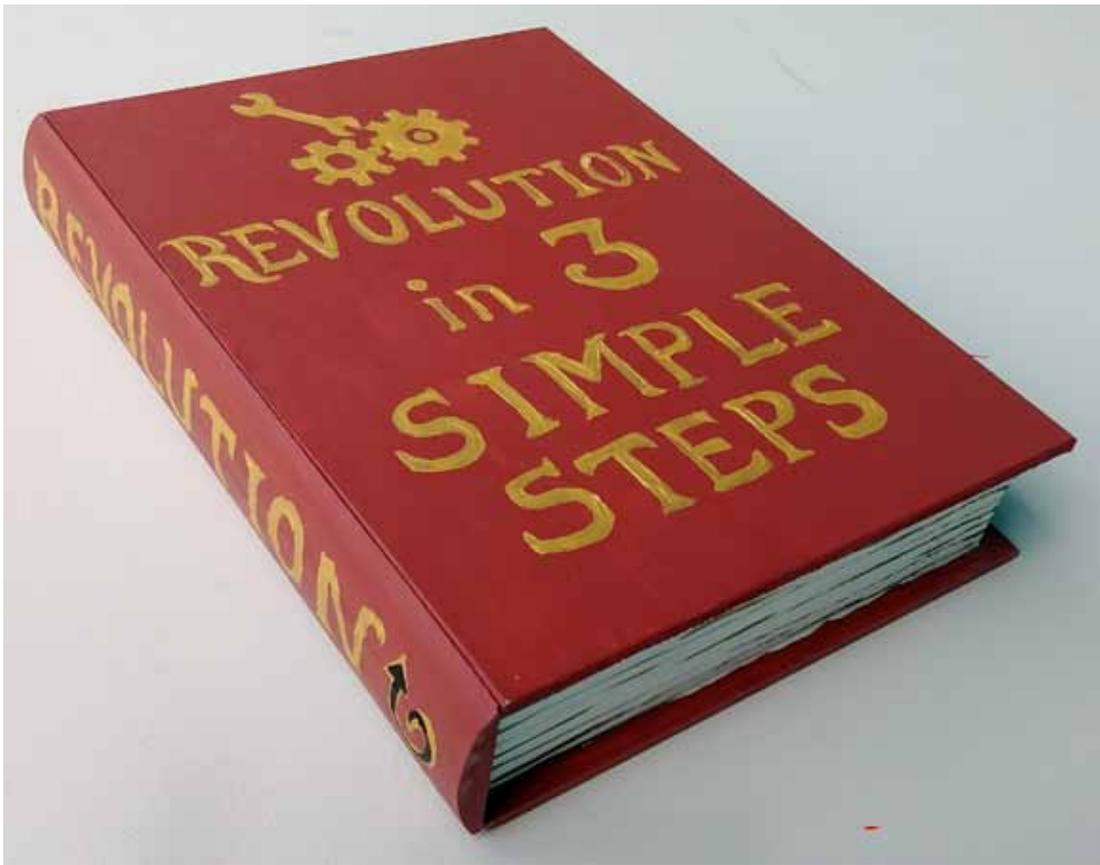


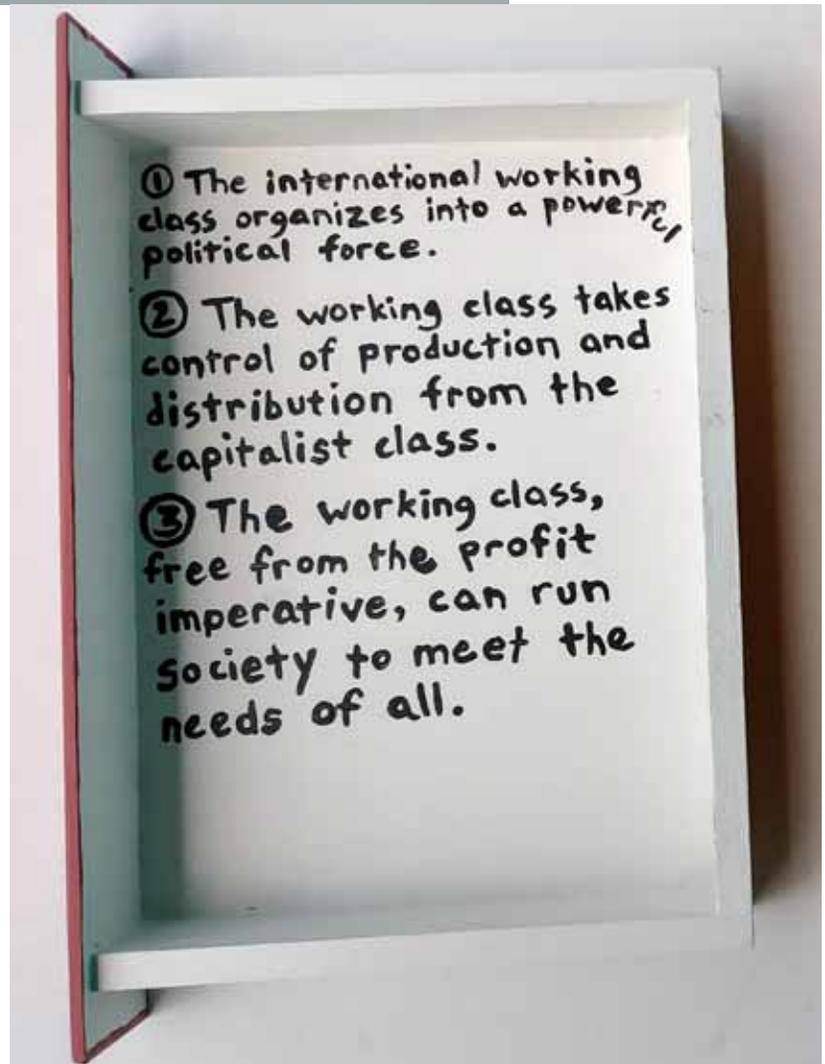
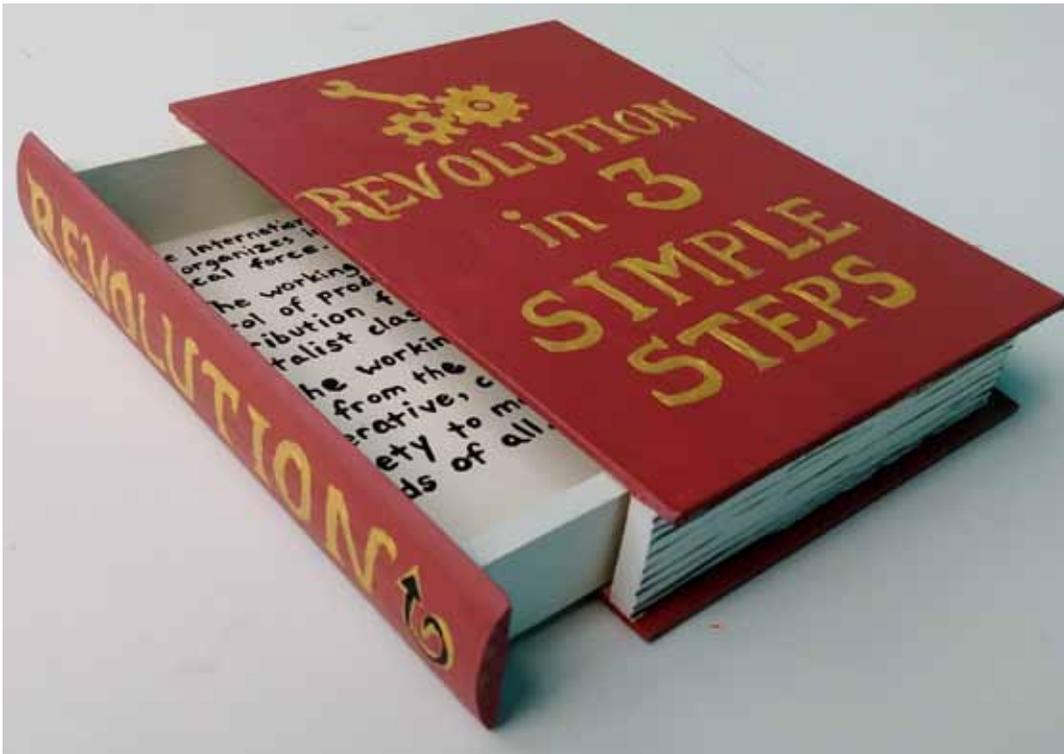


"Hello," 17"x11", acrylic on wood with glitter, 2018  
(front, back, and both under blacklight)







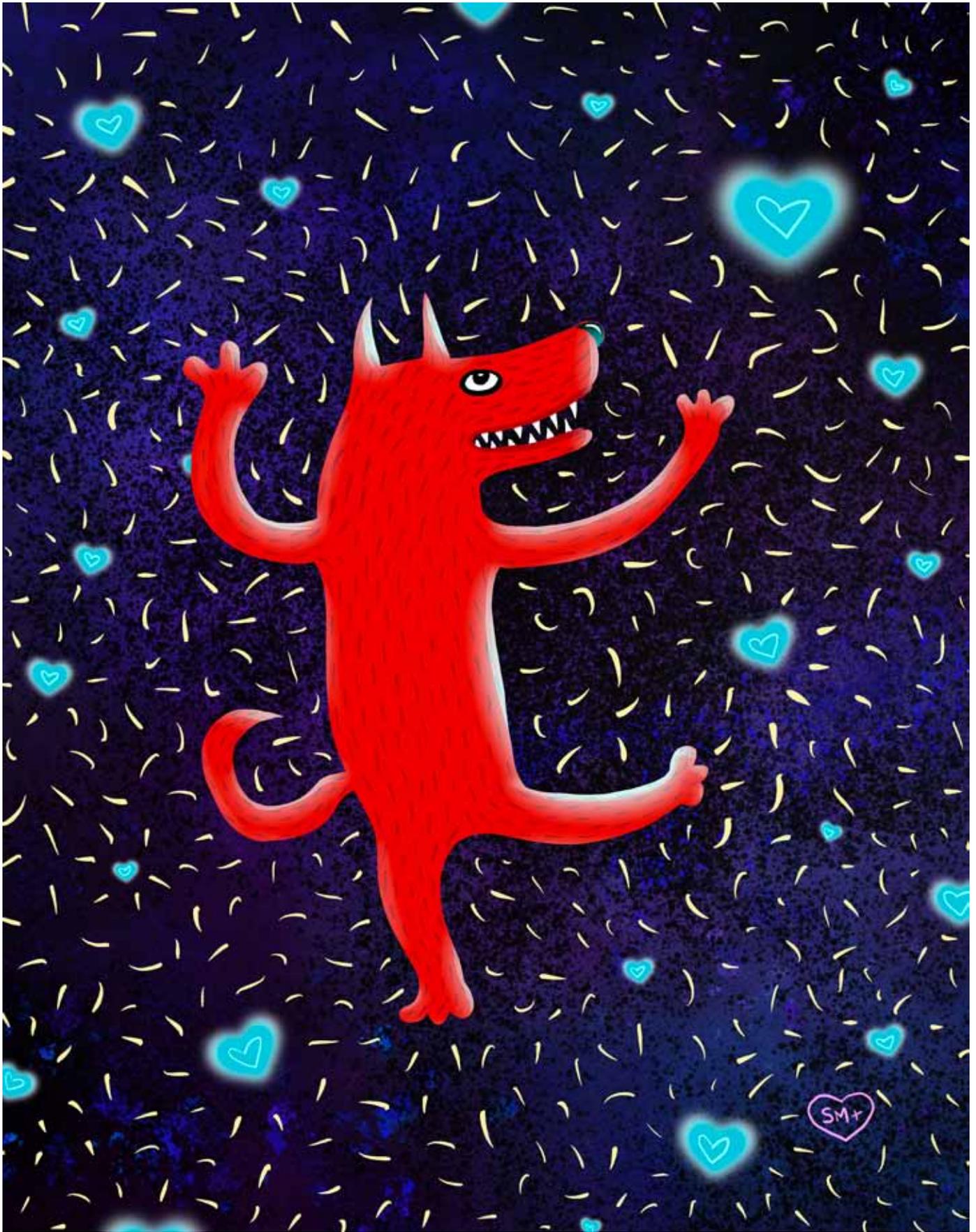


"Revolution in 3 Simple Steps"  
Acrylic on wood box  
8.5"x6"x1.5"  
2018



2018, gouache and marker on paper

Solidarity to all of you in the struggle for a better society. As we worry about the urgency of our situation, sometimes we may feel like there is a lot on our shoulders, or frustrated that we can't do what we think of as "enough," or make the progress we want to. As we focus on our work, let's keep in mind that each of us can only do what we can do, and we're all in this together. Each of us has our role to play. Personally our own contribution may seem small, but it is still necessary, and together our efforts can add up to enough to make the crucial difference.



"Dancing with the Universe," digital, 2021



"Victoria Guinea Pig Leading the People" (commissioned),  
ink on paper with digital color, 2014

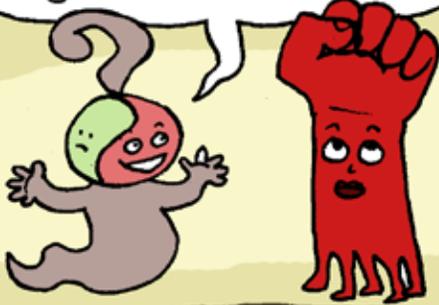


"A Starving Polar Bear Eating an Oil Company Executive,"  
16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020

**How to ABOLISH CAPITALISM**  
-Stephanie McMillan-

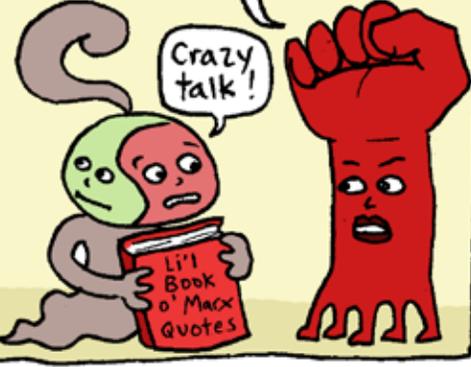
THE APPROACH OF THE PETIT BOURGEOIS LEFT:

We'll engineer system change by combining sharing and gift economies with worker co-ops, horizontal general assemblies and direct democracy to vote in ecosocialism plus a guaranteed income!



THE WORKING CLASS APPROACH:

We seize power, take over production, abolish surplus value, and run things ourselves.



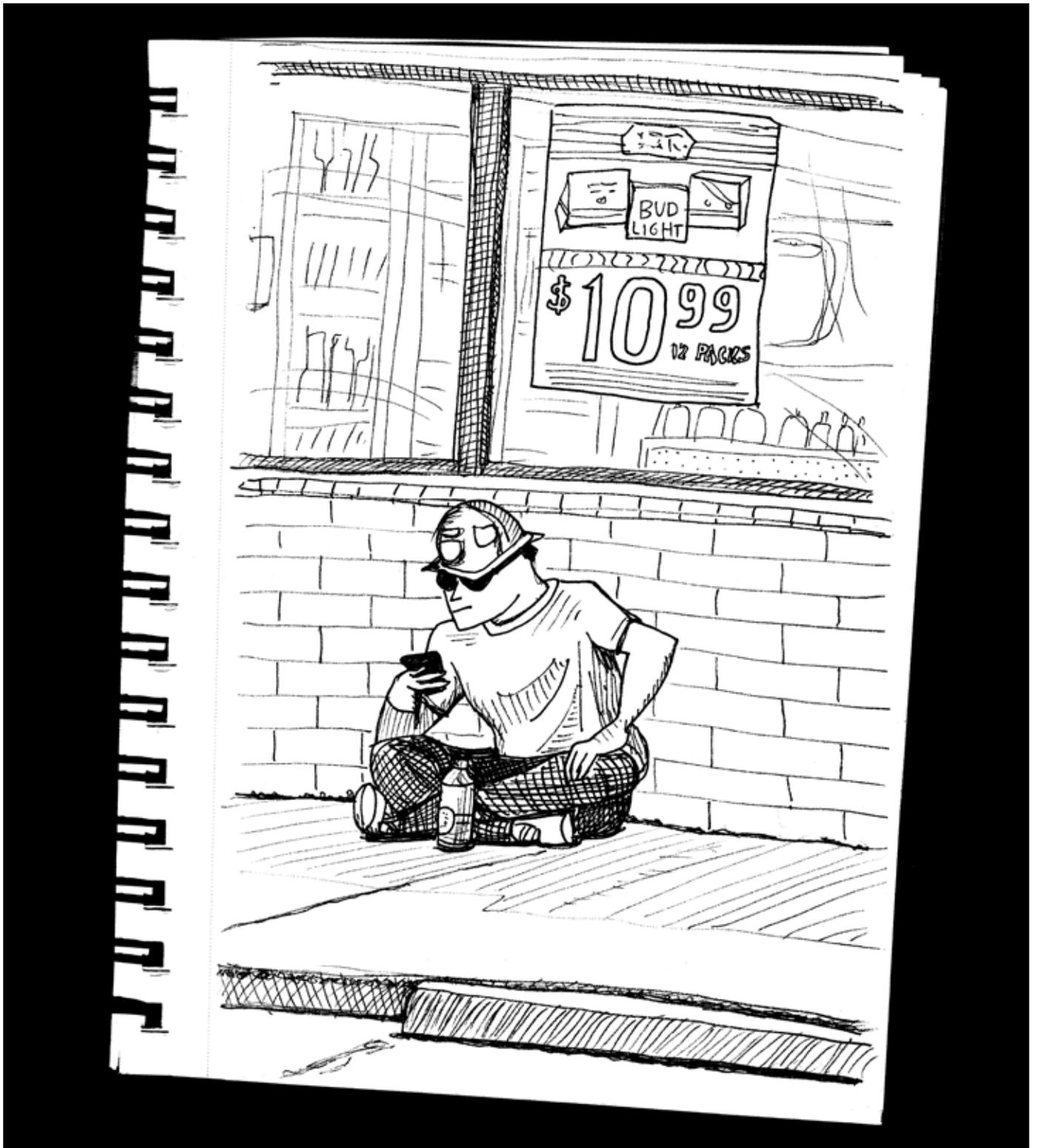
(Left)  
Comic for "Briarpatch" magazine, 2015

During a several-year period, I tried different ways of portraying classes as symbolic figures. I kinda like the fist-with-many-feet for the working class, but the one for the petite bourgeoisie may be too obscure. Its question mark head and ghostly body are intended to evoke the lack of autonomy for the class, and its wavering political loyalties indicated by the two-sided face. I'm not entirely satisfied with either of these characters, but haven't yet figured out anything better.

(Right)  
"After Rain," acrylic on canvas, 24"x36", 2020

A tribute to Chris's banana tree in the yard, who had their first bananas and two pups at the time of this painting. Lots of dragonflies come out and fly around after it rains.





"Taking a Break," ink on paper, 2018



"Hello Little One, Welcome to the World," 12"x12", acrylic on canvas, 2020

"Fort Lauderdale  
Development"  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"  
2018

We're supposed to be "super-excited"  
when greedy fkers fatten their wallets  
to artificially Disneyfy our city and then  
price us out. And we all get to try to  
make our living by playing our parts like  
puppets on strings.



I love Fort Lauderdale. Aside from a few years in New York and Boston, I've lived here all my life. My grandmother came here in 1921 as a schoolteacher. My dad was pushed in his baby carriage down a dirt road that is now a six-lane highway.

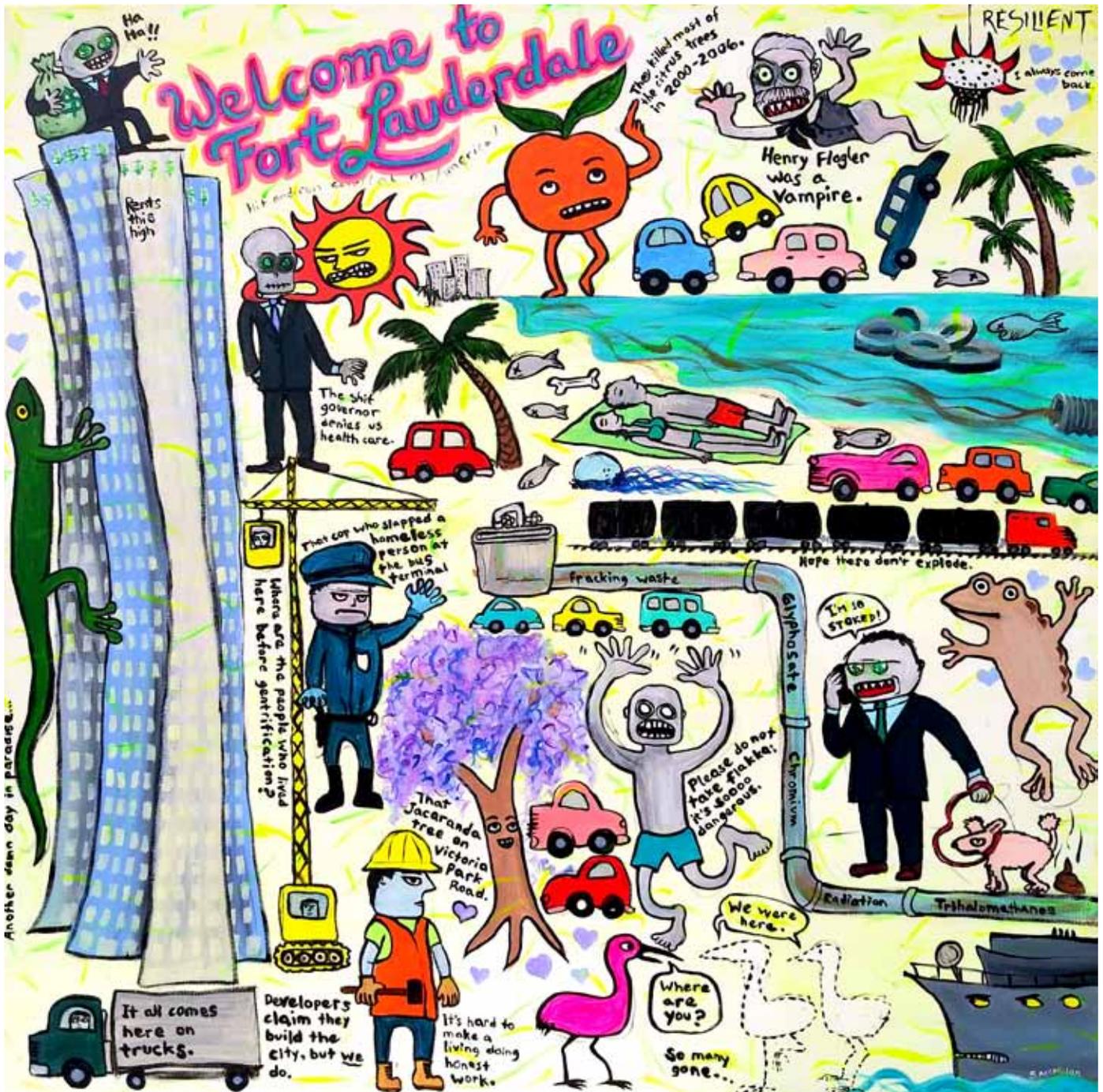
Currently I live only a few blocks from where I was born. There are magnificent trees here, wonderful people, and amazing animals.

But there is also so much wrong. Over-development prioritizes profit over the well-being of residents. Traffic has become awful. So many of the creatures I used to see are drastically reduced in numbers or no longer even here. I remember seeing praying mantises and stick bugs as a kid, but not one for decades. Blue crabs were everywhere. Having governors (the previous one and the new one) who refuse to expand Medicaid to cover those unable to qualify for Obamacare is outrageously shitty. The unaffordable rents and wealth gap are getting worse, and of course sea level rise is going to make the region uninhabitable soon.

So living here is bittersweet, like loving a dying person. Of course we all die; in the meantime we must love one another fiercely and wholeheartedly, and fight to make things good.

This painting is an attempt to capture some of these mixed feelings: the love, the anger, the anxiety, the outrage, the warmth.

The spider in the upper right is a Spiny Orbweaver, scary-looking but nonthreatening, very common around here, persistent and resilient. I love these little cuties (except when I accidentally walk face-first into one of their creepy webs).



"Another Damn Day in Paradise"  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 36"x36"  
 2018

# Bidens alba

& Bidens pilosa



Do your own research before ingesting any new plant!!

- ♥ Anti-inflammatory
- ♥ Anti-fungal, anti-bacterial
- ♥ Fights cancer & malaria
- ♥ Lowers blood sugar & pressure
- ♥ Edible food for humans
- ♥ High in vitamin C
- ♥ Major source of nectar for bees & butterflies
- ♥ Okay, the seeds sticking to your socks are super-annoying, but this is still a damn fine plant deserving love & respect.



A "weed" is just a plant you haven't gotten to know yet.



Made with sticker paper and a used campaign sign, 2020



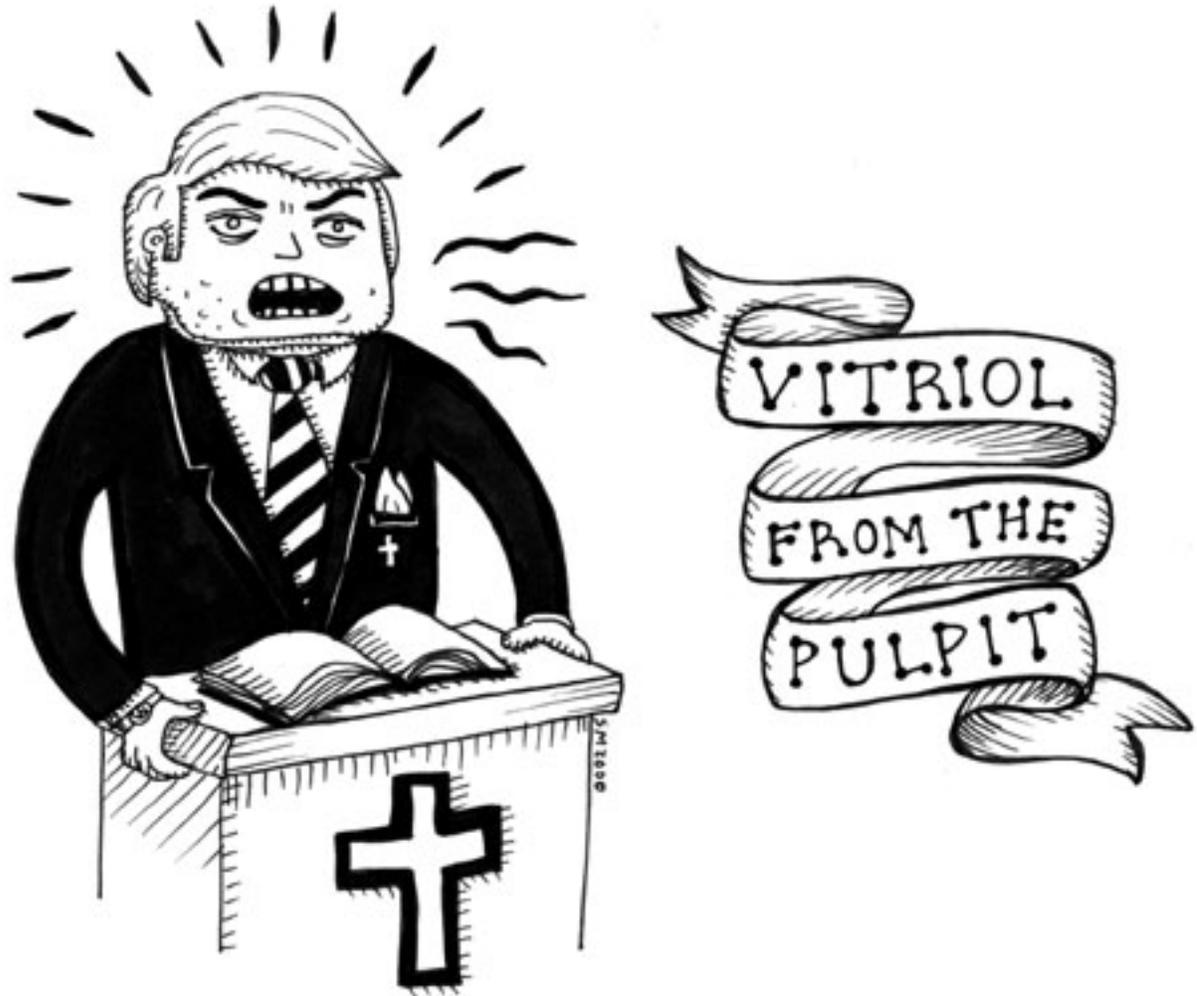
"Have No Fear; Love Is All Around," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018  
We may feel alone sometimes, but it's comforting to remember that we're all in this together.



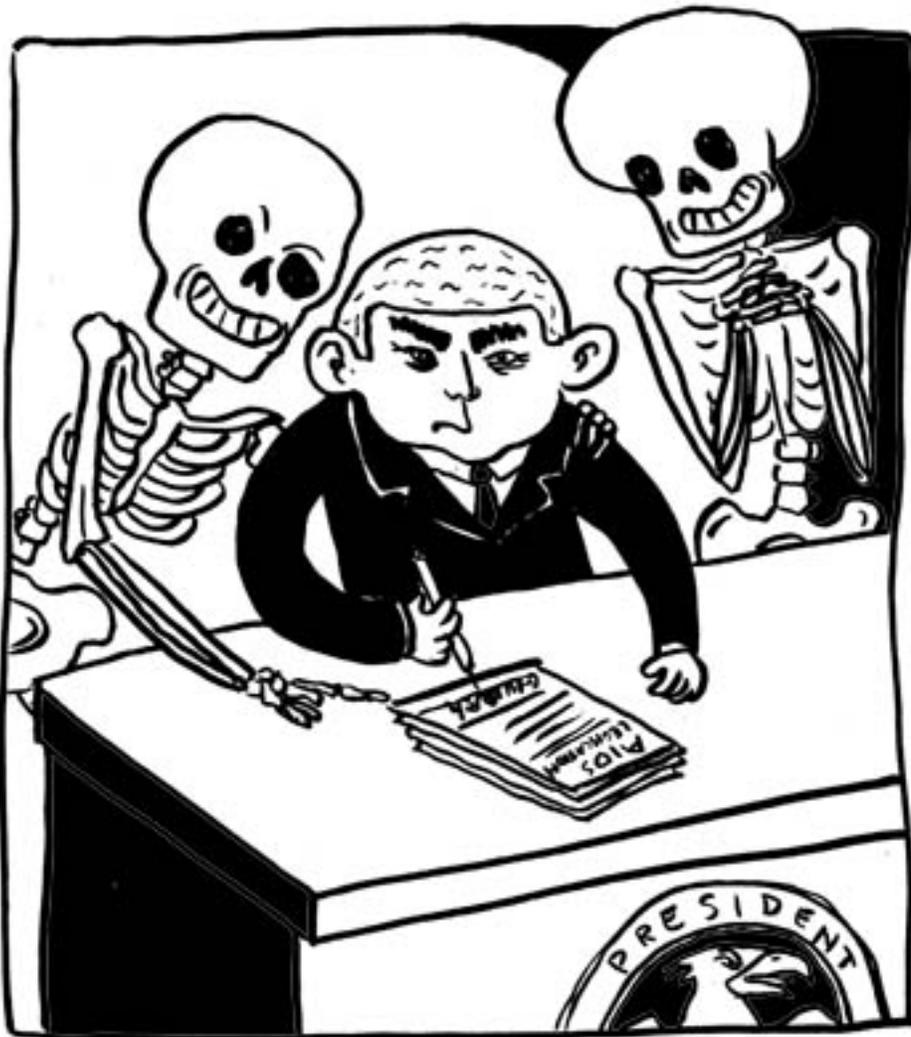
"Certain things may seem inevitable but they haven't actually happened yet,"  
12"x12", acrylic on canvas, 2017  
(This is sort of a self-portrait, by the way).

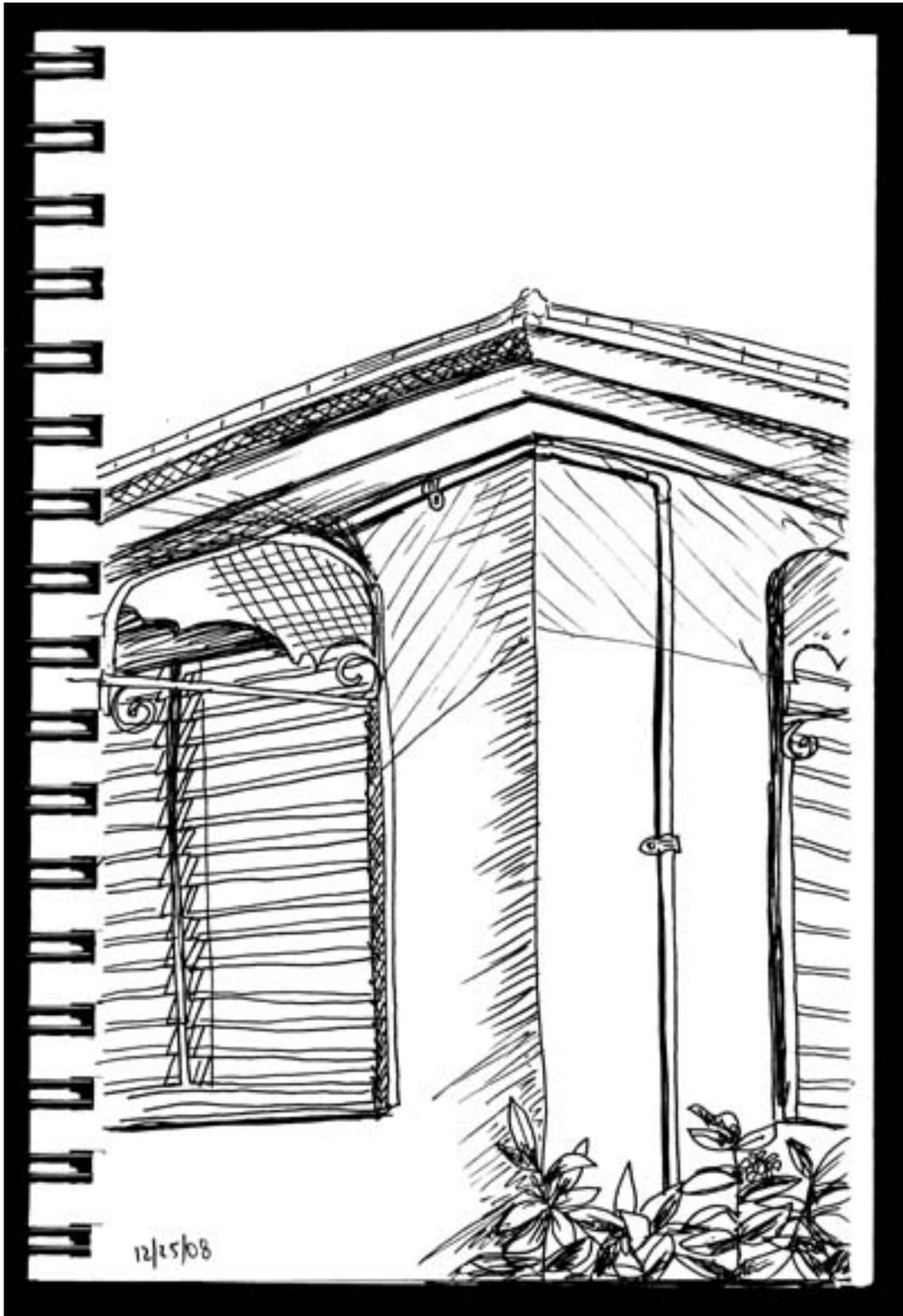


"Schmoozing," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018  
So much self-serving fakery going on.



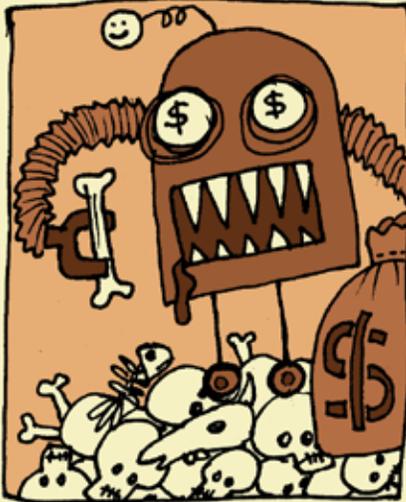
Off and on from 1995 to 2003, I illustrated an annual diary by social worker Paul Gallotta about his work with people with AIDS, published in the now defunct weekly City Link magazine. These two are from 2003.





The corner of my mom's old house, ink on paper, 2008

# UNWANTED



CAPITALISM

- ★ ARMED
- ★ RUTHLESS
- ★ DANGEROUS

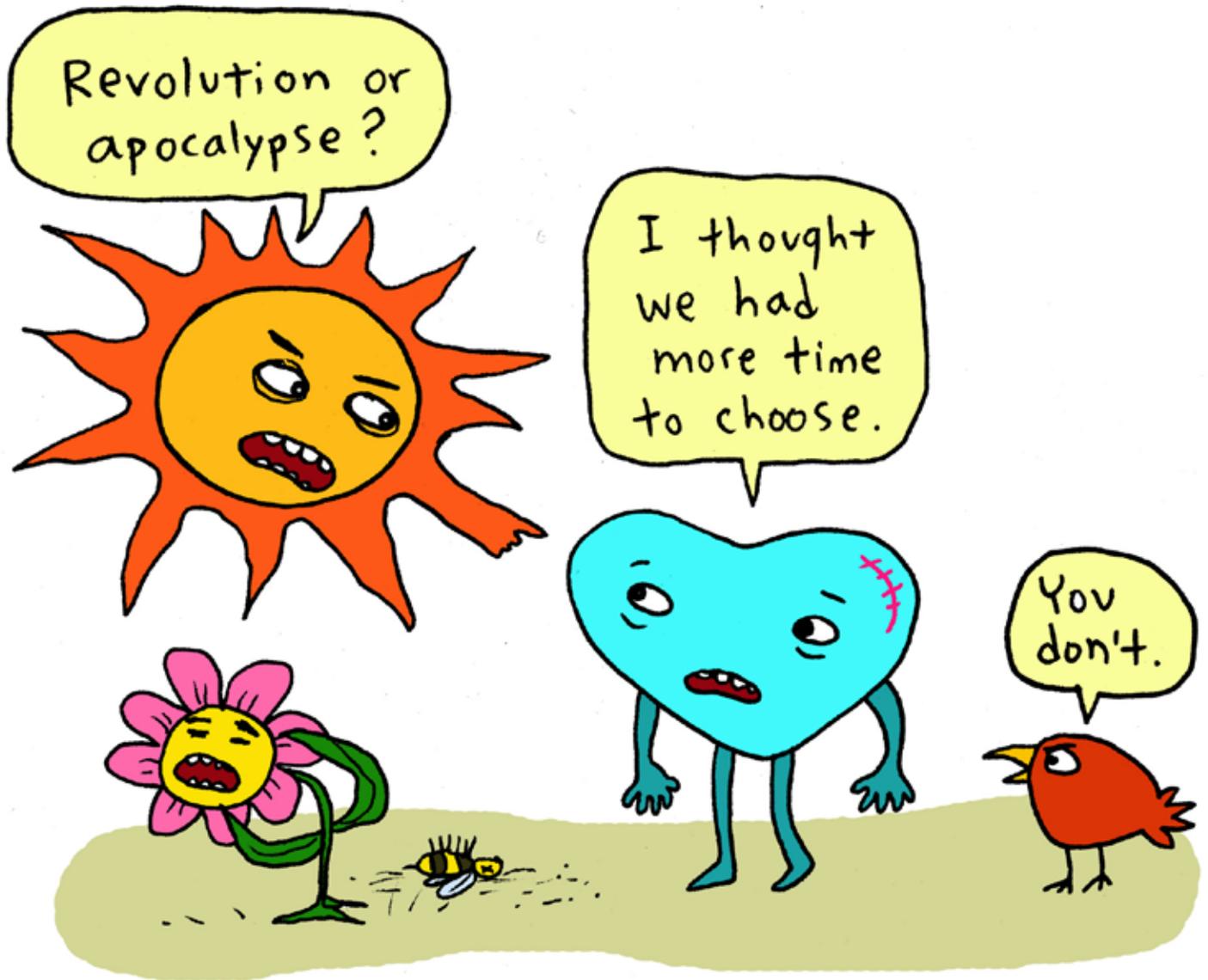
## CRIMES IN PROGRESS:

- ★ Exploiting the majority of humanity for the wealth of a small minority.
- ★ Converting living nature into dead commodities.
- ★ Perpetrating wars, poverty, oppression, and alienation to enforce its dominance.

DO NOT CONFRONT ALONE;  
CAN ONLY BE DESTROYED COLLECTIVELY

REWARD: **EVERYTHING!**

Stephanie McMillan .org

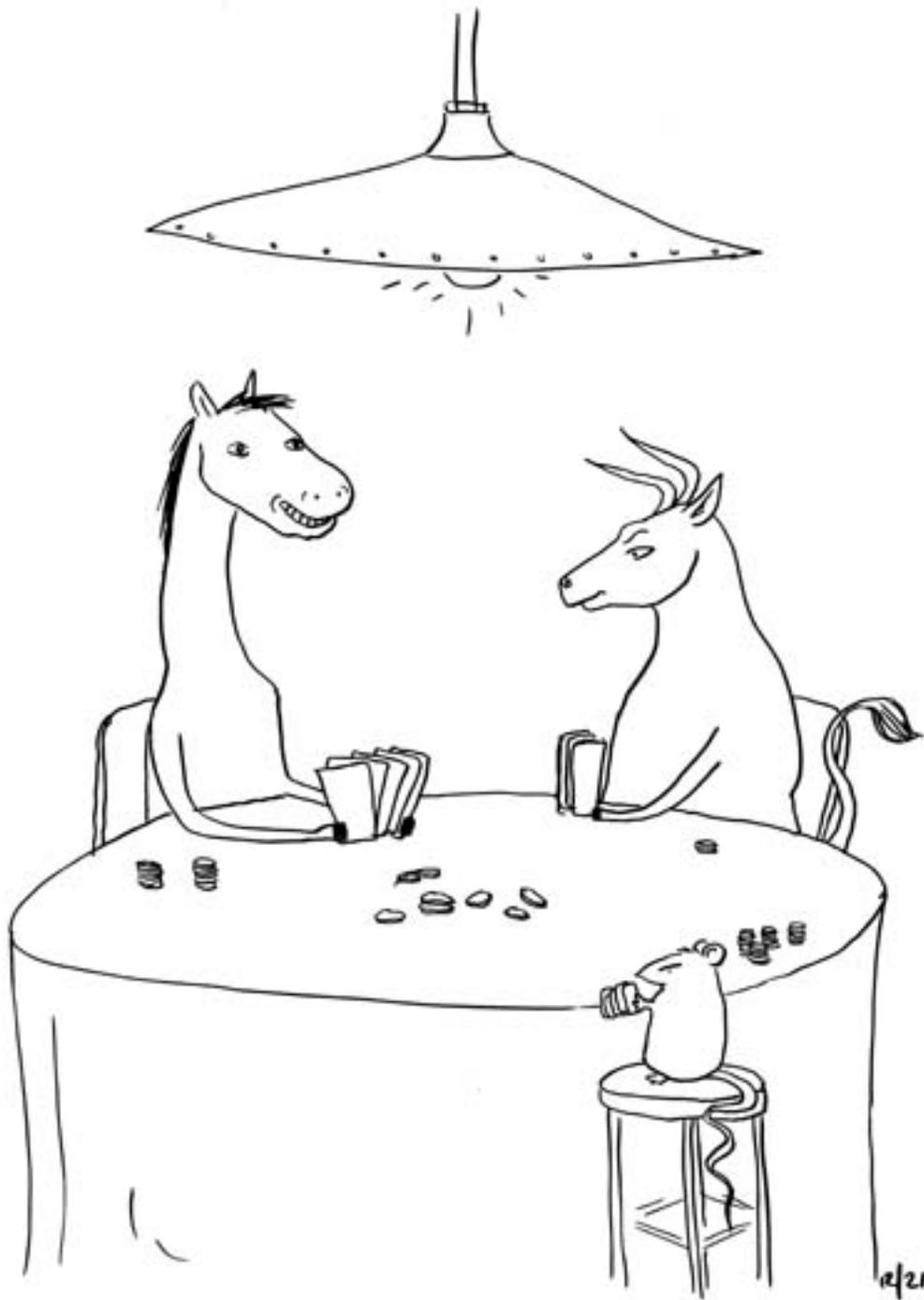


Ink on paper with digital color, 2018

Revolution or apocalypse? Over the passage of time, our options for the future are narrowing down to one simple choice. It seems like we're right up on it, totally unprepared. Let's hope it's not too late for even having any choice.



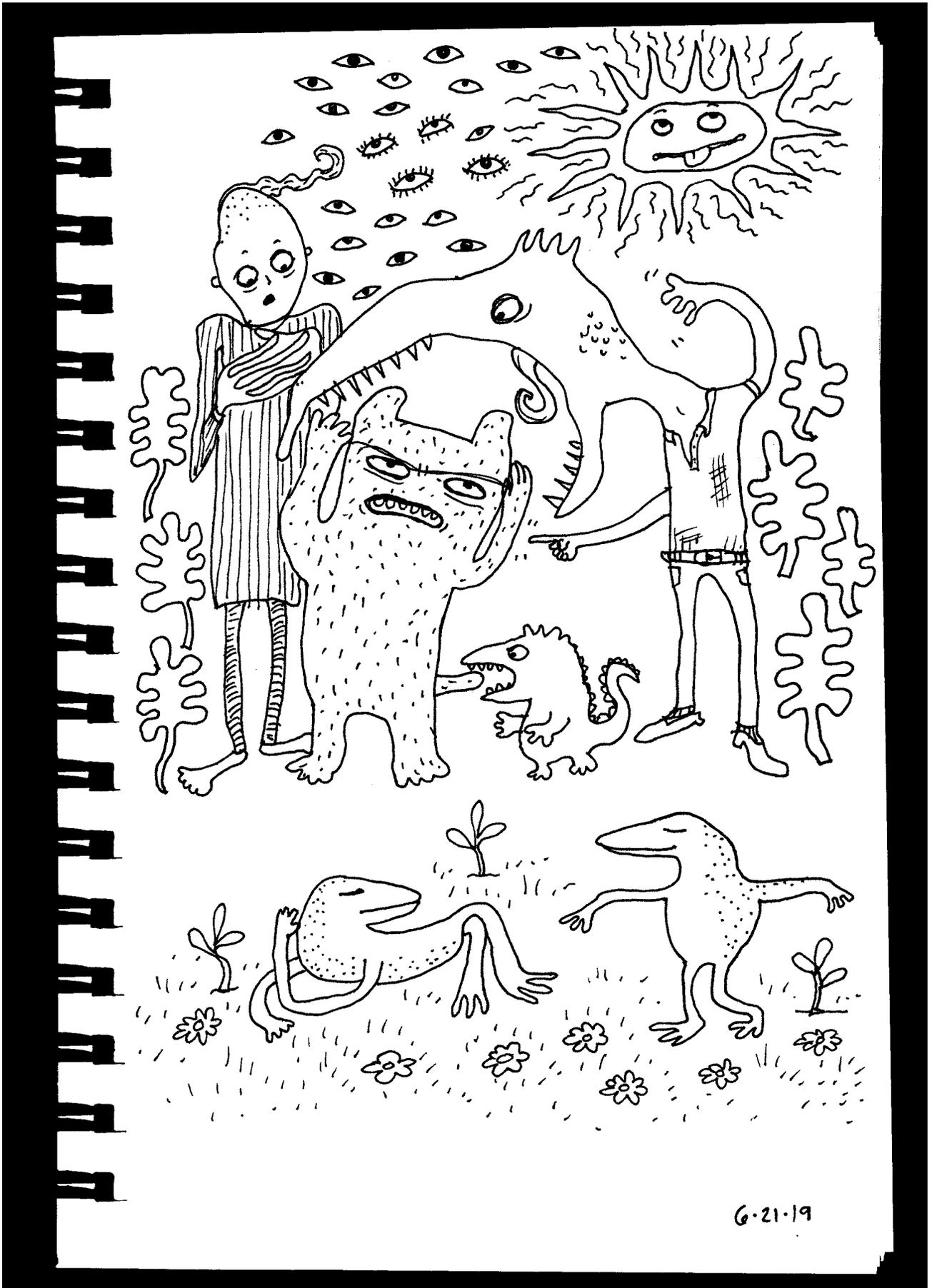
"Imperialism" 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2019



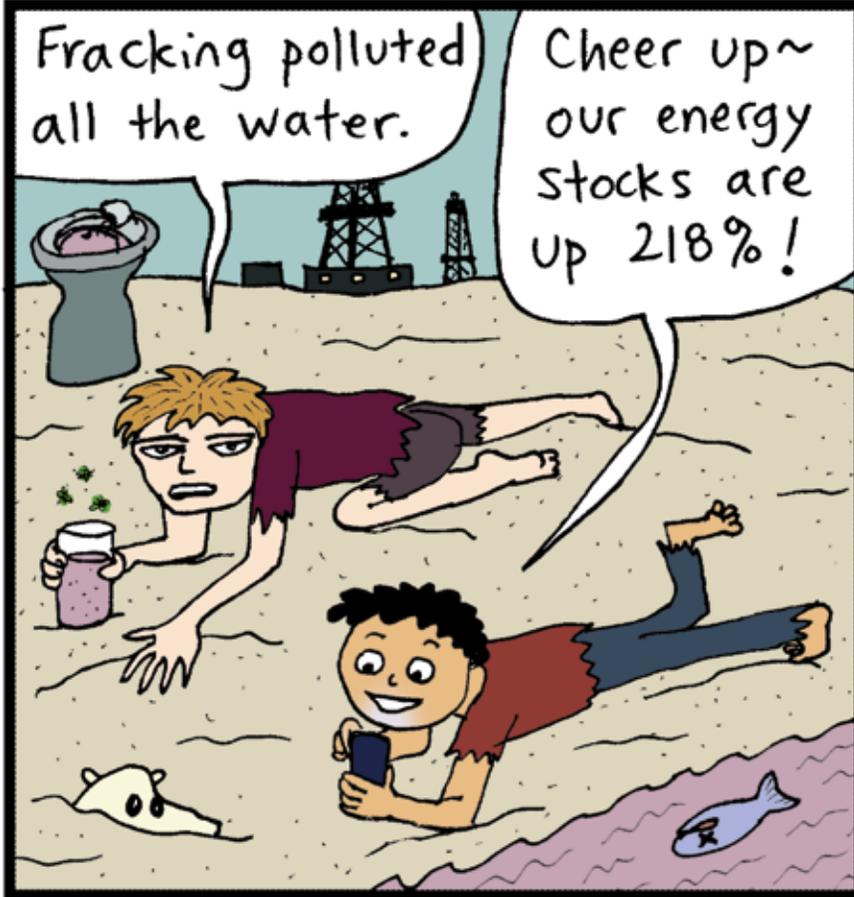
Ink on paper, 2008



"Businesspeople Eating a Corpse" 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018



# LEFT COAST <sup>Stephanie McMillan</sup>



A cartoon from my weekly gig for Pasadena Weekly, which lasted about 6 months in 2014.

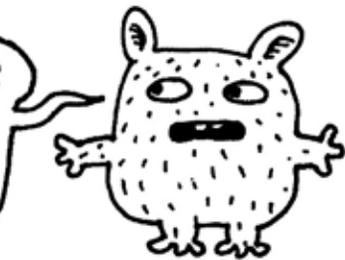
## DOGMATIC NOT DIALECTIC

I find it disturbing when those who claim to understand things dialectically actually frame so many arguments dualistically instead. And very dogmatically too.

Dialectics is so much more than how some people seem to define it (as the struggle and unity of opposites). Dominant & rising tendencies aren't "opposite" so much as interdependent components in tension with each other. When one totally obliterates the other, it also disappears.

This isn't anything new, but it's still irritating to see people claiming to "believe" in dialectical materialism while acting or writing so dogmatically.

I say this as someone who's often done the same thing...

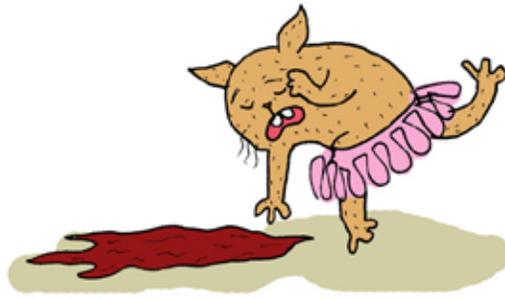


11.15.2018



# INTERMISSION

Please enjoy Victoria Guinea pig performing an original interpretation of Maxim Gorky's "Mother."  
Special Guest Star: BUNNISTA!



FIN



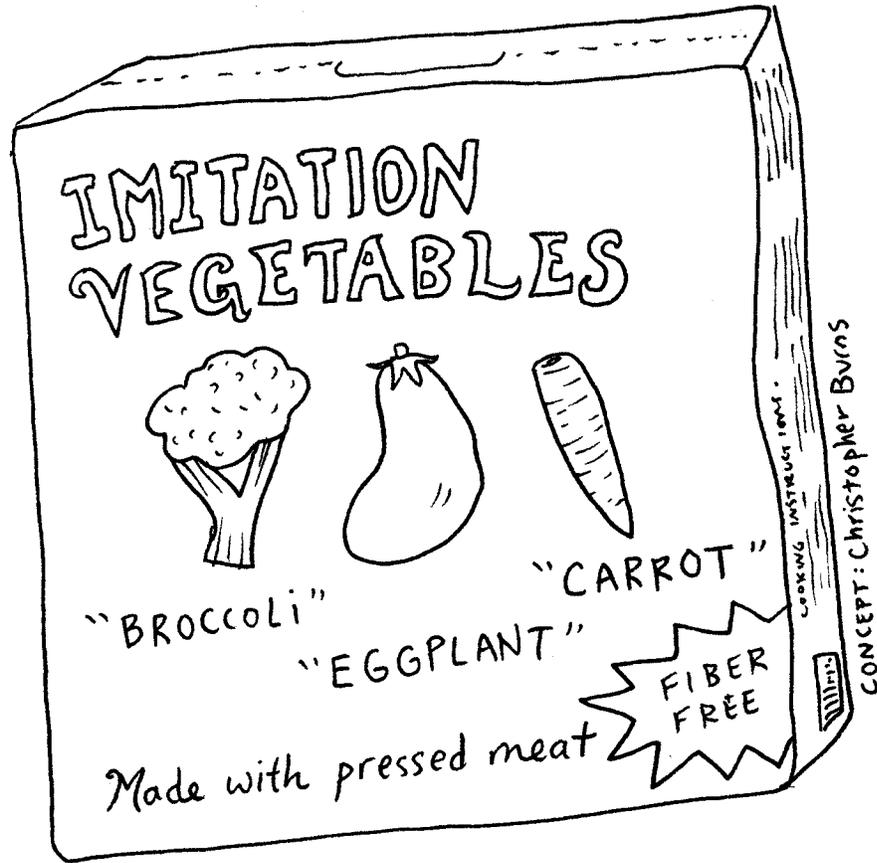
"Fascist USA: The Booming Business of Child Concentration Camps,"  
16"x20", acrylic and paint marker on canvas, 2019



Clocks,  
laminated  
prints on wood,  
6"x7", 2018



"I haven't seen you around here for a while. Are you ok? Will you return?  
(Leaf insect, burrowing owl, epazote, ringneck snake, banana spider)," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020





"Hell Yeah!" 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2018



"Hell No!"  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"  
2020

Dedicated to workers striking and taking other forms of collective action (at the time of making this) in India, France, Kentucky and elsewhere



"Capitalism's  
Last Supper"  
Acrylic on canvas  
24"x48"  
2019

(Right)

This is an idea of what could occur if tenants were organized enough to fight against predatory and unscrupulous landlords, real estate developers, venture capitalists, banks, and others who control land and housing in our society, plus the political institutions who enforce their assertion of the right to do so. I'm not focusing here on small individual landlords, but condemning the entire system of profiting from the private ownership of what should be collectively controlled.

It's wrong that the necessities of life are allowed to be monopolized as private property by the small ruling class, and withheld from the majority unless we meet their terms. It's a form of extortion to withhold necessities until money is handed over. Necessities -- food, shelter, clothing, medicine, education, etc -- should be socially distributed according to need.

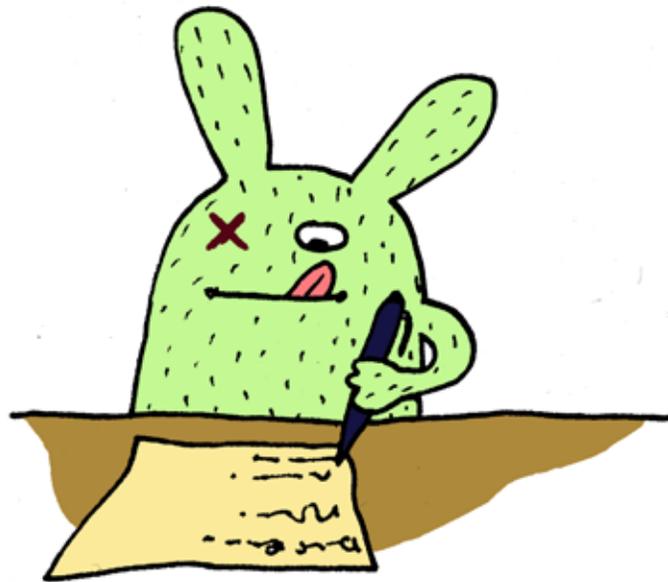
After being robbed in the workplace by capitalist exploiters, working people are squeezed again for the remainder of already measly wages. They sell back to us what was produced by the working class in the first place. This arrangement is completely absurd when you think about it, except that we've been conditioned to believe that it's normal and natural.

Currently landlords have the armed power of the state backing them up; but if the working class becomes organized enough to fight as one unified force, then today's appallingly unjust power relationship would flip to its opposite!



"Bloodsucking Extortionists" 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2019

Dear Capitalism,  
FUCK OFF.  
Sincerely,  
99.99999...% of all lifeforms on Earth





This loud mockingbird sings and makes the sunny moment perfect.  
16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020



The emancipation struggle of the working class is inherently grassroots, collective and democratic; if not, that's a sign that other classes have taken over.

# "Power Struggles at Work" (a group of paintings)

2019

The engine of the global capitalist system is the exploitation of labor for the private accumulation of profit, fueled by the destruction of the natural world as raw materials being converted into commodities. Thus the working class is trapped at the convergence of the most urgent and widespread political, economic, social and environmental crises that humanity currently faces. Workers' self-organized, collective action could have the potential to overturn the entire omniscient system. Because of this, their struggles are violently divided and suppressed, their needs denied, their voices ignored, and their collective existence rendered invisible.

This collection spotlights several workers' grievances and testimony, in their own words. These paintings are a tribute to their outrage, courage and combativeness. My hope is to increase broad appreciation of the fact that workers are waging class struggle constantly, all over the world, and that it takes many forms. And from there, to encourage solidarity and organized support.

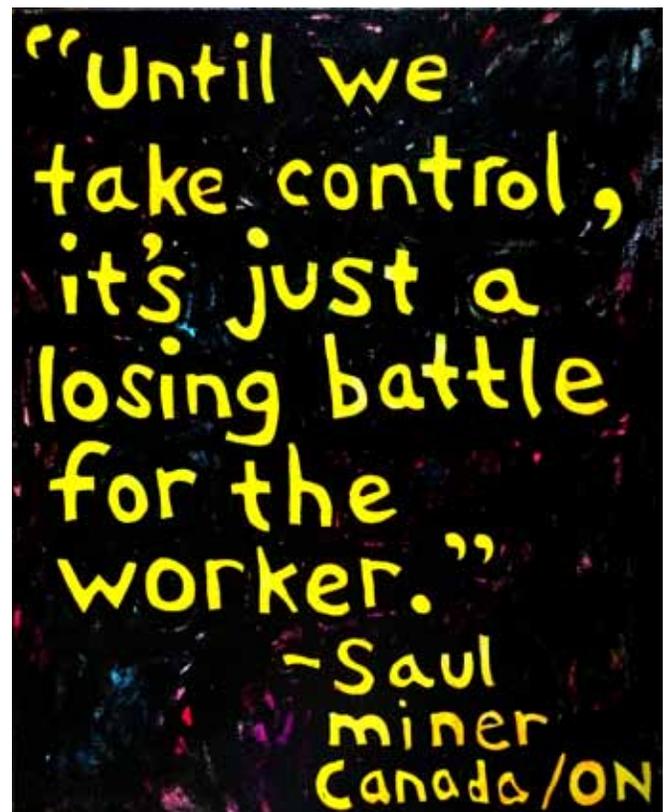
All proceeds from the two paintings I sold from this series so far were sent to the workers waging the struggles they referred to, and I checked with them first to make sure they approved of me producing and selling them in the first place. In one case, workers requested copies as posters to distribute among themselves, which I sent. Another painting I gave to the worker who made the statement in it.

Everyone quoted agreed that their words would be made public, and/or made their statements in a public venue. In all but one case (the Kentucky miner, which was from a news report), they're from interviews that I or my friends/comrades conducted personally, writings we personally

encouraged workers to create and share, or comments we heard during the course of organizing work. Real names (and then just first names) are used only with permission or if the quote is already publicly attached to the name; otherwise names have been changed to protect those speaking out from possible negative workplace consequences.

So as not to present myself as the principal creator (when the words are not mine), I've not signed the front of the pieces.

All the paintings are acrylic on canvas. All are 16"x20", with the exception of the one on the left facing page, which is a laminated print of the 24"x30" original.



“Viv  
solidarite  
entènasyonal  
klas  
ouvriye a!”  
~Télémarque  
Garment worker  
Haiti

“This is  
slavery  
in here.”  
~Grocery  
warehouse  
worker,  
USA

“The union  
is only  
as strong  
as its  
members.”  
~Milly  
Laundry worker  
Canada

“I’m not  
fucking  
doing  
that.”  
~Chris  
truck driver  
USA/FL

"Everyone here is somewhat disgruntled."  
-Paul  
Food production  
USA

"¡Tenemos que hablar con una sola voz!"  
-Truck driver  
USA/FL

"Even though we may lose battles, we gain valuable experience in struggle."  
-Robert  
RAILROAD WORKER, USA

"Pay US."  
-Chris  
miner  
USA/KY

"We suffer  
a lot because  
they don't give  
us enough  
Salary."  
-Mina  
garment worker  
Bangladesh

# A Garment Worker in Bangladesh Speaks Out

Originally appeared in  
One Struggle newspaper, 2013

Mina\* was 15 years old last year when she started working at Pretty Group, a garment factory in Gazipur, a suburb of Dhaka, Bangladesh. She spoke of her situation: "We suffer a lot because they don't give us enough salary. I receive 5000 taka (less than \$65) per month. They don't pay overtime."

This is actually higher than the minimum wage of 3000 taka (\$38.72) per month, but is still not even close to being enough to live on, confirmed Faiezul Hakim Lala, the President of the Bangladesh Trade Union Federation. The BTUF is an autonomous (non-NGO-affiliated) workers organization established in 1978. It organizes rickshaw pullers, construction workers, informal laborers, railway, jute mill and garment workers, rice farmers and others.

Lala explained that soon the government is planning declare a higher minimum wage for the workers, but only because they want votes in the coming election. The new proposed minimum wage will be a paltry 4500 taka per month. The BTUF declares that this is totally inadequate, and that the bare minimum to support a family with two children should be 18,000 taka. This takes into account 10,000 tk for basic food (daily calories only for survival, enough just to go the next day to the factory) as well as 4000-5000 tk for rent (for two rooms), 15000 tk for transportation, plus some for medical allowance and children's education.

Mina said in a soft voice, "I usually work from 7 in the morning until 10 or 11 at night, and sometimes until 3 a.m. They force us to work at night, midnight." I asked her how she gets home. She said she walks by herself, but that it wasn't far. "I'm scared but still I do it."

"If we say anything about it [being forced to work extra hours] then they threaten us. We're scared to lose our jobs." She lives with her sister, also a garment worker. "Sometimes we say that we should move out from here, but we have no options."

Mina said that she sewed sweaters, and also attached labels. I asked her what the labels said, but she didn't remember. She described the colors, though: white with blue and red. I googled some common brand labels on a laptop for her to examine. She recognized one, and pointed to it on the screen, nodding. "Yes, that one." Tommy Hilfiger. (A brand worth \$3 billion in 2010 when PVH Corp. bought it in 2010).

Vijay\* is an industrial engineer at a garment factory, also living in Dhaka. Though he has a higher level job, he still works long hours, coming home after 10 p.m. each night, and struggles to make ends meet. He lives with his wife and child in one room of their extended family's house. He prefers not to name the company he works for, in order not to risk losing his job. It employs 4500 workers who produce garments for major brands including H&M (Sweden), Next (UK) and Gap (USA).

His task is to increase factory efficiency, maximizing production and minimizing cost. He showed me a small metal contraption that attaches to a sewing machine. "This folds belt loops," he said. "It eliminates one job on each production line."

He tells me that his company does not hire underage workers, though he knows that many others do. (At a meeting I attended with members of the Garment Workers Union, affiliated with BTUF, several workers confirmed that children under 18 are working at factories producing clothing for JC Penney, Walmart and Disney). "The foreign buyers come often to inspect our

\* (Mina and Vijay are false names, to protect their identities.)

factories," he said, and therefore they comply with age and safety regulations. However, he also said that the owners break the rules when they can get away with it, and provide false records about the workers' pay. "They show the foreigners papers that say they pay us on time and the proper amounts, but they don't. They tell them we get one day off per week, but we don't."

Vijay showed me a chart that quantified how many minutes it's supposed to take to produce each garment. Based on that speed, the workers are given production targets, quotas to fulfill within the workday. If these are not met, the workers must work extra hours. The workers can usually keep up the fast pace at first, but soon grow tired, explained Vijay. "Then they are criticized, and told, 'You are not working properly.'"

For example, one particular item for the Gap is supposed to take 22 minutes and ten seconds. A line of workers is ordered to produce 1000 of these per day. Vijay said, "Our factory group produces 800,000 items per month, minimum. A realistic profit for the factory owner, after all production costs, is at least \$2 per item. Think, how much money that is." I asked him

about wages. "The minimum wage was recently raised, but the owners totally ignored it. They also raised production quotas," he said.

For those who don't like to do math, the factory owners make \$1,600,000 profit per month after all production costs. That's after paying \$174,240, which would be the total monthly labor cost at the minimum wage, to be divided among 4500 workers.

Mina continued describing her life as a garment worker, "If I am a little late, my supervisor criticizes me a lot, and threatens me that I will lose my job." I asked her if she had ever been physically abused. She replied, "They have not beaten me but they do it to the helpers of the operators - they usually slap them or beat them. I've seen that. They are 14 or 15 year old girls, and some older women too."

I asked her if she knew that in stores in the west, the sweaters she made often cost \$40-\$50 or more. Her face fell. "No," she whispered. I asked, "How would the workers feel to know that they work two weeks or a month for the final retail price of a single sweater?" Mina seemed close to tears. "I feel bad. This will hurt our feelings, but we don't have any choice. We have to work, that's all."



I asked Mina if there was anything she wanted to tell people who might see her interview in other parts of the world. She replied, "I want everyone should know this story, then we won't suffer, maybe people could help us. It's good for it to be exposed, how we're suffering."

I asked her, finally, "What do garment workers want?" The translator said he wasn't sure Mina was mature enough to answer this question, but agreed to ask her anyway. She didn't hesi-

tate, or need to think about it. She sat very straight, her voice becoming strong. "We want proper hours of work, 8 hours, which is the official law. Not more than that. We want a proper salary. The right amount for us to live. We want them to pay us on time. And we don't want to be forced to work extra hours. That's all we want."

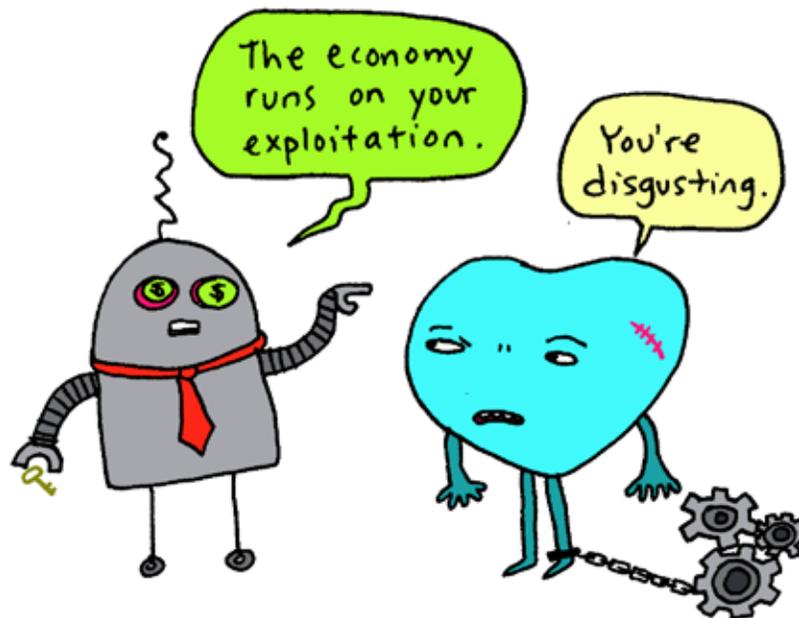
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"In prison, there is some freedom. But in factory, there is no freedom."

-- Abdul, member of Garment Workers Union

"I want to state our position. We did not consider that the collapse at Rana Plaza was an accident. We stated that it is a mass killing of the workers. It was not an accident. Because the building, it was already declared that it was not usable. There was a bank branch [in the same building], they had 13 or 19 employees. On that day, they did not come to the office. The office was closed. That day, on 24th April, this year, the workers came in front of the factory, and they declined to enter the factory, because they already knew that this factory was not safe for them. On this day, the owner of the building, he had some guards, some musclemen. They threatened the workers, to enter the factory and work. At the same time, the owner of the garment factory stressed that, if you do not do it, you do not get your salary. If they are one day absent, the owner will cut three days wages."

-- Faiezul Hakim Lala, President of the Bangladesh Trade Union Federation



Drawing: 2018



"Possum Drinking Beer" 24"x36", acrylic on canvas, 2017



"Trump Cutting Board," 2018-ish

I don't expend much energy critiquing specific politicians, because I think they all suck. But once this occurred to me, I had to do it -- because it's funny.



"Collectivizing Food,"  
an imaginary scene  
from the process of  
the revolution,  
drawing, 2019

I've been thinking about a possible series: "Scenes from the Revolution." It would be a way for me to concretely imagine potential "model" (general) moments in the revolutionary process. As much as I talk and write and paint about why capitalism is omnicidal and the need for revolution to stop the horrors, I realize I don't often explore what a revolution can be like in to-

day's world. We dream about how things might be different after overcoming capitalism, the problems that could be solved, but how do we get from here to there? What parts of today are \*already\* part of the process, and what might people do tomorrow? I haven't actually had much of a clear picture of possible moments, beyond generalities like "we need to organize



and fight." I don't think it's desirable or useful to try to predict specific events and actions, or assert that things have to go a certain way. But at the same time, without imagining some kind of concrete potential path, it's impossible to get to a destination. So I'm thinking about spending some time on that.

"The Owner Finally Agreed to the Workers' Demands"  
Acrylic on canvas  
36"x436"  
2019

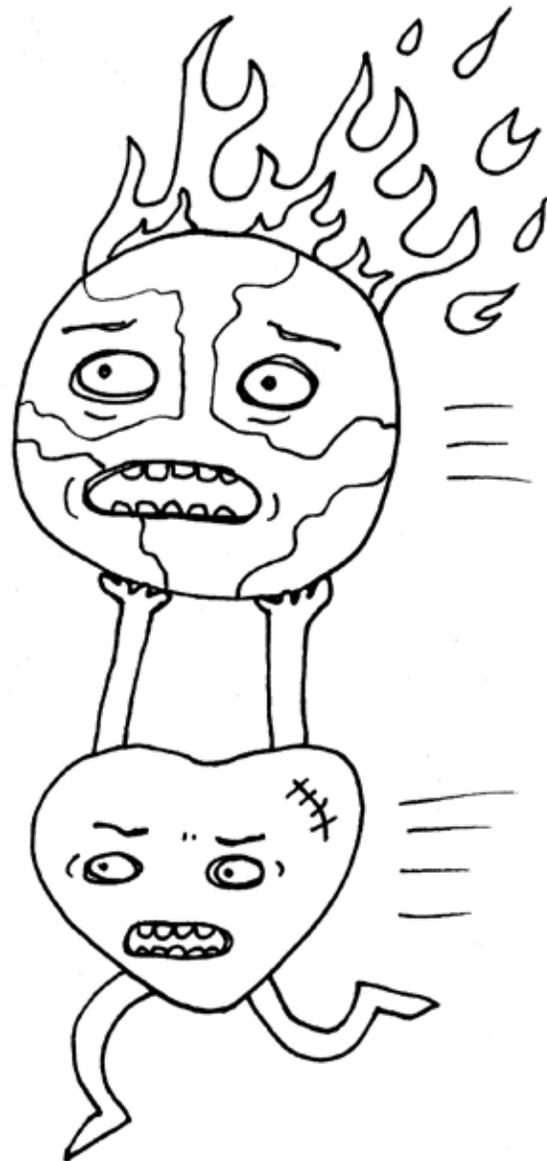


"Portrait of This Spiny Orbweaver," inspired by a photograph by Colleen M. Dougher, 12"x12", acrylic on canvas, 2017

(Right) "International Working Class Revolution," 24"x48", acrylic on canvas, 2019  
Anything less -- even if otherwise positive -- will just not cut it.

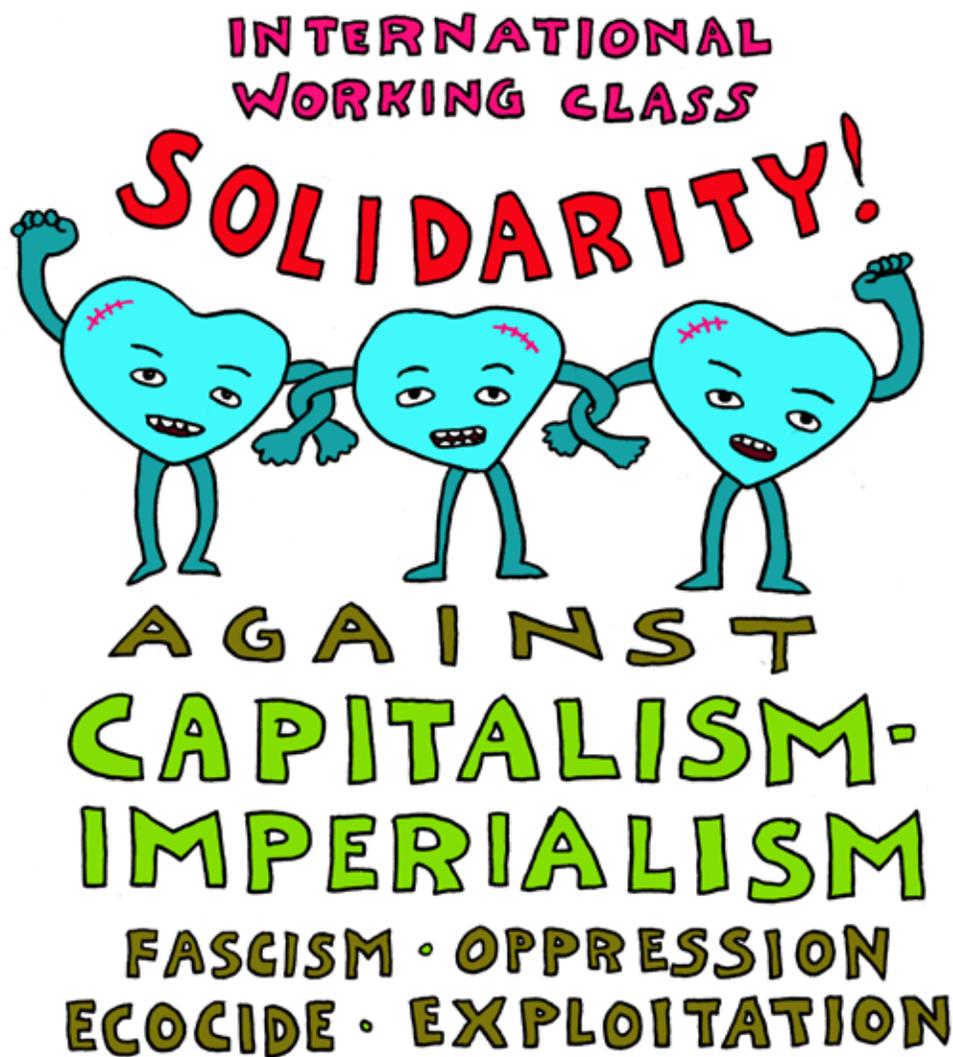


# WORLD in FLAMES





A no-longer-existing clock made of a scrap of Plasticore, the material that campaign lawn signs are made of, 2018



2018

As the tangle of worldwide economic, environmental and political crises draws ever tighter, more than ever we need to assert and enact solidarity with the broad laboring classes around the globe. Our only hope for a viable future exists in rejecting nationalism and other artificial divisions imposed among us, and coming together to fight our common enemy, the capitalist-imperialist system.

"YOUR CALL OF THE WILD  
WILL BE ANSWERED IN  
THE ORDER IT WAS  
RECEIVED..."



# Interview about the book "Capitalism Must Die!"

By Aaron Leonard for rabble.ca  
September, 2015

AL: Some of your images are so playful, yet your message is so serious – how did you arrive at a place of undertaking radical politics through comics?

SM: I loved drawing, and reading comics, ever since I was a kid. By age 10 I had learned to draw Snoopy by tracing Peanuts, and decided I wanted to be a cartoonist someday. I was in high school during the Reagan years, as the U.S./USSR inter-imperialist struggle was heating up [in the form of the Cold War] to what seemed a very dangerous pitch. I wrote my first article for the school paper, with an accompanying illustration, about the dangers of and need to oppose nuclear weapons.

Then I went to college in New York, studying animation while organizing with the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade [the youth group of the U.S. Revolutionary Communist Party]. I quickly realized that it was more important to focus on revolutionary change rather than pursue a career for myself, but my father, dying of cancer, asked me to finish school and graduate. After fulfilling my parents' wishes, I spent the next period of my life organizing, while supporting myself with a succession of temp/clerical, factory and retail jobs.

In the late 1990s, for various reasons, I left the RCP. I still wanted to contribute to the cause of revolution, but now had no organizational framework in which to do that. I thought about how an individual could reach people with ideas and

make a social impact. I decided that comics could be an effective vehicle because they are appealing, fast and easy to produce, and can carry a message to a wide audience.

My cartoons evolved through several stages, including traditionally formatted editorial cartoons, gag cartoons, and a sequential narrative comic strip. Recently I was challenged by a comrade to develop a "proletarian conception of cartoons," and that's led to a new series of comics that go beyond a critique of capitalism to also assert a working-class alternative. They're often paired with theoretical and political texts.

AL: Much of your work has focused on the environment – why is this such a focus of your work?

SM: Global warming, which is already causing mass extinction and rapidly increasing world-wide suffering, and might culminate in an end of life on Earth, is the most urgent problem that humanity faces. After coming to grips with the extent of the environmental emergency, I focused on sounding the alarm by drawing a weekly cartoon called "Code Green," from 2009–2012. Horrified and outraged in the wake of the BP oil spill in 2010, I also started organizing again. This was a turning point for me because I saw, for the first time with my own eyes, the way NGOs take over and pacify broad organizing efforts.

Because environmental destruction is an inevitable effect of capitalism, and can't be resolved within the capitalist framework, I worked to help build an anti-cap-

italist pole within the progressive scene, including Occupy. Through the twists and turns of those experiences, along with my developing relationship with a revolutionary organization, I came to understand that revolution isn't going to happen unless the popular mass movement we're trying to construct is under the leadership of the working class.

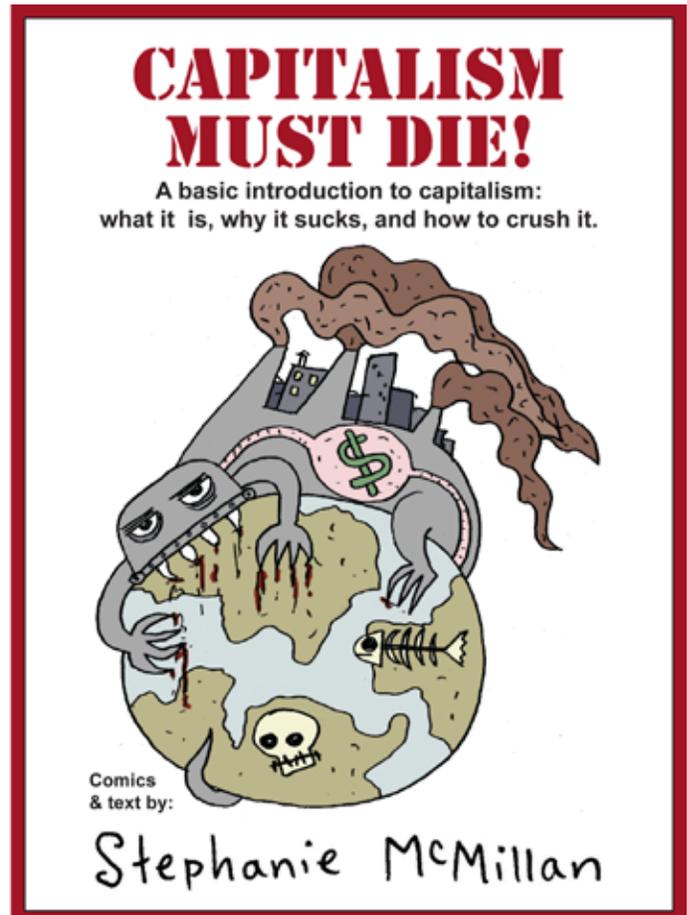
I began to see the limitations of my previous political work; that no matter how much we may have talked about revolution, without working class leadership, reforms are the only possible result.

AL: Who are these characters and why are they in a book explaining "commodity fetishism"? And oh what happened to the bunny's eye?

SM: The possibility of revolution is becoming more widely discussed, and even embraced, as capitalism's crisis deepens. When I started drawing these comics, it was difficult to persuade most people to even entertain the idea or give it a hearing. I decided that if a cute bunny and guinea pig talked about challenging topics like the problems with capitalism and the need for revolution, it might feel less threatening and off-putting to potential readers.

Also, colourful graphics help draw readers in to give longer texts a chance, which they otherwise might avoid as potentially boring. Plus, why should capitalist propaganda get all the attractive imagery?

As for the bunny's eye, during the narrative comic strip phase, Bunnista lost it to shampoo testing in a lab. He later escaped and returned to free his fellow bunnies and all the other lab animals.



AL: Parts of "Capitalism Must Die!" reminds me of Fredrick Jameson's description of capitalism, "[a] peculiar machine whose evolution is at one with its breakdown, its expansion at one with its malfunction, its growth with its collapse." What do you want folks to take away from this volume?

SM: That's a great description of it. Increasing numbers of people are seeking a path out of this global capitalist nightmare. But we're not taught revolutionary theory in school, and reading three thick volumes of Capital or a mountain of academic prose is more of a commitment than most people want to initially undertake.

With "Capitalism Must Die!" I wanted to provide a brief, simple and nonsectarian signpost to a viable revolutionary path, an introduction that could help readers gain

enough confidence to join the struggle.

We urgently need to defeat capitalism, and we need to be armed with some basic concepts and orientation if we're not to waste our efforts on flawed strategies. I wanted to provide something useful, a tool that anyone could use to begin organizing others.

AL: For better or worse comics have played a sharp satirical role, from Lil' Abner to Bloom County to Boondocks. What do you think is the responsibility of the progressive and radical cartoonist to the wider world?

SM: Progressive or radical artists, musicians, performers, writers, academics, journalists and others working in the cultural (ideological) realm, should put our work at the service of the masses, against capitalist and imperialist domination.

The problem for creators needing to make a living from our work is that capitalism won't pay us to undermine it (even while many like to fool themselves into believing it will).

In the mainstream and reformist media, there is unrelenting pressure to water down one's message, to divert an audience into political dead ends (even when these may seem progressive or have superficially radical trappings). Political artists may be able to rely on audience support, or may need to do non-political work, or take unrelated jobs to make a living -- I cobble together a combination of these -- but should focus the bulk of our energy on our real work to advance the struggle. We need to have our priorities straight.

If we are for progressive change or revo-

lutionary social transformation -- "a big task, requiring a lot from us" -- then we need to do whatever it takes to serve that goal. We can't get stuck in a mindset of art-for-arts-sake, or allow our egos to take over.

We can't just make political art and then think we're done, that it's sufficient to cheer the struggle on from the sidelines. We need to not only put our art in the service of the cause, but also be involved in constructing organizations at different political levels, which are the vehicles through which this social change can be accomplished.

If we're not involved in the struggle, then we can't really understand it, and our artwork and writing can't fully connect with it and become part of it. Too many artists and writers relate to the struggle like tourists, able to share only superficial impressions and observations.

AL: Have you considered having your characters cross the "communist horizon," i.e., have you explored what kind of world these characters would inhabit if that world were communism?

SM: They haven't crossed that horizon, and I don't think they can until we do. In my opinion, grand plans, detailed programs, and utopian schemes aren't very useful because we can't predict what will happen. These fantasies, completely disconnected from reality, inevitably fall by the wayside.

We do need to have a basic goal, and a corresponding strategy. The strategy I think might work is to build a mass movement led by the working class to collectively seize the means of production, through the con-

quest of political power by revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state.

The organizations we construct today, as they historically constitute themselves through our constant practice, are what we'll move into the future with. These are the embryos of future society. This should impress upon us the importance of constructing organizations that embody principles corresponding to our strategy and goals: collectivity rather than bureaucracy; workers in the lead rather than the petite bourgeoisie; practice based on political unity rather than faith; members who are assertive militants rather than compliant foot soldiers.

Instead of dreaming about the details of what communism might be like, we need to get involved, work hard, and apply our strength and intelligence toward the collective revolutionary project, so we have the chance to actually find out.

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Aaron Leonard is a writer and historian. His book "Heavy Radicals: The FBI's Secret War on America's Maoists," with Conor Gallagher, was published by Zero Books (UK) in February 2015.



# Translating the Language of Imperialism

2012

**“That country is poor.”**

**Translation:** “Your country had bountiful natural resources until we beat the hell out of you and stole everything.”

**“Their government is incompetent. They are unable to govern themselves.”**

**Translation:** “We invaded you, killed a bunch of you and set the rest at each other’s throats, and installed a dictator who’s helping us steal everything. But it’s your own fault that your country is a mess.”

**“The US helps people all over the world.”**

**Translation:** “If you don’t want our products or loans because they’ll ruin your economy, we’ll twist your arm until you take them. We’ll charge you for interest, inputs and maintenance far beyond the value of our original ‘assistance,’ and label ourselves saints and you ungrateful.”

**“Developing nations should be integrated into the global economy.”**

**Translation:** “First we’ll steal all your natural resources and destroy your economy, and then when your people are starving we’ll give them sweatshop jobs in our factories.”

**“We pay low wages but their living expenses are lower so it all works out.”**

**Translation:** “I’ll tell that lie to pacify domestic consumers, but really I don’t care if you starve.”

**“Okay, their lives are hard, but they should be grateful we gave them a job.”**

**Translation:** “You have no right to dignity, safety, to send your kids to school. I need that extra profit to pay for my fifth mansion in Switzerland.”

**“We are bringing democracy to the world.”**

**Translation:** “We’ll crush you.”

**“Without our help, they’d fall apart. They need us.”**

**Translation:** “We don’t produce anything, but we’re violent sociopaths loaded up with guns and nuclear weapons, so we’ll keep on sucking your blood as long as we can get away with it. If you ever stop us, we’ll die.”

By breaking the chains of wage slavery, the international working class can free humanity and the Earth from this omniscidal nightmare of capitalism.

Let's do it



"By Breaking the Chains," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020



"Collectively Asserting Our Interests," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020

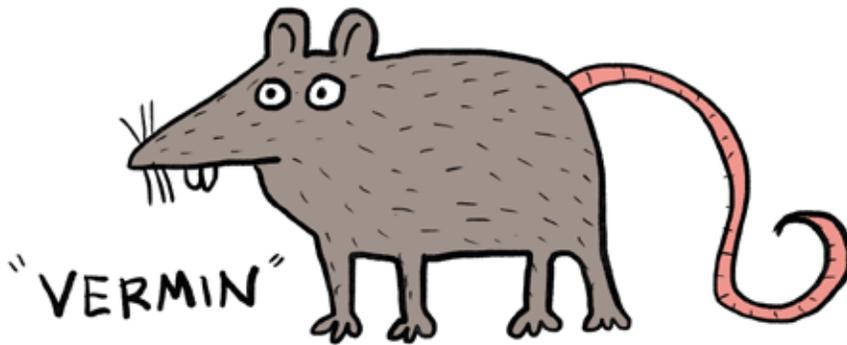
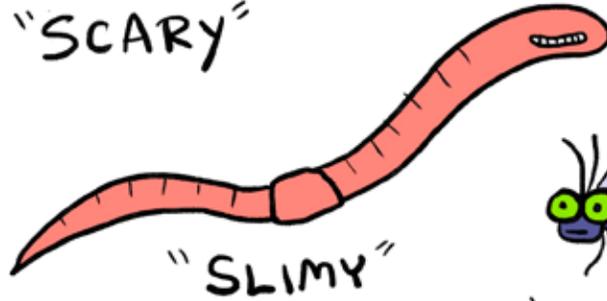
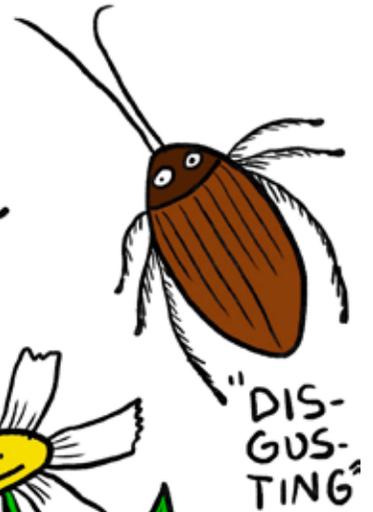


"We Will Not Work Until You Meet Our Demands," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020

# The Unloved

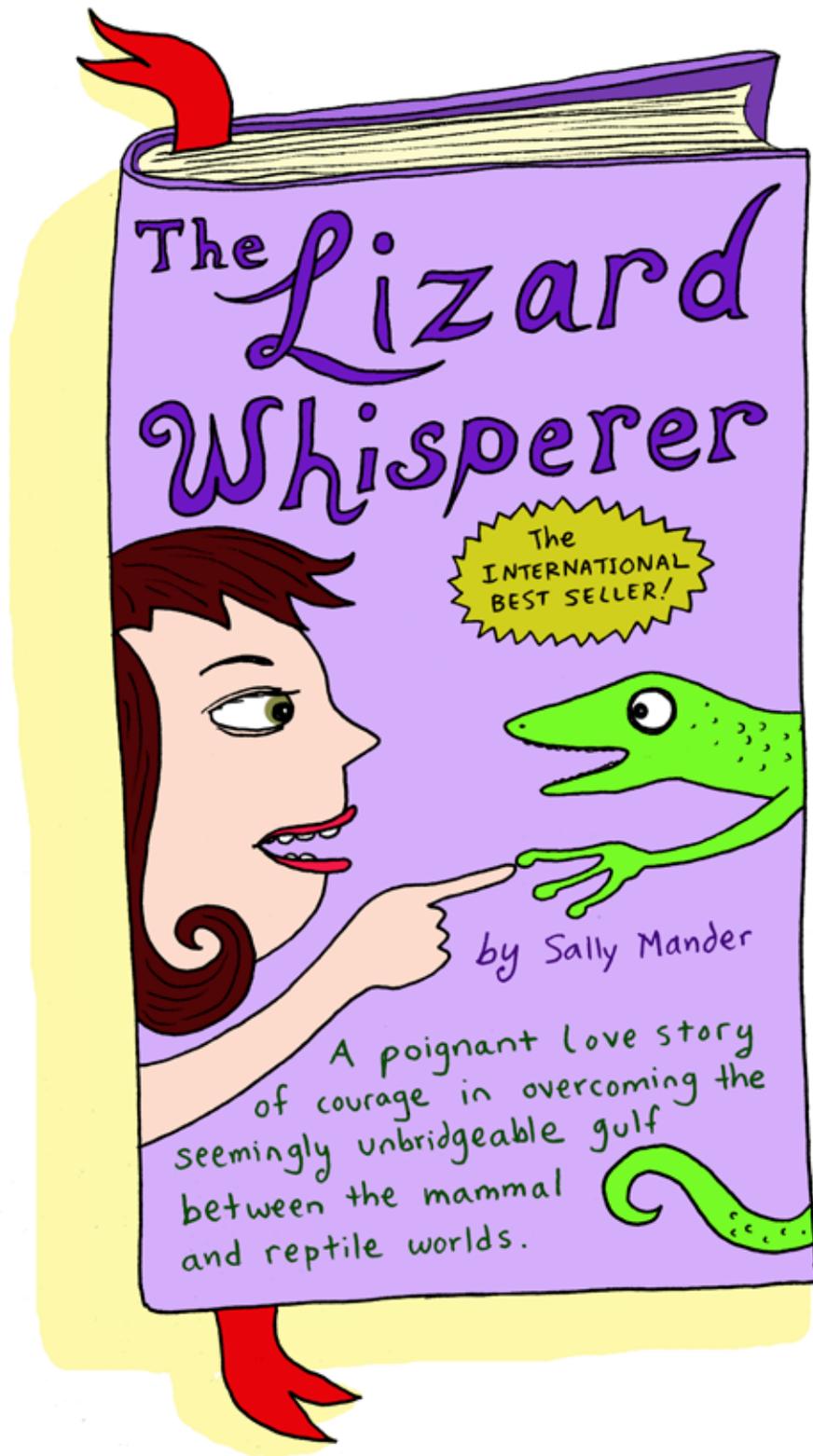


... but no one's perfect;  
~ I love you ~





"Wise Bird"  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"  
2017



(Above) Drawing dedicated to Kathy, 2018

(Right) "We Belong to Them" 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2020



## Some Suggested New Norms for Life Beyond Capitalism

- \* The planet does not belong to us; we belong to them.
- \* We may only receive from the land and waters that which is freely given and for which we give appropriately in return.
- \* The global economy and the social structure based on it shall be based on meeting the needs of humanity and all living beings while nurturing a thriving Earth.
- \* We are each welcome to voluntarily contribute our effort to help meet social and ecological needs.
- \* It is unacceptable for some to accumulate wealth generated from the labor of others.
- \* It is unacceptable for some to accumulate more than they need, while others' needs are not met.

# Imperialist Gangsters on the Prowl

Written July 2015, slightly edited 2020.  
(Note: all quotes are paraphrased).

They scan the horizon constantly, seeking the next target. Cuba looks soooo tasty. They bide their time, dreaming of the day their advances will inevitably be accepted, however reluctantly.

It starts out with a sympathetic glance, an offer of help.

"I'll teach your children to read," murmurs Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh.

First they soften you up with missionaries, madrasas and non-profits offering free education, health care, economic assistance.

"Here are some pharmaceuticals to end the scourge of malaria," purrs Bill Gates to Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique.

You don't want to seem like a jerk to these self-proclaimed idealistic do-gooders and innocent servants of God, and your people could certainly use some help, so you accept these gifts. Some of it fucks you up though, like the food aid that floods the market and drives your own farmers out of business. Also you have this bad feeling: have they tested these medicines before giving them to your kids, or are they testing them \*on\* your kids? But your benefactor insists that it's all offered in kindness. Refusing would insult their generosity, not to mention make it look like you don't care about the people's welfare.

Back at home, the benefactors justify the

outflow of funds by pointing out that most of it boomerangs, making its way back into the pockets of the benefactors' own firms and agencies (minus a few crumbs for potentially useful recipient bureaucrats to line their pockets too).

"Here's some corn to feed the hungry," Monsanto breathes into the ear of Mexico.

The courtship heats up.

"If we build some hotels along your coast, we could give your people jobs serving tourists. You need jobs, right?" asks the Clinton Foundation, apparently awash in sincerity. Hillary might add, "We'll open up an industrial park too, so all the people evicted from the land we build on can earn a living sewing clothes for US sweatshops, I mean, respected firms. By the way, thanks for the gold mine permit you gave my little brother Tony."

You accept these things with good grace. Because after decades or centuries of being beaten down by colonialism, which -- well, let's all move on from the past, shall we? The point is, your people could really use the help, and you may gain some political prestige from being the broker, plus perhaps you'll receive a modest kickback that wouldn't hurt anyone. Turning down offers of assistance to preserve abstract principles like "dignity" and "self-reliance" would only be selfish.

Then come the offer of loans.

"We see you're still struggling," says the supremely sympathetic IMF and European Central Bank to Greece, "so let us just start

you on a small loan that will strengthen your economy. Goldman Sachs says you're good for it. They're experts. If they say you can pay it back, it's solid! Once you're on better footing, you pay it back with a little interest, then we're even."

"You have all this money now," muses Germany, France and the US to Greece a bit later. "Why not import our goods? It's give-and-take, we help you and you help us, and we all benefit." It sounds so reasonable. "We've got plenty of warplanes and other military hardware you probably need."

Having access to unlimited goods and services helps everyone, obviously. Global free trade agreements are finagled accordingly.

As you import more than you export, however, you start to lose ground.

Now they've got you.

"Listen, we loaned you this money in good faith," say Germany's politicians to Greece, "and you fell behind in your payments. We're willing to bail you out (well, not we, exactly, and not our banks, but we'll make our people do it. They're pretty pissed). But you've got to prove you're serious about being responsible. So you're going to have to implement some serious austerity measures. For a start, you can cut pensions, wages, health care, and sell off your infrastructure. We're not asking."

You discover that this arrangement doesn't come with an exit. Next come the threats. "We'll make your economy scream," says Nixon to Chile. "You'll build our oil pipeline or we bury you under a carpet of bombs," says

Bush to Afghanistan. "We'll kick you out of the Eurozone and you'll starve," says Europe to an aghast Greece.

If you withhold your cooperation, they'll make an example of you. Again and again and again. "We're spreading democracy by eradicating dictators, strongmen, terrorists," asserts the United States to El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Korea, Vietnam, Honduras, Iraq, Indonesia, Cambodia, Argentina, China, Guam, the Dominican Republic, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Panama, Libya, Germany, Lebanon, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Hawaii, Cuba, Afghanistan, Haiti, Bolivia and on and on and on and on.

These gangsters don't just rule the block; they rule the world. Capitalist/imperialists accept no boundaries, no limits. Voting can't get rid of them; our exercise of democratic rights within the framework they dominate is always going to be constrained by whatever is in their interests.

Words won't stop them. They don't hear the word "No."

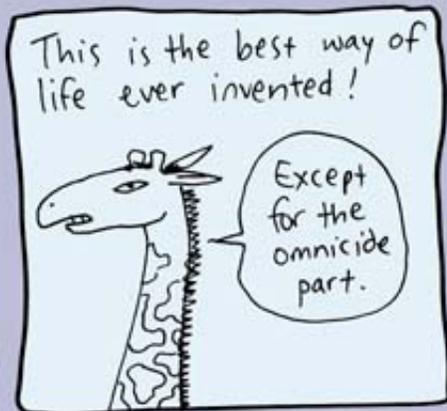
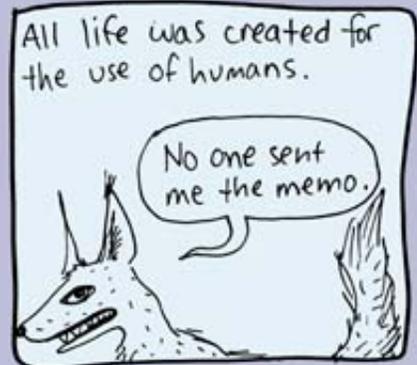
Speaking of Greece, let's learn from what just happened there. Voters elected a supposedly socialist prime minister who promised to reject euro-dominated austerity, and then they voted again, overwhelmingly, against further austerity measures. It's not very difficult to determine what the people want: no austerity measures! Duh! Now that same leader, Alexis Tsipras, is imposing even worse austerity measures. "Oxi" might as well have remained unsaid -- they just rub the people's noses in it. It's the same story everywhere: if we don't organize and fight back, they will suck us dry.



Sophie Scholl with brother Hans Scholl  
and Christoph Probst of the White Rose  
anti-Nazi student movement.

Drawing 2008

# Lies.



The collapse of insect populations worldwide is more alarming than I can express in words. The loss is utterly devastating. Each insect should be honored and protected and loved as the miracle it is. Instead their annihilation continues.

We know the reason: an economy that converts life (nature + labor) into dead commodities, driven by profit accumulation rather than by the needs of living beings. The capitalist entertainment-indoctrination film industry loves to pretend that if we met different life forms from space that we would respectfully try to communicate with them -- but why can't we give the same respect to the incredible life forms of our own world? When the web of life is torn, we are all damaged. Can we come to grips now with the scope of this tragedy, and do everything possible to prevent further omnicide? Is that (not to mention any degree of recovery) still within the realm of future possibility? If it is, it can only be by overthrowing the capitalist class that has the world in its death-grip, overcoming the capitalist-imperialist system, and basing human society on mutuality and reverence for the web of life.

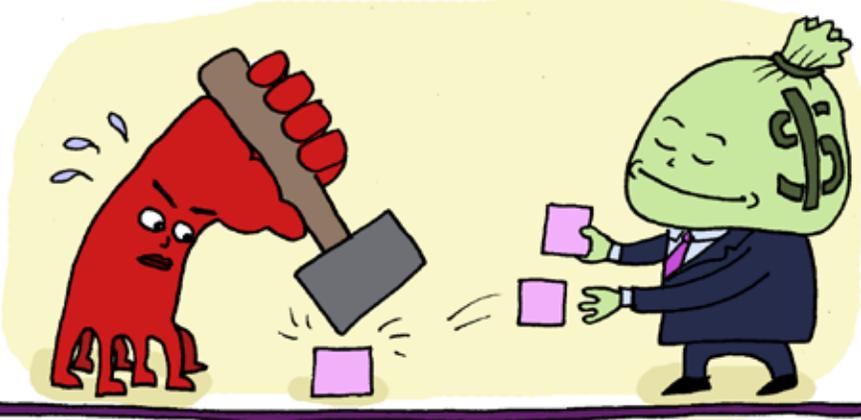


"How Did It All Go So Wrong?" 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2019



Drawing, 2019. Our family is humanity and all living beings, our home is the Earth. Let us not allow any narrower loyalties to overshadow these.

THE WORKING CLASS PRODUCES EVERYTHING FOR THE WHOLE SOCIETY. CAPITALISTS TAKE POSSESSION OF IT.



THEY PAY A BIT BACK IN WAGES.

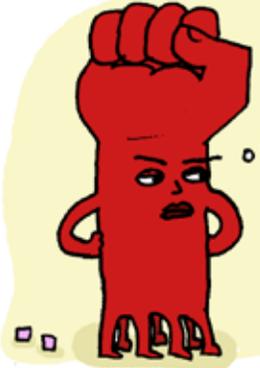


I can't live on this.



You can borrow more!  
At an interest rate that will keep you working for me FOREVER!!

WAIT... WHO'S REALLY IN DEBT TO WHOM??

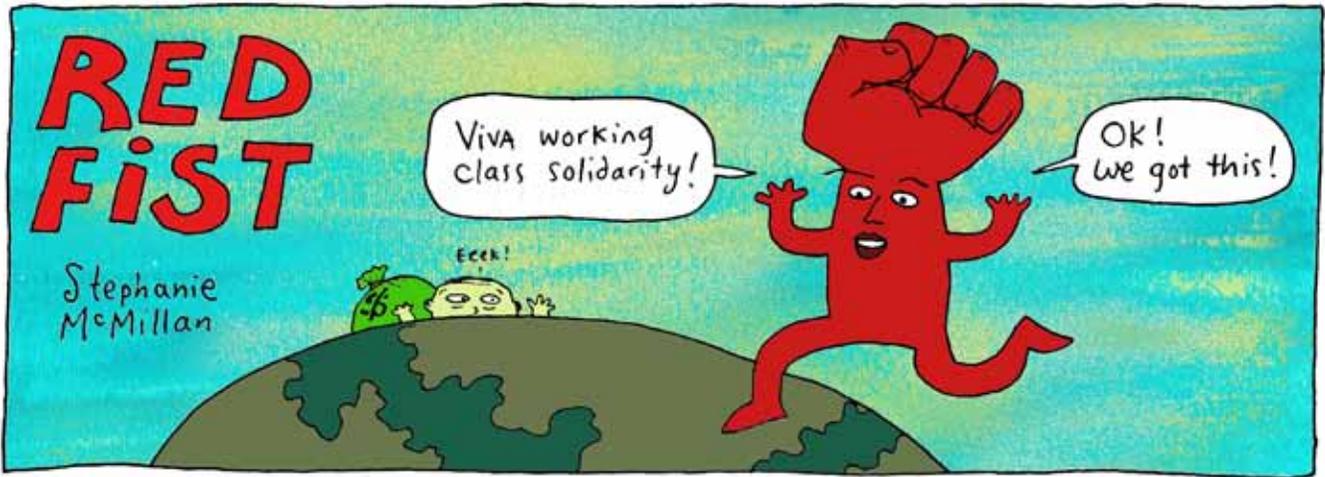


First appeared in "Yes" magazine, 2015



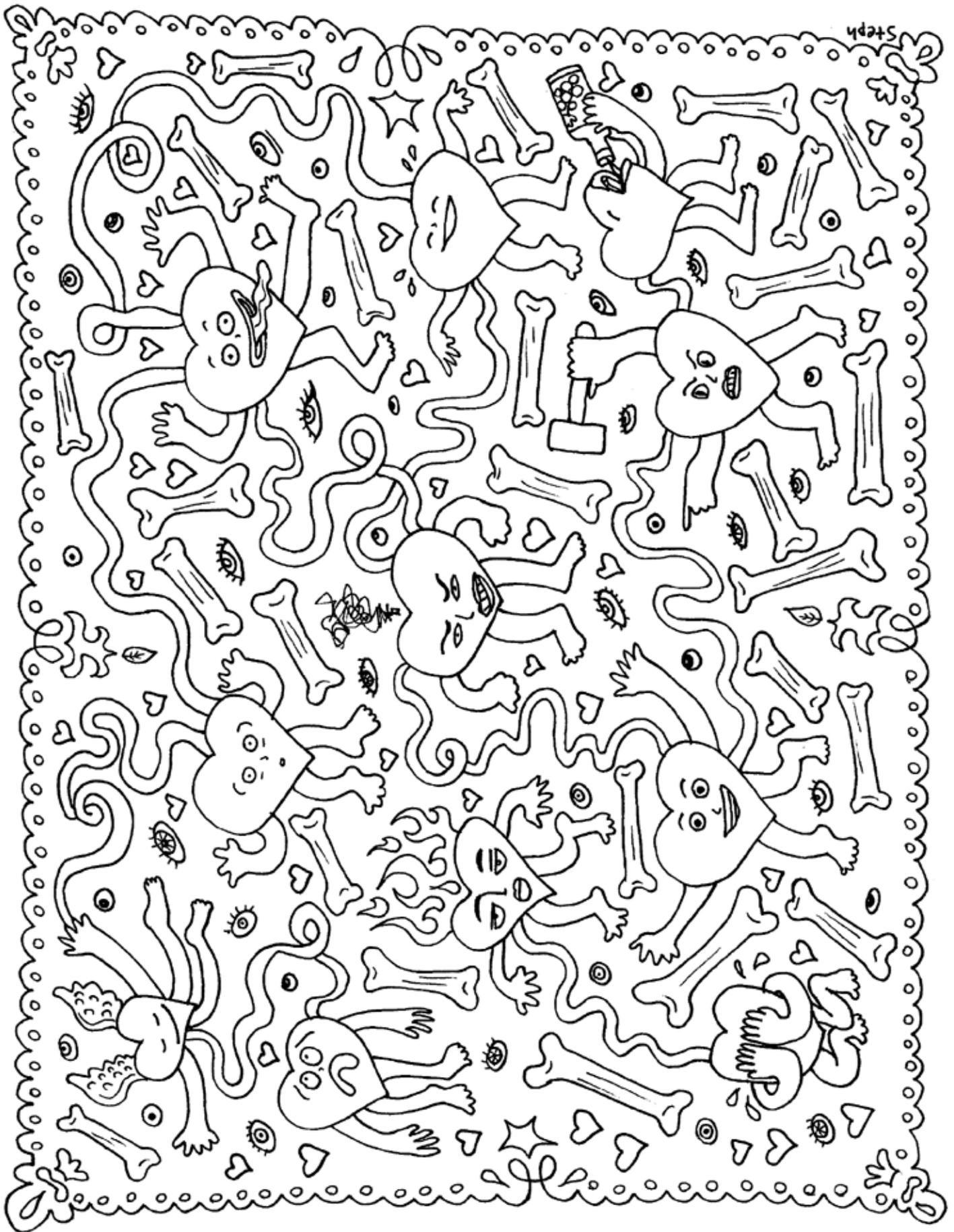
(Above) "We're All In This Together," 16"x20", acrylic on canvas, 2019. Whatever happens, we all need to face it. On the plus side, we have each other to get through it with.

(Right) A comic strip experiment that didn't go anywhere, 2015.



# Hearts and Bones

I drew this coloring page in 2017. This may have been the first time I personified hearts, which became a recurring motif in the following 2 years (so far... I write this in 2019).



# Intuition

Listen to your intuition. It's a lesson confirmed so many times by experience, but for many years I rejected it. That approach doesn't correspond to the political training I've been through, which has been based on a certain articulation of philosophical materialism (I'm not sure at this moment whether the philosophy is deficient or if I just comprehended it inadequately).

Certain groups and people I've been involved with during my life advocated "objectivity" and denigrated "subjectivity" (as if any sentient creature could actually stop being subjective). They pushed all my shouldn't-be-selfish buttons, causing me to cooperate in erasing my own sense of self. (I possessed these buttons in the first place for deeper reasons). To even acknowledge one's emotional state, if it ran contrary to what was deemed appropriate for the struggle, was to commit the crime of individualism. Collective rational knowledge (as defined by "leadership") was supposed to dictate decisions and behavior.

But finally I couldn't help noticing that I've made my worst mistakes in life when shutting down my inner voice, and suppressing its accompanying emotions. So during the last few years I've finally begun paying increasing attention to my

intuition, and struggling to overcome my conditioning so that I can respect what it tells me. Thank goodness, because disasters of varying magnitude happen when I don't listen to it, and a massive one was recently avoided because I did.

I'm fully convinced that our wisdom is deeper than our conscious thoughts. It's generated in our bodies, from our experiences, the history of our ancestors encoded in our DNA, and our universal collective subconscious. We process information beyond the conscious level. We know things before conclusions bubble to our surface awareness. We make decisions before we're aware of them, and then we retroactively manufacture reasons and stories so they make logical sense to us.

We deny or ignore this at our peril. Logic and reason can be useful tools to make and communicate meaning, but our hands holding these tools aren't ruled by them. Our behavior isn't fundamentally based on them. If we try to force it to be so, then we're building ideological structures on sand. They will collapse.

The more we tune in to the stillness of our hearts, and allow our deepest knowledge to rise to the surface of conscious awareness, the better we can understand ourselves and each other.



"You Already Know," 30"x36" acrylic on canvas, 2018

Instead of questioning our own intelligence and second-guessing ourselves all the time, let's listen to our inner voices. When I've done this, that voice has almost always been right. When I've ignored it, I've usually regretted it. The dominant culture is constantly gaslighting us, undermining our faith in our own perceptions. But when we tune in, we already know.

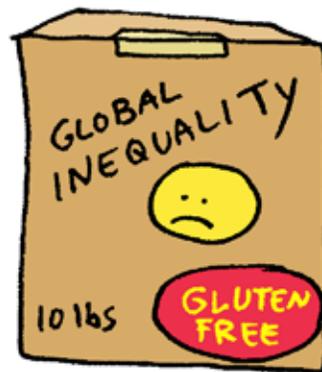
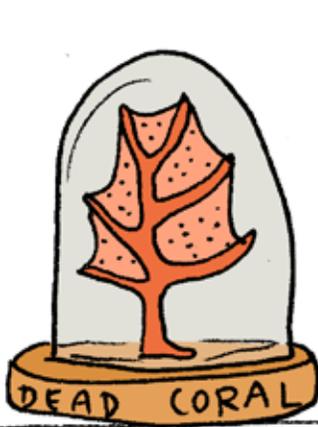


A few things serving as constant reminders to overthrow the system.

(Above) Painted scraps of plywood, 2020

(Right) Drawing, 2019

# SOUVENIRS of CAPITALISM



# If Workers Take Power

2016

\* Instead of the small class of capitalists controlling society, we can make our own decisions about work and social life.

\* Instead of some of us being forced to work too many hours while others are unable to find a job at all, the work can be divided so everyone works a reasonable amount.

\* Instead of competing against one another for scarce jobs, everyone can have the opportunity to do meaningful and useful work that contributes to society.

\* Instead of capitalists pitting us against each other by fostering racism, sexism, nationalism and other forms of oppressive ideologies, we can unite for the common good.

\* Instead of the fruits of our labor enriching the few while the majority is kept in poverty, it can be distributed to provide food, shelter, medical care, household goods, education and recreation for everyone.

\* Instead of destroying the environment for higher profits, we can implement sustainable ways to meet the needs of humanity and the planet.

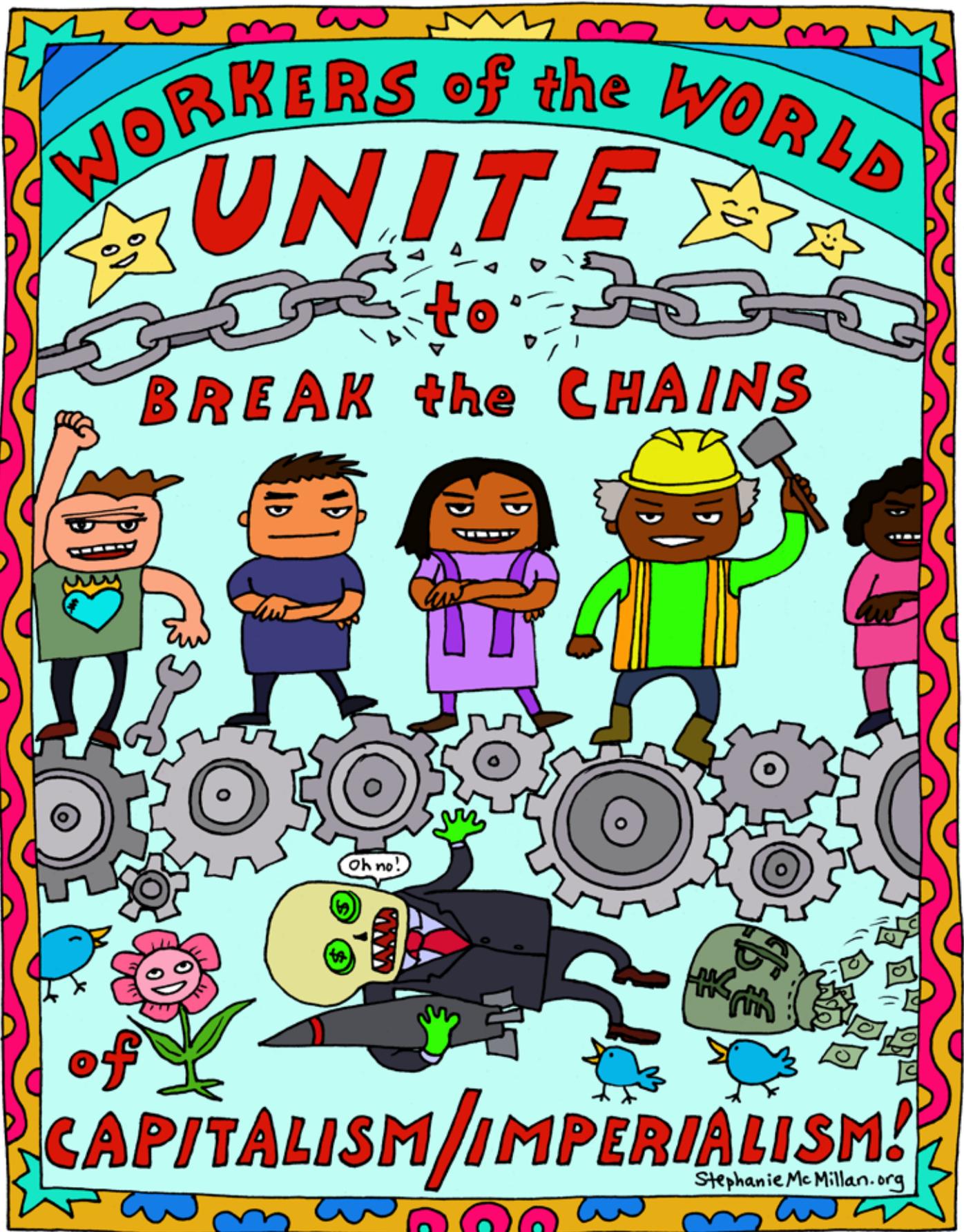
\* Instead of sacrificing our safety and health to cut costs, our well-being will be prioritized.

\* Instead of half of the world's food being wasted because it's not profitable to sell it, we can eliminate hunger.

\* Instead of being forced to wage wars of conquest for capitalists, the workers of the world can cooperate in peace.

Workers already provide all the goods and services for society. The global working class can decide together what we need, and how it is produced and distributed. Power is in our hands ~ if we organize, rise up and take it!





May 1, 2019



Papier mâché demons, 2019



# RESISTANCE

is  
SELF-DEFENSE



Stephanie McMillan



"Why?"  
Acrylic on canvas  
9"x12"  
2019



# What Is Socialism? Neither Grim Hellhole nor Rainbow Utopia

2019; slightly edited 2021

There are many contending claims of what socialism is. Let's take a whirlwind tour:

There's the Cold War propaganda version that paints it as gray block housing, billowing smokestacks and soot-smearred faces, ragged (gray) clothes, and an autocrat wielding a sharp-toothed Secret Police that comes for anyone who complains and shoots them in a basement. And it's raining.

There's the old-school Marxist stereotype of smiling workers holding hammers aloft, working hard to build a glorious new tomorrow with space travel and robust steel mills and synthetic food aplenty, red flags flying.

Then there's the Bernie/Kshama/let's-form-a-Labor-Party version, the cuddly idea that all we need to do is elect nice people who sincerely want what's best for us and keep their promises, and then we'll all get a better life with free health care and somewhat higher wages, while corporations and Wall Street will be restrained from their most evil excesses.

There's the "post-capitalist" vision that has us evolving automatically into a system upgrade: a mix of automation, 3D-printing, sharing, workers' co-ops, microfarms, localism, transition towns, community ownership and other bright green and compassionate new economy experiments that will combine together to overwhelm capitalism like a mighty tide and sweep it off the scene.

There's the idea that we already have so-

cialism because we share roads and libraries and fire departments. (Somehow the bad things we share are never mentioned in this example, like prisons and leaky nuke plants and civilian drone killings).

All of these conceptions have one thing in common: they're total crap.

So what is socialism, and how will we know when we have it?

I'm going to say some scary words right now. Imagine ominous music and a blood-dripping, horror movie font. Ok. Here goes: \*Dictatorship of the Proletariat\*.

That phrase makes us quake with conditioned anxiety and confusion. What the hell does it mean? The proletariat: a screaming bunch of bloodthirsty rabble with pitchforks and torches coming to take away our flat screen TVs? Dictatorship: Stalin or Hitler or Kim Jong-il?

Calm down. Breathe. The proletariat means the working class. Dictatorship means running things. That's it. We will know we are in socialism when the working class is running things. Not just our own workplaces, not just the economy as a whole, but everything.

Anything else that claimed or claims to be socialism wasn't, and isn't, and will not be.

If workers as a class are not in control -- if instead we find ourselves still toiling away for some layer of bloodsuckers, whether it's the same old faces or a new bunch of bu-

reocrats telling us what to do and using the state as their personal ATMs, then it doesn't matter what you call it: that's not socialism.

What might the working class do if in charge?

\* Workers might organize the economy in the people's interests instead of for the benefit of a minority of parasitical exploiters.

\* Workers might decide that everyone who can should pull their weight, which would provide full employment without being overworked.

\* Workers might demolish the capitalists' government, armed forces, judicial system, and the rest of the institutions of their state apparatus, which only exist to enforce exploitation and oppression.

\* Workers might, instead, make decisions collectively and democratically--for-real.

\* Workers might break down class stratification and the division between mental and manual labor.

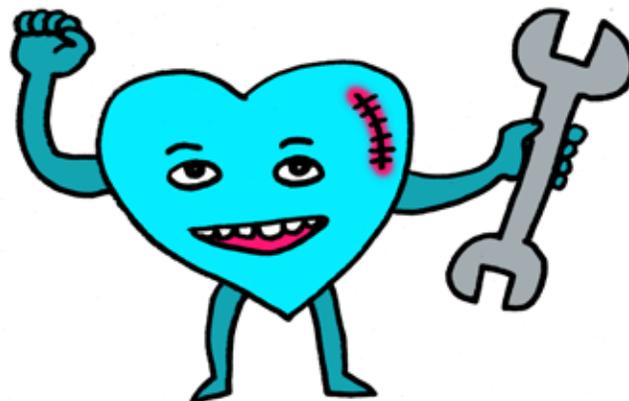
\* Workers might flatten wages and increasingly provide for everyone's needs until it's possible to finally abolish the wage system altogether.

\* Workers might shift resources from producing unnecessary crap to figuring out how to preserve the planet we all live on.

\* Workers might abolish private property (another phrase we're conditioned to fear -- will they take my toothbrush??), which simply means preventing the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, so that everything we collectively produce can benefit society as a whole, all of us together.

Socialism is definitely something to fear -- for capitalists. For us, the worst thing that can happen is not to achieve it.

**WORKERS MAKE SOCIETY RUN;  
WORKERS SHOULD RUN SOCIETY.**





Drawn after Hurricane Irma, 2017

# When all is LOST...

We treasure every moment.

We jump in with both feet.

We learn hard lessons.

We become stronger.

We fight with all we have.

We love with all our hearts.

... and then all  
is not lost

# Why Environmentalists Should Support Working Class Struggles

2013

This is to specifically address class struggle as it relates to the ecological crisis. It will not address all the other (many!) reasons that working class struggle must be waged and supported.

First, we must recognize the fact that global capitalism is driving ecocide.

The problem reaches much farther back than capitalism itself. The combination of an early gendered division of labor with the adoption of agriculture and generally corresponding formation of permanent settlements set the stage for class divisions and the private accumulation of surplus wealth. Maintaining this arrangement required the development of states with armies, social oppression and repression to weaken internal opposition, and ideologies to make it all seem normal and pre-ordained. And as land was degraded and resources used up faster than they naturally replenished themselves, expansion became imperative, leading to conquest and forced unequal trade.

These intertwined and matured over time into an ever-more complex tangle, culminating in late-stage capitalism: the all-encompassing, all-devouring, spectacular horror that is our current global social living arrangement.

The environmental crisis, specifically cli-

mate change, is the most urgent problem we collectively face. It is a simple fact that if our planet no longer supports life, then all human pursuits, including social justice, will also come to a screaming halt.

But attempts to solve the environmental crisis head-on, without addressing the underlying structural causes, will ultimately fail. Approaching it directly (for example by blocking a pipeline to prevent tar sands oil from reaching a refinery), while compelling and admirable, can not overturn the socio-economic system that makes resource extraction a non-negotiable necessity. Capital is relentless, and will flow around any obstacle or smash through it. Throughout history, it has demonstrated the willingness and capacity to wipe out anyone -- including entire populations -- who attempt to resist it.

Historically only one class has been able to challenge capital and offer an alternative to it: the working class. This is not because of any sort of moral superiority, nor is it a matter of suffering the most. In fact, there are many others who are deprived of any means of survival altogether, which is an even worse situation than being exploited as a worker.

The reason that the working class has this capacity is that it is strategically placed. Workers have the most direct relationship with capital: they produce it.

Even capitalists themselves merely manage and accumulate it, which they accomplish through the exploitation of workers in the production of commodities.

Commodities embody surplus value in the form of unpaid labor, combined with natural materials (which capitalists simply claim ownership of through legal or other violent means). This surplus value, when it's realized as profit and re-invested, becomes new capital.

Capitalism runs on exploitation, by paying the aggregate of workers less than the total value of their products (the rest becomes profit). So in order to sell all the surplus commodities that can't be profitably consumed within a social formation, capitalism is structurally required to "expand or die." The problem with this economic model on a finite planet is obvious.

The process is now at a stage where we face imminent catastrophe, unless we act decisively. Our collective strategy must be capable of transforming the entire global matrix of social relations -- the economic, political, and ideological structures and practices (which all ultimately rest on the economic -- the driving force is production).

Only if we free society from capitalism can there be any possible basis to reorganize human activity with different values in command, such as biocentrism and classless, mutual cooperation. Once we understand that the environment cannot be saved within the system's framework, that reforming or restraining it are im-

possible, then the question becomes: how do we end capitalism? How can we completely transform the way we live, so that the totality of human endeavor is no longer harnessed to the pursuit of private profit (through the production of surplus value)?

Capitalists will not voluntarily stop accumulating capital. They can't escape its structural imperatives any more than we can. Instead they are compelled to concentrate all their political might on crushing any and all threats to their hegemony. If we are to become capable of driving them from power, we need to organize ourselves into a massive, global social force. Our only two choices are omnicide or world revolution.

Many classes and social groups are dominated by capital and have an interest in ending it, and often a burning desire to do so. But most of them, even if they resist capital's effects extremely valiantly, will not be able to permanently defeat it. Historically, even after governments are overthrown, capitalism has either continued without interruption or been quickly restored. This is not a moral failing, but an inherent structural incapacity of the classes that have led these struggles -- usually different fractions of the petite bourgeoisie (the "middle" classes). This flows from their own economic survival imperative under capitalism: the constant struggle to elevate their position in the marketplace.

Thus they will insist on equality, "horizontalism" and fairness (marketplace values), but will always stop short of

destroying the market itself. This is why the majority in the environmental movement (who are mostly from the middle classes) refuse to cross that line of advocating the destruction of capitalism through revolution, and will vehemently deny ("You're going too far!") the fact that it is the only way to save the planet.

The only class that is in fundamental conflict with capital is the working class. They face capital every day in an unresolvable antagonistic relationship of exploitation. Emancipating themselves entails stopping exploitation -- wage slavery, the private appropriation (theft) of surplus value generated in commodity production -- which means destroying the

reproduction of capital altogether.

By self-emancipating, the working class can free all other classes and the entire world from the grip of capitalism. Capitalism can only be defeated through revolution led by the working class.

This is why anyone (in all the dominated classes) concerned with saving the planet -- or ending oppression and other horrors perpetrated and held in place by capitalism -- must, in addition to weakening capital by resisting all its manifestations and effects, also take up, amplify, and support the struggles of the working class.





2018

(Left) "It's Not Over," 16"x20",  
acrylic on canvas, 2018.

It's not over til it's over. Even when our  
chances don't seem good, surprising things  
can always happen -- you never know.  
So don't give up -- ever!! It's better to  
go down fighting than to accept defeat.



Drawing, 2019. We're all here on this planet together, and depend on one another. Let's reconnect to the web of life, through love.



Paintings, drawings, essays and commentary  
created at various times, mostly about capitalism-  
imperialism, revolution, plants and cute animals.



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