



Cauleen Smith

1 I Am Holding My Breath, de la série |
from the series In The Wake, 2017.

Photo : permission de | courtesy of
the artist, Morán Morán, Mexico, &
Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

Candy Chang

— Photo d'un dépliant distribué à la
Nouvelle-Orléans par | photo of a flyer
posted in New Orleans by the Louisiana
Justice Institute, 2015.

Photo : permission de l'artiste |
courtesy of the artist

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Resili

In 2015, posters covered worn-down telephone poles in New Orleans, declaring to passersby, "Stop calling me resilient." Quoting Louisiana Justice Institute member Tracie L. Washington, the justification for refusing resilience continues, in a bold electric blue: "Because every time you say 'Oh, they're resilient,' that means you can do something else to me. I am not resilient." Washington's words were being used to protest the City of New Orleans's new "resilience strategy" launched on the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, an environmental disaster that disproportionately affected Black residents.

Refusing Resilience

Kristen Lewis

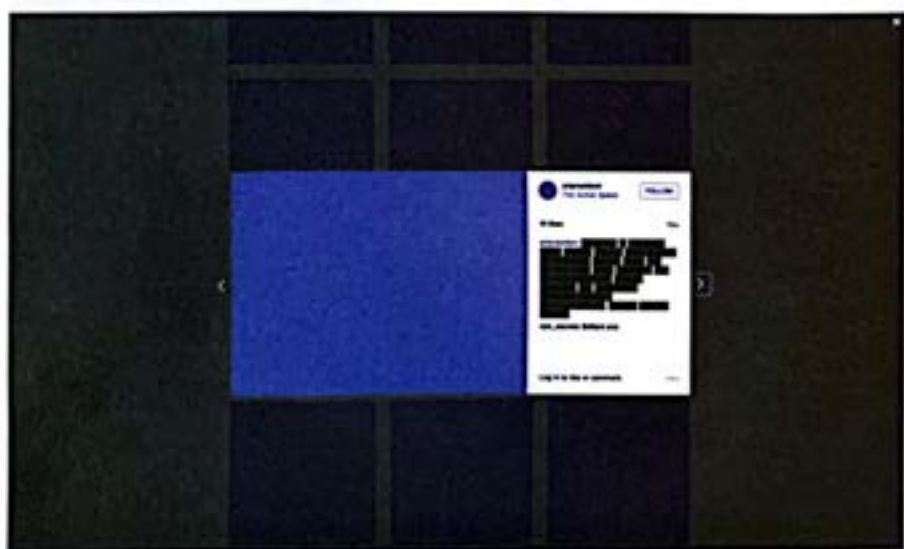




American Artist

A Refusal, captures d'écran |
screen captures, 2015-2016.

Photos : permission de |
courtesy of the artist & Labor, Mexico



A Google search for the strategy brings up a colour-blocked website emblazoned with a trio of "empowering" soundbite colloquialisms: ADAPT TO THRIVE; CONNECT TO OPPORTUNITY; TRANSFORM CITY SYSTEMS.² A closer look at the strategy reveals more of the same jargon, only in longer format and with more motivational subheadings. On each page, "resilience" is transformed into "resilience value," with environmental and social existence palatably quantified to satisfy donors and "protect critical economic assets."³

This discursive tactic is a symptom of what political theorist Naomi Klein calls disaster capitalism, a political strategy that pushes neo-liberal policies in the aftermath of a shocking catastrophe.⁴ Often sold as solutions to or palliatives for the problem, such policies are cloaked in generally acceptable, but largely unremarkable language that is meant to dissuade any form of protest. Those who are unperceptive or otherwise preoccupied ought to pass on by, satisfied with the fact that their strength has been recognized: we

are focused on *resilience thinking*! Yet, as feminist theorist Sara Ahmed observes, "Sometimes the repetition of good sentiment feels oppressive."⁵ The praise of resilience flows downstream from those who benefit from the structures to those who are forced to endure them, as if to congratulate them for surviving the lopsided obstacle course of lived experience in a post-welfare era. In this context, overly enthusiastic and frequent expressions of goodwill are strategically exploitative, meant to quell the anger of those who would protest the policy-makers' actual objectives.

Such discursive techniques are not restricted to policy-making situations but filter down into everyday aspects of social and political life that are influenced by the same neo-liberal principles. Ahmed explores how good sentiment is pushed onto those embodying diversity within organizations such as the university as an expectation for being "afforded" the opportunity of being there. By hiring a Black faculty member and appointing that individual as lead on the Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee, the organization

has satisfied the requirements of EDI without necessarily having to address the structural racism embedded in the organization—there is *representation*. Just as in circumstances of disaster capitalism, those who are vulnerable and exploited have adapted in order to thrive, they are *resilient*. Praise is manipulated by the powerful as a technique of oppression to maintain the social order.

If we take what Washington says seriously, then resilience is an inadequate response to addressing challenging situations. Instead of acquiescing to the language of resilience, which can be a pacifying form of toxic positivity, Washington demonstrates that refusal is a viable political alternative. The same year that Washington's words made their way onto protest posters, artist E. Jane wrote her own refusal of resilience in *NOPE (a manifesto)* (2015–16). What began as a Facebook status update moved onto a screen-print on silken fabric, the manifesto overlaid on an ombre purple to blue background, bordered with digital roses. Dead centre it reads, "I am not grappling with notions of identity and representation in my art. I'm grappling with safety and futurity."⁶ With this statement, E. Jane challenges the reductive tendency for discourse about the works of Black and queer artists to become solely about identity and representation. Instead of exploring the artistic content in any depth, general conclusions with flattening effects are quickly drawn. If a Black queer artist makes an artwork, then they are forced to speak from the position of the Black queer artist as it is recognized by a system that feeds off its own progressiveness through a kind of implicit, congratulatory narcissism. But, as E. Jane writes, "None of this is as simple as 'identity and representation' outside of the colonial gaze."⁷ It is exactly the implication of simplicity that is so frustrating—nothing about this is simple.

When terms such as resilience are used to minimize systemic issues as minor hiccups, resilience becomes synonymous with the capacity to endure the norm. Instead of acknowledging their expressed concerns regarding safety and futurity, Black and queer experiences are dismissed as disputes regarding differences of identity and representation. This approach is a clear instance of the straw man fallacy, in which those in power

falsify the real issue as something else to subvert addressing the core arguments of those protesting. Claiming that oppressed or vulnerable people are resilient functions in much the same way: those in power emphasize the capabilities of the oppressed or vulnerable to endure hardship as a way to avert attention from their own failures to address the issues that initially caused harm. To this point, Washington originally spoke out against President Barack Obama's use of resilience to refer to the citizens of the Gulf Coast after the 2010 BP oil spill that took eleven lives and caused severe environmental degradation. Instead of meaningful environmental action, Obama praised the people's resilience and prayed for brighter days. Two presidents and twelve years later, oil continues to spill every year in the United States. Within our current political reality, resilience suffers from a neo-liberal disembowelling, stripped of its hopeful connotation in the service of maintaining the inequality of the dominant political order. Resilience here has no guts.

With consistent reminders of the system's ineptitude, refusal appears increasingly desirable. Refusal has the dual benefit of functioning simultaneously as a challenge to the neo-liberal co-optation of resilience and as a method of futural projection that enables possibilities unrestricted by the current dominant principles. Afro, queer, and Indigenous futurisms span out in the open clearing ahead once the present is found to be lacking any substance. Acknowledging the potential of strategic un-cooperation, Brooklyn-based American Artist refused social media participation in 2015 with their online performance action *A Refusal* (2015–16). A visit to American Artist's Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter pages from 2015 to 2016 would turn up a series of blue rectangles reminiscent of an early internet "loading" screen on which one would expect to find profile pictures and biographical information. By draining the content-rich networks of their fuel—or their lived experience—American Artist challenges the idea of exposure, opening the question of who profits from our vulnerability. Although vulnerability can promote a community of care grounded in an openness toward the sharing of experience, it is also easily co-opted as an opportunity for capital gain, monetary or otherwise. Vulnerability appears thus simultaneously as a source of artistic, political, and social hope and as an unfortunate perversion of this hope.

Can we imagine vulnerability beyond its possible exploitation? Cauleen Smith marries the resistance necessary for protest with the vulnerability required for care in her 2017 series of banners, *In the Wake: A Procession*. Born out of feelings of grief at the loss of Black lives to ongoing racial violence, Smith coined epigraphs of protest and sewed them onto colour-rich, sequin-adorned fabrics. The epigraphic statements of three banners read, "I'm so black that I blind you," "my pathology is your profit," and "Give it or Leave it." On the opposite sides are symbolic images reflecting the statements: a pencil poking out of a blood-spurting eye, a diamond dripping blood between two crossed guns, and

an open hand with a blue heart. The glistening satin fabric offers a critical juxtaposition to the imagery and text, functioning as its own form of refusal. In this series Smith utilizes grief and anger to conjure statements of emotional resistance that challenge the erasure and enclosure of resilience thinking.

Jack Halberstam writes, "The path to the wild beyond is paved with refusal."⁸ Crucially, refusal is not inactivity but an enabling force that rejects the call to order oneself according to an unjust logic. Refusal breaks down the token placations associated with resilience thinking, which projects a future only according to the power structures of the present. Acquiescence to the praise of resilience reaffirms the legitimacy of an illegitimate order premised on oppression, racism, and inequality, and, as Ahmed observes, "to get over it before it is over would be to keep things in place."⁹ To refuse is to recognize that the choices on offer are all against you. For American Artist, the shade of blue in *A Refusal* represents "the state prior to revolution."¹⁰ To refuse is to clear the way for what E. Jane identifies as needed: "We need more people, we need better environments, we need places to hide, we need Utopian demands, we need culture that loves us."¹¹

On a spring day, Smith's banners were taken down from their display at the 2017 Whitney Biennale and carried in a procession through the streets of Manhattan's Meatpacking District.¹² Through song and dance, with processional joy and protest, Smith's banners charted a path of refusal into Halberstam's wild beyond. •

1 — Candy Chang, "nola_resilient," candy-chang.com/nola_resilient/.

2 — Resilient New Orleans, resilientnola.org.

3 — City of New Orleans, "Resilient New Orleans: Strategic actions to shape our future city," 26, accessible online.

4 — See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2007).

5 — Sara Ahmed, "Embodying Diversity: Problems and Paradoxes for Black Feminists," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 12, no. 1 (March 2009): 46.

6 — E. Jane, *NOPE (a manifesto)*, accessible online.

7 — E. Jane, *NOPE (a manifesto)*.

8 — Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons," introduction, in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 8, accessible online.

9 — Ahmed, "Embodying Diversity," 51.

10 — American Artist, "A Refusal," accessible online.

11 — E. Jane, *NOPE (a manifesto)*.

12 — Cauleen Smith, "In the Wake, a Procession," *ASAP/Journal* 3, no. 2 (May 2018): 303.

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Contributeurs et contributrices

Contributors

Giovanni Aloï

An author and curator specializing in the history and theory of photography, representations of nature, and materiality in art, Giovanni Aloï has edited and authored more than ten books. He is the editor of *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture* and the University of Minnesota Press series *Art after Nature*.

Tyler Benedict

An assistant director at Blouin Division, Tyler Benedict also writes for galleries and auction houses, focusing on Canadian contemporary art.

Philippe Bourdeau

Le commissaire indépendant Philippe Bourdeau vit et travaille à Montréal et à Sudbury. Sensible aux enjeux relatifs à la valorisation et à la démocratisation des pratiques artistiques actuelles, il articule son travail autour de la création d'espaces d'expérimentation, de rencontres et d'échanges.

Cody Caetano

A writer of Anishinaabe and Portuguese descent and an off-reserve member of Pinamootang First Nation, Cody Caetano is the author of *Half-Bads in White Regalia: A Memoir* (Hamish Hamilton Canada, 2022).

Anaïs Castro

A curator of exhibitions and projects in North America, Europe, and Asia, Anaïs Castro is a founding member of the curatorial collective *The Department of Love* and an editorial member of *Daily Lazy*. She publishes regularly with various art magazines.

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Titulaire d'un doctorat en histoire de l'art, Ariane De Blois œuvre dans le milieu des arts en tant qu'autrice, chercheuse et commissaire. Elle est directrice artistique de *Plein sud*, centre d'exposition en art actuel à Longueuil, depuis trois ans.

Joëlle Dubé

Currently pursuing a PhD in humanities at Concordia University, Joëlle Dubé is researching the intersectional temporalities of intergenerational (in)justices and contemporary art. Positioning relationality at the centre of her theoretical preoccupations, she investigates ways of rearticulating the relationship between the currently living and life-to-come.

Anne-Marie Dubois

Titulaire d'une maîtrise en histoire de l'art avec concentration en études féministes, Anne-Marie Dubois emprunte aux théories féministes et queer leur potentiel critique afin de déboulonner la prétention d'ontologie des différents discours de vérités.

Marie Gayet

La commissaire d'exposition indépendante, critique d'art et enseignante Marie Gayet est membre de l'Association internationale des critiques d'art et du conseil d'administration de l'Association française des commissaires d'exposition. Elle s'intéresse aux pratiques transdisciplinaires et à la présence de l'écrit dans l'art. Elle vit à Paris.

Kaysie Hawke

Titulaire d'une maîtrise en esthétique et philosophie de l'art de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, Kaysie Hawke est une travailleuse culturelle basée à Montréal. Elle s'intéresse aux rencontres entre l'environnement, la philosophie et l'art actuel.

Véronique Hudon

Commissaire indépendante, autrice et chercheuse, Véronique Hudon poursuit un doctorat à l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Sa thèse s'intitule *L'exposition à l'épreuve du vivant : pratiques curatoriales et performance*. Ses projets curatoriaux font dialoguer recherche et création. Elle est codirectrice du livre *Curating Live Arts* (Berghahn Books, 2018).

Marie J. Jean

Professeure en problématiques contemporaines de la muséologie à l'Université du Québec à Montréal, Marie J. Jean est également directrice artistique chez VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine, et commissaire d'exposition.

Benoit Jodoin

En plus de concevoir des programmes culturels, Benoit Jodoin, titulaire d'un doctorat et chargé de cours au Département d'histoire de l'art de l'UQAM, est membre fondateur du collectif *Phoria*. Également chercheur indépendant, il s'intéresse aux liens entre savoir et art contemporain et à la recherche-création.

Maude Johnson

Autrice, commissaire et consultante en art contemporain, Maude Johnson détient une maîtrise en histoire de l'art de l'Université Concordia et un baccalauréat en histoire de l'art de l'UQAM. Dans le cadre de ses projets, elle s'intéresse aux pratiques performatives, critiques et commissariales en explorant les méthodologies, les procédés et les langages au sein de démarches multidisciplinaires.

Adam Lauder

With a PhD from the University of Toronto earned in 2016, Adam Lauder has taught courses on Canadian art at OCAD University and the University of Toronto. In 2018, he organized an exhibition of Rita Letendre's public art at YYZ Artists' Outlet.

Kristen Lewis

An artist, writer, and researcher, Kristen Lewis is pursuing a PhD in Art History at Concordia University examining the concept of non-participation in contemporary interactive art. Her artistic practice explores the body through creative writing and contact sound recording.

Camille Paulhan

L'historienne de l'art et critique d'art Camille Paulhan enseigne à l'École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon. Elle vit et travaille à Paris et à Lyon, en France. Elle collabore avec *Esse arts + opinions* depuis plusieurs années.

Jessica Ragazzini

Chargée de cours à l'Université du Québec en Outaouais et doctorante en histoire et études des arts (Université du Québec en Outaouais et Université Paris Nanterre), Jessica Ragazzini mène des recherches transdisciplinaires sur la tension qui réside dans la corporéité photographiée des 20^e et 21^e siècles.

Itay Sapir

Professeur d'histoire de l'art à l'Université du Québec à Montréal, Itay Sapir se spécialise en art européen du 15^e au 17^e siècle. Ses nombreuses publications portent sur des artistes tels que le Caravage, Claude Lorrain et José de Ribera, ainsi que sur les liens entre la peinture, la philosophie et la science.

Dominique Sirois-Rouleau

Titulaire d'un doctorat en histoire de l'art, Dominique Sirois-Rouleau est commissaire d'exposition, critique d'art et chargée de cours. Elle est aussi directrice générale du centre d'artistes *Vidéographe*. Ses recherches portent sur l'activité spectatorielle et la notion d'objet dans les pratiques artistiques actuelles.

Connor Spencer

Writer Connor Spencer is based in New York City. A PhD student in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, he is interested in queer and trans studies, critical theory, and Marxist approaches to aesthetic objects.

Maude Trottier

Formée à l'histoire de l'art, Maude Trottier est coordonnatrice et coéditrice de la revue *Hors champ*, critique de cinéma chez *Panorama cinéma* et autrice d'un poème narratif imagé par l'artiste Cécile Ronc, *Sous le figier* (Moult Éditions, 2022).

Stephanie Weber

A PhD candidate in the Department of Art History at Concordia University, where her research is supported by a Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Award, Stephanie Weber was the 2022 runner-up for the *C Magazine* New Critics Award.

Jayne Wilkinson

An editor and writer, Jayne Wilkinson holds an MA in art history and critical theory from the University of British Columbia, and her writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *C Magazine*, *e-flux*, *Esse arts + opinions*, *Momus*, and other magazines and journals.

Eve Taghy

Funeral Garden, vue d'exposition | exhibition view, *Plein sud*, Longueuil 2022.

Photo : Simon Bellet, permission de | courtesy of the artist, *Plein sud*, Longueuil, & Cooper Cole, Toronto

Refusing Resilience

Kristen Lewis

In 2015, posters covered worn-down telephone poles in New Orleans, declaring to passersby, “Don’t call me resilient.” Quoting Louisiana Justice Institute member Tracie L. Washington, the justification for refusing resilience continues, in a bold electric blue: “Because every time you say ‘Oh, they’re resilient,’ that means you can do something else to me. I am not resilient.”¹ Washington’s words were being used to protest the City of New Orleans’s new “resilience strategy” launched on the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, an environmental disaster that disproportionately affected Black residents. A Google search for the strategy brings up a colour-blocked website emblazoned with a trio of “empowering” soundbite colloquialisms: ADAPT TO THRIVE; CONNECT TO OPPORTUNITY; TRANSFORM CITY SYSTEMS.² A closer look at the strategy reveals more of the same jargon, only in longer format and with more motivational subheadings. On each page, “resilience” is transformed into “resilience value,” with environmental and social existence palatably quantified to satisfy donors and “protect critical economic assets.”³

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catastrophe.⁴ Often sold as solutions to or palliatives for the problem, such policies are cloaked in generally acceptable, but largely unremarkable language that is meant to dissuade any form of protest. Those who are unperceptive or otherwise preoccupied ought to pass on by, satisfied with the fact that their strength has been recognized: we are focused on *resilience thinking*! Yet, as feminist theorist Sara Ahmed observes, “Sometimes the repetition of good sentiment feels oppressive.”⁵ The praise of resilience flows downstream from those who benefit from the structures to those who are forced to endure them, as if to congratulate them for surviving the lopsided obstacle course of lived experience in a post-welfare era. In this context, overly enthusiastic and frequent expressions of goodwill are strategically exploitative, meant to quell the anger of those who would protest the policy-makers’ actual objectives.

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