

Enter the Waiting Room

By Susan Snodgrass

Today is tomorrow, the day after the day before. Today feels a lot like yesterday and the many days that have passed since the early months of 2020, when an airborne virus upended our collective lives disrupting the ordinary patterns of the everyday. It often seems we are forever caught in a warp of time that neither moves beyond the challenges of the present nor delivers us to the rituals of our previous existence. We are, observes Industry of the Ordinary (IOTO), in “a superimposed state. A sense of being in a waiting room with no windows.”

Reset.

Today is tomorrow, the day after the day before. Today feels a lot different than yesterday and the many days that have passed since the early months of 2020, when an airborne virus upended our collective lives disrupting the ordinary patterns of the everyday. Much has happened during the past two years. In the United States, over one million people have died from Covid-19, the highest death rate of anywhere in the world. There are now vaccines as well as multiple variants some resistant to those vaccines, hence the pandemic continues. So too, does the climate crisis that destroys our natural habitats and communities, giving rise to the environmental pathogens and contagions that define our current reality. Time is not on our side.

Meanwhile, Russia has waged war on Ukraine undermining the stability of Europe and the global economy as right-wing politicians and their minions have waged war on American democracy. The

Supreme Court has revoked Roe v. Wade, waging war on women. Thus, the fight for sexual, social, and economic freedom urgently marches on. Sometimes it's hard to breath.

In the world of art, the rise of unions and demands for institutional accountability and decolonization have brought several much-needed reforms to museums and schools of art, whose very foundations are often predicated on cultural imperialism and elitism, exploited labor, and economic disparity. The pandemic further exposed such inequities, as did the global movements organized in protest of the police murder of George Floyd. Both crises disrupted the boundaries between private and public, between individual suffering and collective responsibility, renewing discussions on how and who to memorialize. These issues are also at the heart of the ongoing monuments debate that calls for new commemorative forms, enlisting artists, among others, to re-envision our public spaces and civic commons.

Change will come tomorrow.

Amidst the chaos and enforced retreat into private life, artists and cultural producers (ourselves victims, witnesses, activists) sought strength and refuge in the studio, within online communities, in nature and on the streets. When our galleries, museums, and cultural spaces remained shuttered or partially closed, artists and creative agents became catalysts for resource sharing, community building, and care, creating new kinds of cultural infrastructures and exhibition models whose future possibilities we continue to explore.

One such exploration, ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ was organized by Industry of the Ordinary (Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson) in the “aftermath of collective trauma” to support and

celebrate Chicago artists. Each of the 101 artists included responded to the curatorial prompt by either creating new artworks or submitting existing works, the diversity of which spanned the spectrum of disciplines and practices. However, ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ was more of a happening than an exhibition, a conceptually conceived event that took place over a 24-hour period, from the evening of April 15, 2022, through 5 pm the following Saturday. Occupying the Design Museum of Chicago, works were on view throughout the museum's interior galleries, with some works performed live and others activated by the viewer, together offering a broad view of artistic responses to the existential threats of the last two years. An activist work of art in its own right, ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ presented a multivalent view of lived experience and survival against the backdrop of unprecedented political and social upheaval, an "action" not unlike Joseph Beuys's idea of "social sculpture" that sought to change society by creating new artistic structures through interdisciplinary dialogue. While *Industry of the Ordinary* might shun Beuys's overly utopic view of art, it does share the artist's belief that art is embedded in life – its very practice is, after all, dedicated to explorations of "the customary, the everyday, and the usual." As such, ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ became a social sculpture that crossed aesthetic dimensions to provide Chicago-based artists with a temporary platform for addressing the most pressing issues of our times.

A Few Yesterdays

An act of both generosity and artistic invention, ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ continued the legacies of communal exhibitions established elsewhere in *Industry of the Ordinary*'s practice. For *39 Verbs*, the duo solicited artists and art workers living in Chicago to create works that responded to 39 action words (for example, *Accompany*, *Examine*, *Give*, *Walk*) culled from the titles of IOTO's own works for a one-night event held at Packer Schopf Gallery on October 11, 2009. Their *Portrait Project*,

organized as part of the IOTO's mid-career survey "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi: Industry of the Ordinary 2003-2013" at the Chicago Cultural Center (August 17, 2012 -February 17, 2013), commissioned 71 Chicago-based artists to create portraits of Brooks and Wilson as IOTO, which were then displayed in a separate gallery inside the main exhibition. Identified as a collective work, *Portrait Project* engaged the multiple meanings of artistic representation, from institutional inclusivity to histories of portraiture to individual perception and likeness.

Both these projects belong to a decidedly different political and cultural era than ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ yet speak to IOTO's foundational belief that artistic creation is based in networks of support and collaboration. Within that continuum, ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ and ~~Tomorrow~~ offered a physical and conceptual site for creative acts of engagement, a momentary space for local communion and experimentation, as we navigate the uncertainties of the future and our transitional present.

Tomorrow is near. Let's hope it is ordinary.

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