

YOU NEVER KNOW

— HOW YOU LOOK —

THROUGH OTHER

PEOPLE'S EYES

JACLYN JACUNSKI



Jaclyn Jacunski is a Chicago-based artist whose prints and sculptures are inspired by political controversies that surround land, communities, and acts of resistance. She integrates found objects, news images, zines, and architectural elements with sculptural forms in public spaces and neighborhood landscapes in opposition to destructive cultural systems such as gentrification, environmental threats, and state violence. In her work the land is a character, constantly imbued with the physiological to reflect the social, political, and financial networks that either bind people together or create divisions between them.

Jacunski holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The Chicago Tribune featured her solo exhibition at the Chicago Artist Coalition, held while participating in the 2016 Bolt Residency. She currently promotes artist led projects in North Lawndale, Chicago as the Director of Civic Engagement in the Office of Engagement at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Shapiro Center for Research & Collaboration.

CONSIDERATION AND COMPROMISE

MARY MATTINGLY

Instead of taking the F train from 4th Avenue/9th Street in Brooklyn to Penn Station (\$2.75), New Jersey Transit to Trenton (\$16.75), and then to the River Line (\$1.60) to get to Rutgers University in Camden, I overslept by an hour so purchased a last-minute Amtrak ticket from Penn Station to Philadelphia while waiting for the subway. I took the R to the B express at Atlantic Avenue to 34th Street, walked to Penn Station, and caught an 8:10 train that will arrive in Philadelphia at 9:30 (\$76). From there, the SEPTA to the PATCO will get me to Rutgers at 10:15am. I prepped coffee the night before so drank it as I left home, took the mug with me, and purchased another onboard Amtrak. Drinking it now, it's decent. My hair is buried under a winter hat, I didn't brush my teeth, and am wearing the clothes that I slept in. The train exits the tunnel in the Meadowlands and passes Elizabeth with the Port of NY/NJ on my left. New Brunswick, Trenton... factory buildings burned through inside, tagged on the outside... and surging smokestacks that diffuse the morning light... The train is smooth and fast. I know I'm fortunate to be able to take it, and it is with new ease that I begin this essay knowing I'll make it to class minutes early, and that peace of mind was worth the cost. I try not to think about what my day rate will work out to be today.

Wanting to write about cooperation, collaboration, and compromise, I'm stuck on economics and logistics. Mass transit, I know, is in some ways a form of all of those acts: taxes that subsidized energy sources, the far away land and labor that subsidized the coffee beans, trees subsidized the price of the cups, and the cows that did not have a say processed the milk I added. The plastic container, again... the inks, again... and the drug companies that provided the cow with chemicals, hormones, and possibly antibiotics that were in turn subsidized by the military and initially by tax payers.

Earlier in the week, my students at Pratt Institute began working on negation: reading Ilya Kabakov on the void, writing about what they've chosen to negate, and (we have all agreed) not participating

in the waste stream for the week. I have a cup and two milk containers from Amtrak this morning, and have now committed to carrying these with me for the week (Amtrak counts their cups as a form of accounting, so I didn't bother asking to use the mug I'm carrying). Beyond this, I've just participated in an expansive trail of waste chains involved in the production and distribution of these products that I never did see. I think about my resolution to be aware of beauty, and wonder what the last thing I consciously recognized as beautiful was? I didn't think about it on the subway, but am now thinking about it on the train. The supply chain as part of a dominant culture is a collaborative terror – so then does that make it sublime? How abstract is that? I think about my plans to move to Omaha part time, but love it here, it's what I know. That confirmed, I also know life is full of surprises, and compromise.

Compromise. I work on large-scale projects in public space, and beyond becoming mired in logistics, I'm able to talk with hundreds of people every day. I've learned that many of us do believe we compromise our personal ethics everyday. Environmental scientist Donella Meadows writes that this compromise is rational in a dominant system based on overreach;¹ a system that exponentially extends the predator/prey curve until only the predators are left. Then I suppose predators must build more prey: in labs, fish farms, recycling centers, and our bodies. Beyond direct predatory violence, the violence in indifference and participation is an act of cruelty that runs contrary to a basic dignity. In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis claims that this type of violence is reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in all forms of life, from decreasing animal populations to polluted air and poisoned water.² When the foundations of social life are corroded, new forms of exploitation widen an economic gap between wealthy and poor.

When dominant cultures use powerful means to promote individualism over collectivity, how do we begin dialogue to express common ground, locate mission-alignments, and build strength with

each other? When societies build systems for equal education, low interest rates, progressive income taxes, and inheritance taxes, these are devices that can keep the “success-to-the-successful loops” under control, and can decrease a runaway gap in economic disparities, directly connected to health. Within systems based on overreach and expansion, Meadows wants us to ask: Growth of what? For whom? What is the cost? Paid by whom, and for how long? When will we get there, and where are we going anyway?

What happens when people are brought together to jointly build metaphorical bridges? What may seem like individuals coming together without much in common at the outset is a process of sharing stories and visual poems—a form of social love that builds upon civic and political commons. Love has a positive feedback loop that increases exponentially through considered acts of care. Social love can move us to devise strategies to halt degrading systems and encourage a growing justice that permeates society.

Mary Mattingly is an artist based in New York. Her work has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, International Center of Photography, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de la Habana, the Seoul Art Center, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, deCordova Museum, and the Palais de Tokyo. She has recently been transforming military trailers into social spaces (at the Museum of Modern Art and with Boulder Public Art in Colorado), and also launched Swale, a floating food forest on a barge in New York City. Her work has been featured in *Aperture*, *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Le Monde*, *New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and on *BBC News*, *NPR*, and *Art21*. Her work has been included in books such as the *Whitechapel/MIT Press Documents of Contemporary Art* series titled “Nature”, and *Henry Sayer's A World of Art*, 8th edition. Mattingly is engaged in questions about how art can influence policy and strengthen the commons.



¹Meadows, Donella H. “Limits to Growth” Chelsea Green Publishing; 3 edition (June 1, 2004)

²Francis, the Holy Father, *ENCYCLICAL LETTER, LAUDATO SI', ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME*, 2015