

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

If You Want to #Resist, Pay a Poet

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, May 10th, 2017

If you want to resist, pay a poet. Poets don't make much money. They do bookstore readings for free, and sell their poetry books for maybe \$15. It seems like such a trivial, useless thing to write a poem, until you remember that some governments throw poets in jail. Because poets' words incite people to think and feel. Here are the first few lines of a poem we recently published by [Beate Sigriddaughter](#):

*How beautiful you are,
world, with jewels in the juniper
moments after rain. When
will I be allowed to touch
your beauty and keep it
alive?*

How does *that* make you feel? We publish lots of poets here at Cultural Weekly, because we love poets. Our poetry editor [Alexis Rhone Fancher](#) even shoots photos of poets that make them look like the sexy beasts they are. Thanks to our editor [Chiwan Choi](#), educator [Mike Sonksen](#) curates next generation voices every week. Poets can be challenging and make you feel vulnerable, but they always need cash. If you want to resist, pay a poet. They might buy a new composition book.

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If you don't want to pay a poet, pay a dancer. Dancers use their bodies as their art. They think in terms of physical space and embodiment: what does it mean to embody love, joy, pain, desperation, hope? In the face of oppression and fear, how do you express your desire? If you follow ScreenDance Diaries, the series choreographer [Sarah Elgart](#) writes for us, you marvel at their passion. Most dancers don't have any money. They spend hours rehearsing and performing for free. If you want to resist, pay a dancer. They might buy a new pair of shoes.

If you don't want to pay a dancer, pay a theatre-maker. Theatre people are loving and generous, giving of themselves performance after performance, taking on characters that scrub our psyches. They support each other in solidarity and community. Theatre, consistently, forms the mirror in which society sees itself. This has been true for three thousand years. If you want to resist, pay a theatre-maker. On a night they're not on stage, they'll probably buy a ticket to someone else's show.

If you don't want to pay a theatre-maker, pay an artist, maybe a street artist. Street artists just put their work up because they need to do it and we need to see it.



Street art by MegZany. Photo by Adam Leipzig

Here's a street art piece that recently appeared in downtown LA's Arts District, where I live. It's by a street artist who signs her work [MegZany](#). I like her work a lot. It pops up unexpectedly. Sometimes she makes a statement on behalf of women, a statement we all need to pay attention to, and sometimes she talks for everyone. "Let's put elevator music back in elevators" — yep! If you want to resist, pay an artist. They'll probably paint something.

If you don't want to pay an artist, pay a musician. I know it seems like a dream-come-true to get booked into a club with your band, but did you know that most of the time bands have to pay to get the gig, or at least give up so much of the gate they only have money for beer? Where would we be without music? Unfortunately, tragically, some people who live in certain fundamentalist societies are not allowed to listen to music, or sing, or make music themselves. We are so fortunate we have music in our lives. Consider how many times you have probably listened to music today! If you

want to resist, pay a musician, c'mon, put a five in the tip jar. They'll get some new strings for the guitar.

If you don't want to pay a musician, pay a journalist. Journalism is the bedrock of a free, democratic society. And you know the kind of journalism I mean — real, street-pounding, investigative journalism. Truth-telling. Shining a flashlight of information into places some would prefer we don't see. Right now in America, true journalism is more important than ever. You rarely get it on broadcast or cable TV; most of the time those shows give us 5 minutes of facts, 35 minutes of “commentators” telling us what to think about those facts, and 20 minutes of commercials. Recently, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter David Cay Johnston launched [DCReport](#), to report on what the President and Congress do, not what they say. (Disclosure: I helped.) Johnston and managing editor David Crook post new articles every day, along with action steps you can take to influence the outcome of decisions that affect health care, the environment, food safety, LGBTQ rights, and more. The administration in Washington is seeking to completely remake our society into one which is, in my eyes, far less just, civil, equal, and free. If you want to resist, pay a journalist, like the people at DCReport. They'll write about something you need to know.

If you don't want to pay a journalist, pay a filmmaker. I recommend paying a documentary filmmaker. Documentary filmmakers take us to places we would never go ourselves so we can understand our world. Usually they go out of pocket and work on their projects for years. The average length of time to make a feature doc, from idea to completion, is something like five years, and unfortunately I'm not kidding. No one pays them, they do it because they care so much. Documentarians are beautiful folk. I'll bet you have watched at least one doc in the past few weeks, and you are a better person for it. If you want to resist, pay a documentary-maker. They may be able to quit that soul-killing “reality”-show gig and finish their film.

If you don't want to pay any of these people, you probably haven't read this far. But here you are. In addition to paying all these creative people, you might also [make a donation to us here at Cultural Weekly](#), because we're a non-profit and we need to keep doing our work.

Paying creative people is a revolutionary act in America today. It is an act of resistance. There's a reason Trump wants to zero out the NEA and NEH budgets: because art is dangerous. Authoritarianism is an existential threat to democracy, but *creativity is an existential threat to authoritarianism*.

A couple of months ago we published these lines by young poet [Jason Salguero](#):

*To me, it's like the world shouldn't even know
It all started with something called hope
Yet some say no, others ignore
I say false hope ain't right
Just ignore what I've done for the world
Just remember it brought hope*

Creative people say what needs to be said, say it with such force and passion that society can wake up. I say, let's pay them all.

Top image: Revolution. Street graffiti in LA's Arts District. Photo by Adam Leipzig

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 10th, 2017 at 7:00 pm and is filed under [Theatre](#), [Film](#), [Music](#), [TV](#), [Fiction](#), [Dance](#), [Poetry](#), [Lifestyle](#), [Visual Art](#)

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