

HOT TOPIC #4: MARCH 20TH

CREATIVITY AND ART IN DIFFICULT TIMES

COVID-19 updates from San Juan County around subjects on the minds of islanders.

Note: in an effort to diversity and strengthen San Juan County's COVID-19 response, we've added some people to the team from the broader community. The article below is from Nathan Kessler-Jeffrey, the Executive Artistic Director at the San Juan Community Theater. Thanks to Nathan and everyone else who are putting aside so much to help the islands through this.

Turn Fear Into Beauty. Turn Fear Into Hope.

For San Juan County, March 20, 2020

I'm brand new to the San Juan County Emergency Operations Center's communications team, and I'm so grateful for the chance to get involved in the good work this group is doing to try to keep the islands informed. For my first assignment, I was asked to write a guest column on "How Can Artists Help?" This is what came out:

Courtney (the amazing woman I have the privilege of being married to) is a professional theatre artist. So am I. Last week, Courtney's next several months of work were abruptly cancelled. We have easily over a hundred friends in Seattle who were laid off from shows—actors, singers, instrumentalists, directors, choreographers, technicians etc.

It's easy to do two things during this time. First, it's easy to feel useless. I can't diagnose an illness, build a ventilator, or miraculously restock breathing masks, toilet paper, and hand sanitizer. (Or chicken! Wow, there was a run on chicken!) Second, it's easy to jump into the idea that as artists, we **MUST** do something immediately! Let's pick a theme, do a piece, find a medium where we can still create art but at a distance! I've seen posts from dozens of friends attempting to collaborate on social media with pieces about quarantine, stocking up, etc.

I was thinking about what I would do—with a keyboard for a paintbrush and the imperfect pigments of words on a page. Then I asked myself the big question, "What is my responsibility?" Because artists don't heal the body, per se. Our work, when we're fortunate enough to do it well, addresses the spiritual and emotional health of our community.

And right now, I'm fearful. My community is fearful. So my next big question was, "What does my heart want to say about that unease and uncertainty and anxiety that we're all wrestling with?"

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In all the artistic disciplines, we deal with the idea of *contrast*. What is the contrast to darkness? To quiet? To loneliness? How do we truthfully address fear, while providing contrast? I have a

musician friend in Seattle who's captured this idea beautifully with his new song *Make It Through Tonight* in which he offers his heartfelt hopes for us all. (aaronjshay.bandcamp.com)

Heartfelt is a useful word right now. It implies sincerity and a sense of connection—and fear is often alleviated when we know we aren't alone.

Back to the original question: "How can artists help?" I recommend we create from the heart—what we do has the potential to provide a contrast to the fear and uncertainty we face.

And here's one potential prompt for us—if it's helpful. We're dealing with a lot of social distancing—giving space to those around us—friends, family, etc. We're keeping our distance FROM, which can be lonely and isolating. Who are we keeping our distance FOR? Who are the people whose lives will be impacted or even saved by the isolation we self-impose?

For my next guest column, I'll be writing an article about 'Becky' (not her real name), who is one of the people that I keep my distance FOR.

If you create something—a story, a painting, a poem, a dance, a song, anything—about a person you keep your distance FOR, please let me know.

And please remember to give your love and support to all our leaders, schools, medical professionals, artists, and whole community. We'll get through this as we weather all things: *together*.

All the best,

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