

Claire Yspol

Fuchsia Survival Techniques

I'm about to turn the house upside down, looking for a piece of paper with notes I made on several artists. Luckily, I find it quickly, nestled in the back pocket of a notebook which contains, among other things, titles for future artworks, the occasional journal entry, and stray tips on pleasure. One of the artists I wrote about was David Hammons, an intriguing, mercurial figure who seems to refuse the bombast that can be present in the art world. He nimbly avoids it, while still being successful and well-regarded. Hammons' art practice has an ethereal streak, with *African-American Flag* and *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* being some of his most notable works.

You may have seen the iconic image of Hammons in which he stands on a street somewhere in New York City, looking dapper in an offhand way. In front of him is a rug on which are neatly displayed snowballs of various sizes. A pop-up 'shop' for super ephemeral objects. There's something matter-of-fact yet surreal about the photograph in question.

A line in a poem by one of my favourite poets (Lieke Marsman) talks about how a parallel universe exists only a few millimeters away from our skin. I like to imagine the photograph was taken in that parallel universe; one where walking home with an armful of *Bliz-aard Balls* means that winter has finally begun.

"I decided a long time ago that the less I do the more of an artist I am, ... Most of the time, I hang out on the street. I walk." – David Hammons

Walking most days becomes a survival tactic for me during the lockdown (it's June as I write this). I drift semi-aimlessly, improvising my route like a jazz musician would a score. Focusing on minute things, listening to bees being frenetic; still-astonishing intervals between the sound of one car and the next. I make a point of smelling these overripe roses with a citrusy undertone, some as big as fists in fuchsia-coloured gloves. Decadent. A few days later, I go back. Many of the roses are in various states of decay. I lean against a stone wall that's older than any of us and think about nothing or a lot of things and catch the sun. A black flaneuse.

While walking, I take apart the situation I'm in, tinkering with it on the go. My choices and past actions become a series of objects to be scrutinised. I chose to leave the Netherlands, my home country, and move abroad, an experiment in making the familiar strange (it's working). I chose to become an artist, not a bookkeeper or a journalist or an actor, although I considered all these things. Don't get me wrong, being an artist is an important part of who I am. However, there's almost no escaping having a day job to fund one's life, and money seems more elusive in the arts than in other professions, but I knew this going in. What's become more apparent, though, is how much an art practice is like having an extra mouth to feed. Under normal circumstances, I'd happily forgo buying clothes or furniture (I still don't have an official sofa) to fund my art projects. Now, in the pandemic, that trick is no longer working, as any extras have to be set aside, in a bid to make things easier for my future self. So I'm reconsidering what my practice should look like going forward. Doing less (that costs money), and walking more, like David Hammons. Writing more.

An artistic practice that's 'cheap' to run makes things easier, to an extent, and same with life in general. During the 2007-08 financial crisis, I lived in Edinburgh, sharing a beautiful, dirt-cheap flat with two other girls in the leafy neighborhood of Morningside. Only a third of my very modest income had to be spent on rent and bills. Though sharing can be fun, it has its drawbacks; like having to deal with other people's loud lovemaking or clipping their toenails at the kitchen table. But life was relatively breezy, even with a temp job and a raging recession.

Just before the pandemic, I coasted along, every once in a while admonishing myself to save more, to build a second income stream because "you never know what the future might bring". Well, the future has arrived and has shocked me into a phase of conspicuous near-non-consumption that is likely to last for some time. I'm even saving now (for real), but it feels like trying to establish a rainy day fund in a monsoon. Ironically, my part-time job in the arts looks to be relatively secure, at least for now, and I'm grateful for this.

I wanted to end this text by reflecting on the weird mix of fascination and queasiness that the subject of money can elicit (like a handsome neighbour with troubling habits); on the side-effects of practicing financial funambulism; on a three-hour-old dream where I lost all the text you've just read, because a new word processing app called BORIS (seriously) got installed on my computer; on the crushing inequalities that have erupted to the surface; on the need to hustle and grind when it comes to one's art practice; on radical self-compassion. Instead, I wander past all these roads not taken, with summer receding like a hairline.

Schjeldahl, Peter, *The Walker, Rediscovering New York with David Hammons*.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/12/23/the-walker>

Claire Yspol is a Dutch artist based in Dundee, UK. She works across writing, moving image, artist publishing and more, to playfully interrogate the complexities of living amongst objects and other systems. Her works pay homage to the everyday, but also to art itself; the experience of which is a specific way of being-here.