

The Slow Process

By Kristine Diekman



Photo courtesy Kristine Diekman © 2020

Kristine Diekman: Time Based Tree

Process in art-making is foundational but has shifted in importance since March 2020, when artists' working routines, strategies and opportunities were upended due to the COVID-19 virus. Many of the ways we worked collaboratively and proximally together were no longer possible, the venues for

distribution and exhibition closed, and funding was canceled. Not a practicing studio artist myself, but a media artist who relies on community connections and close personal interactions, I turned to process, not resolution, as a fruitful place to be. I learned to stay in the process until I could listen to my voice and the myriad new voices emerging out of the pandemic and the movements for racial justice.

I asked other artists about their processes since the onset of the pandemic. Artist Sandra Martinez, whose work is closely tied to seasonal economies, described how her routine was upended by the virus (<https://www.martinezstudio.com/sandra/>). While she works in her studio during the winter months, the emergence of her work and artistic process as a tool for living reemerges in the Spring and early Summer. She explained that COVID coincided with her customary re-entry. While the virus disrupted her routine, it also disrupted the comfort of her strategies that were more personal and intuitive. She said she felt the “abject pain and uncertainty of the crumbling planet.” One of the ways she responded was to look for failure in the process as something to work against. Using techniques of layering materials on two dimensional surfaces, she could make some “failures” that she could enter into and through that find play and joy. Nibble is a word she uses often.



Sandra Martinez Production Still”. Photo credit: Claudio Martinez

Michelle Montjoy’s process has always been important in her work as a studio artist and community artist, and it has gained in importance since the pandemic. Process has become infused in her daily life and art practice, and the edges that define the two have become less distinct. Walking, baking and mending have gained in significance. While she walks each morning, she rummages for the right word to describe the feeling moment. On a recent walk,

during the death of a close friend, she embraced the word “unfinished” and embroidered it on a handkerchief passed on to her by a mutual friend of the deceased. She said, “We are all unfinished”, which holds a particularly poignant meaning for me during this time.



Photo courtesy Michelle Montjoy © 2020

Michelle Montjoy
Unfinished

Tactility is critically important in her work and to the collective she is a member of (<https://todomendingproject.org/>). Through handwork, she says, the hands are learning. In sewing, we grow with the piece, mending the fabric and our bodies. As artists working during the pandemic, she asks, what do we lose in the loss of embodiment? “The world needs human breath to exist but now the breath is not lingering because of the mask.” Now that she cannot set the physical table to create the conditions for group gatherings to mend tangibly, the process is embodied in virtual adaptation and translation. And she continues to walk.

Ximena Alarcón is a sound artist researcher interested in listening to in-between spaces: silences, dreams, underground public transport, and the migratory context. Her telematic performance work uses Deep Listening and relational listening as processes to investigate place and presence. Deep Listening is a lifetime process, a meditative practice that is generative in our connections to ourselves and others. As a sonic artist, she works in the realm of vibration

which doesn't stop, as vibration infuses materials and people. Her work is both somatic and telematic, and the pandemic has emphasized both the connection and dislocation that technology can produce. She has found that while she maintains the technological aspect of her work, the process of listening as a practice has intensified. The relational deep listening practice that she has been facilitating with Columbian migrant women in Europe as part of *Intimal* employs non-judgmental listening that avoids interpretation, a deep encounter of others, and leaves spaces for silences. In these silences we wait, listen for connection and witness healing (<https://www.ximenaalarcon.net/intimal-project>).

While many of us remain stunned by the halt of life as we lived it, this pause has also produced a cultural shift related to the Slow Movement that advocates sustainability and biodiversity. I have returned to drawing as a process of knowing which is immediate, somatic and incremental. In the project, *Time Based Tree*, I do a cumulative seasonal drawing that to date has continued for a decade. Instead of projecting into the future, I have been embodying chronographic time in my process, working in small intervals of time, and living with an artwork over time. Drawing has become a process where I can witness the accrual of time at a slow pace and be mindful of my impact. While we should all advocate for the urgency manifested in the movement for racial justice and the crisis of climate change, we can also value how listening, sewing, walking, drawing, and breathing have become slow processes of importance to heal our "crumbling planet."



Short Bio

Kristine Diekman is a media artist and educator working in documentary and experimental film, new media, sound, drawing, and community-based media. Her recent media projects focus on water and environmental justice, proposing new frameworks for political ecologies of water in California. As an educator, she facilitates international workshops in digital storytelling and

physical computing that lead participants through writing, craft, computing, and sound production to create interactive tactile audio interfaces to tell their stories. She is a Full Professor in the [Art, Media & Design Department](#) at California State University where she teaches media theory and production, and sound studies. She has received numerous awards and grants, and presents her work world-wide.

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