

Mana Contemporary

ARTISTS AT MANA

MAY 2022

A Heartfelt Reading List During a Pandemic

by Matt Morris



hi there! matt morris, here. grateful to be invited by mana to put together my most heart-felt of reading lists during the times of a pandemic. **book recommendation no. 1: 'candida alvarez: here. a visual reader.'** editors fulla abdul-jabbar + caroline picard. green lantern press, 2020. for a few years in my own studio i've been asking what felt like a very painter's painter

question: ‘what does impressionism look like now?’ candida alvarez’s works through an inquiry of just this sort: equally concerned with formal articulations of light and a keen-witted capacity for staying present no matter what the world delivers to the artist. candida—both my colleague in the painting and drawing department at the art institute of chicago, AND my neighbor in the mana contemporary chicago facilities—is celebrated in this new visual reader from green lantern press (a publisher whose entire catalogue is worth exploring). documentation of alvarez’s recent survey exhibition, her collaboration with fashion house *comme des garçons*, and her lively career testing the tools of abstraction and conceptualism against the demands of cultural representation are explored by a lineup of ALL STAR contributors. art historian dr. kellie jones, in a new essay on alvarez’s work, writes: “for alvarez, the formalities and repetitions of making join with conceptual gestures drawn from a cultural place. they constitute alvarez’s art systems which have roots in the personal, the built environment of the city, and non-objective form.” i’m eager to think more deeply about art practices like candida’s that wrangle with the materials of the world with gusto and finesse. @candida_alvarez_studio @kimonorose2 @greenlanternpress @saicpics @saicpaintinganddrawing @trmyers1 @doctorkelliejones @heartmattmorris



matt morris’ book recommendation no. 2 for a heartfelt reading list during a pandemic: pema chödrön. ‘when things fall apart: heart advice for difficult times.’ boulder: shambala, 2016 (first edition, 1997). i’ve read this little tome written by a buddhist nun more times than i can count—during hard life moments like family death, fascist presidencies, or professional rejection, as well as in so many of the courses i teach at @saicpics. “there is definitely something tender and throbbing about groundlessness.” chödrön’s advice directs readers toward nonjudgmental noticing, being with difficulty, working with hopelessness, and developing ways of giving our lives meaning. last year i developed a perfume titled ‘a big

groundless moment’ that was exhibited at @spacenesss in a project organized by @meganschvaneveldt and then at @goldfinch_projects_chicago in an exhibition curated by @marieastman_artist. the combination of soft, airy aldehydes and earthy orris and vetiver in the fragrance gestures toward chödrön’s groundlessness. @heartmattmorris

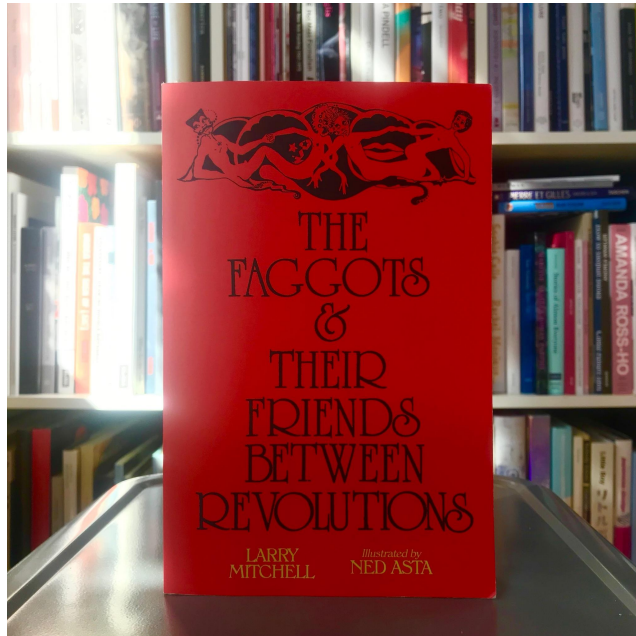
matt morris pandemic reading pick no. 3: keith banner. 'the smallest people alive.' carnegie mellon press, 2004.

keith banner is a writer, artist, social worker, and curator at thunder-sky inc. the non-profit he operates with his partner bill ross—and truly one of the coolest and most inspiring folk i've ever met. this collection of his short stories are full of pathos and dry humor as they meander through realms inhabited by service industry workers, low income households, disabled people, care homes, and a queer element that is fugitive, transgressive, and ambivalent. when i re-read stories like they wedding of tom and tom,' in which renegade care home employees assist two adult men with disabilities in getting hitched,

it's as if john waters' outlandish storytelling has been textured with real and really inconvenient truths of our current class systems, medical establishments, and taxonomies for gender and sexuality. banner's writing undulates between barnes remarks and raw tenderness. his first novel, 'the life i lead,' is one of the most moving (okay, upsetting) things i've ever read, compelled as it is in rendering relatable the most alienated positions in society. the novel as well as these short stories are possessed of the political conscience of vanessa place with the salty flourish of oscar wilde, all grounded in a middle american cul-de-sac. @thunderskyinc @bannerkb @heartmattmorris



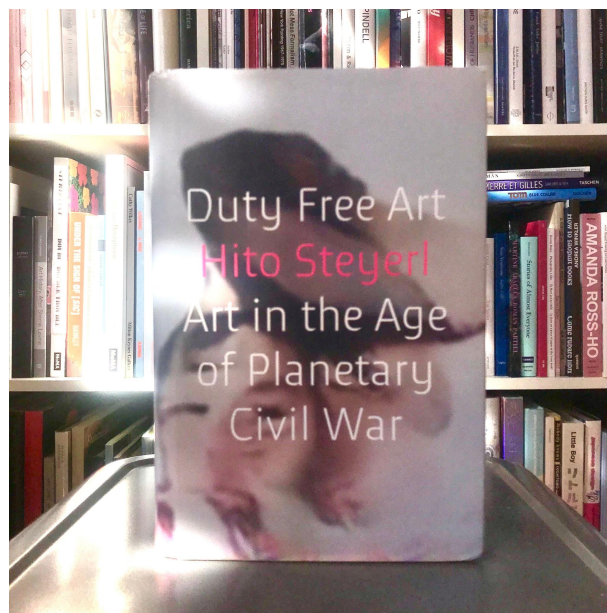
@heartmattmorris pandemic reading list no. 4: larry mitchell. 'the faggots & their friends between revolutions.' illustrated by ned asta. new york: nightboat books, 2019 (first edition 1977). required reading from a legendary queer author and founder of calamus books, an early small press devoted to gay male literature. from page 13:



“the faggots cultivate the most obscure and outrageous parts of the past. they cultivate those past events which the men did not want to happen and which, once they did happen, they wanted to forget. these are the parts the faggots love the best. and they love them so much that they tell the old stories over and over and then they act them out and then, as the ultimate tribute, they allow their lives to re-create those obscure parts of the past. the pain of fallen women and the triumph of defeated women are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. the destruction of witty faggots and the militancy of beaten faggots are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. and so these parts of the past are never lost. they are imprinted in the

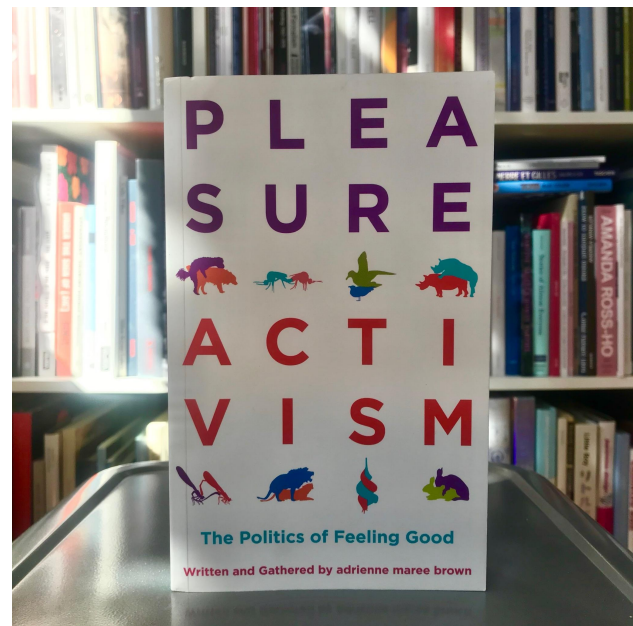
bodies of the faggots where the men cannot go.

the men want everyone to remember and commemorate only their moments of victory and plentitude. the men hope that only they have such moments. so history becomes a chronicle of wars and brutality and state splendor. art attempts to transform men's brutishness into men's benevolence. the faggots know better. they know that one man's victory means the defeat of others and that some men's plentitude means that others go hungry. the faggots refuse to celebrate the men's lies.” @nightboat_books



@heartmattmorris, **chicago-based artist, writer, curator, and educator**, is sharing a reading list we invited him to assemble for an instagram takeover during these pandemic times. **matt's no. 5 pick: hito steyerl. 'duty free art: art in the age of planetary civil war.'** **london: verso, 2017.** hito steyerl is an unparalleled artist, thinker, and writer; her documentary video installation 'adorno's grey,' 2012, is easily among my favorite works of all time. 'duty free art' is a techno-marxist trice of short essays in which steyerl critiques such contemporary organizing principles as the idealism of cultural representation as a political vehicle, the art world economics, tax shelters, algorithmic technologies that instrumentalize images and data, and plenty of other spots of trouble for life today. the thing is, steyerl approaches this litany of tangled, dense concepts with smooth storytelling, caustic humor, and general accessibility. throughout, she's making room for how artists might intervene, resist, or at least comprehend their own positions in relation to a world overflowing with advanced global capitalism. **@versobooks**

rounding out my tender heartfelt reading list hosted by mana's ig, **my no. 6 pick: adrienne maree brown. 'pleasure activism: the politics of feeling good.'** **edinburgh: AK press, 2019.** the french theorists who shaped me call it 'jouissance': a kind of excess or more-ness, unmanageable yet crucial capacities for pleasure or joy. political resistance and dynamic ethical living often get framed with a kind of dour solemnity. not so with writer and activist adrienne maree brown; 'pleasure activism' collects some of her own writing, along with interviews and key texts in the pursuit of pleasure as a politics. the book opens with audre lorde's 'uses of the erotic,' and continues with writing about consent and #metoo, menstruation and sex, cannabis, sex toys, cancer, burlesque, aging, poetry, and spells. the grace with which brown and her comrades navigate the particular and broader abstractions is a real and true pleasure in itself. **@adriennemareebrown @audrelordeproject @heartmattmorris**



First published on @manacontemporary Instagram page, May 2020.