

EXERCISE 3.A

YOUR SKETCHBOOK OF QUESTIONABLE IDEAS

TIME: 1-2 HOURS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Get a special book of your own. The pages can be lined, or graphed or blank—whatever you like. Make sure it has lots of pages in it and pockets to collect loose papers, and that it's big enough to sketch in but small enough that you won't hesitate to carry it around with you. You're going to need this and you're going to need to be able to use it at a moment's notice—you can't plan when questionable ideas strike.

2. On the inside front cover of the book, write a note in case you lose your sketchbook. How can people find you to return the book? Maybe offer a reward of money or karma.

3. A stranger finding your questionable ideas can be embarrassing, so write a disclaimer in the first few pages. When you open Lambert's book of questionable ideas, it reads:

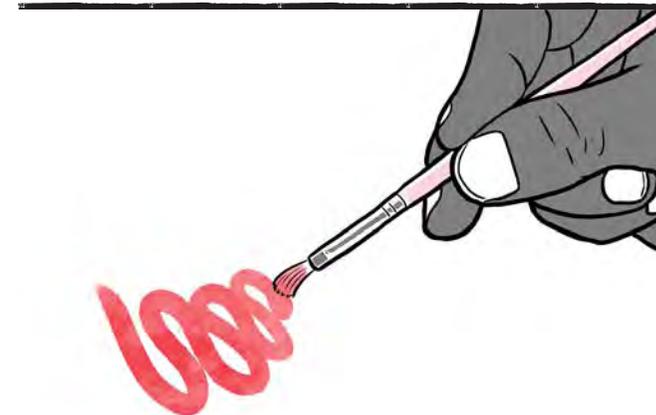
I AM GOING TO FILL THIS BOOK WITH ALL KINDS OF IDEAS, MANY OF THEM ARE NOT GOING TO BE GOOD, BUT THE POINT IS TO FILL IT. SO, IF YOU FIND THIS, AND YOU ARE THINKING, "THESE NOTES ARE RIDICULOUS," WELL, I ALREADY KNOW THAT. THAT WAS THE PLAN.

4. Find a room of your own. Someplace where you can feel free to draw and write and think and dream. Someplace where no one will disturb you or look over your shoulder. What Virginia Woolf called A Room of One's Own. It can be a closet, it can be a crowded cafe, it can be under a tree, it can be anyplace that you are at ease. In order to create freely you need to create a comfortable, non-judgmental space where you can work with abandon. (We'll get into this more later.)

5. Fill one page. Words, sketches, doodles, technical drawings, these can be plans for a piece or your thoughts about penguins, you decide.

Sorry, it's me again. Is it ok if I skip this sketchbook and move on to the serious social change parts? I'm not good at drawing and I don't want to waste time with the writing. And plus, to be frank, it feels silly and kind of embarrassing—like keeping a diary.

In the course of the coming chapters we may ask you to do things that seem silly or "not appropriate" for a person interested in "serious" social change. Trust us, and stick with it. It's all part of the creative process and remember, this is just for you. If you can't draw, don't worry: stick figures are fine. If you can't write, don't worry: there's no one reading it. This sketchbook is the foundation of your creative process. Trust yourself.



LESSON 3.1

The Creative Process

In arts and activism the product gets all the glory. In the art world, an artist's talent is judged by what she has created: the painting that hangs on the wall of a museum or is sold in a gallery, or the dramatic performance staged in a theatre and watched by an audience. In the activist world, it is the demonstration or rally that one organizes that attracts people, gets media coverage, and influences politics. The same thing is true when you merge these two worlds into artistic activism. Look back on the examples we've showcased in the last chapter. What have we shown you? That's right: the product that artistic activists have produced.

The obsession with the product is not unique to arts and activism, it is at the core of capitalism. Capitalism is based upon *things*: producing *things* and consuming *things*. It's what Marx called the "fetishism of the commodity." What's overlooked when

we focus on things is an understanding and appreciation of how things are made and who makes them—the "secret" of the commodity for Marx. In a word, what gets left out is the *process* of creation. Until we understand how things are made, how to make things will forever remain a mystery. Too often artistic activism becomes only about these things—what we'll discuss later as a sort of "tactical myopia"—and this can lead to an artistic activist practice only interested in replicating successful pieces: "best practices" employed, in cookie-cutter fashion, anyplace and at any time. This isn't very creative.

Creativity isn't a product, it's a process. It's a process that helps us to notice new objects and events, make new connections, and see the world in different ways. It's a process that helps us think of, sketch, and build innovative things. A process that helps us act in a different manner and imagine new horizons within which to act. Most important, creativity it is a process that *all of us* can use to become Artistic Activists.

Artists master the creative process over the course of many years. It takes this long because each of us needs to develop our own, individual process of creativity. While we can't turn you into a master over the course of the next chapter, we can give you some shortcuts we've learned through hard-won experience, and a lot of trial and error. In the end, however, these are only lessons that worked for us—and they may not work for you. Try these bits of wisdom on for size, keep what fits and feels good, put back what doesn't, all the while experimenting with other ways of developing your creative process. All we ask is that you explore the possibilities and commit to the task of discovering your own creative process.

LESSON 3.2

Creative Habitats

To be an artistic activist it helps to have a creative habitat. This habitat is a place where we can cultivate, grow and replenish our creativity for the rest of our lives. To create a habitat, we need physical and mental space. Here's a list of things to think about. Some may work, some may not. What's important is understanding the concept and adapting for your needs. In the end, do what works.

FIND A SPACE

Physical and mental space is key for creativity. A space away from the ordinary routines, obligations, and distractions. A space where we can have new ideas. Have you ever had a great idea in the shower, or when you're lying in bed drifting off to

sleep? What makes these spaces so conducive to creative thinking? Our mind is constantly working away. It's making plans and alternate plans, playing out conversations both real and imagined, and re-visiting and analyzing the past. For most of our lives our mind runs like a personal tabloid television news show in the waiting room of our consciousness: giving reports, speculating on events, gossiping, and hyperbolizing our past and future. Our creativity thrives when it can escape the chatter of our mind. This can happen when we're going out of town, or relaxing in the shower. When we can turn off the distractions and quiet our minds, it's like a new channel opens up for creative thought. Artists, if they can, like to go on "retreats." When we can we schedule the artistic activism workshops we run out of town in antiquated religious centers and off-season summer camps so participants can put miles between themselves and the pressing concerns of everyday life. But while heading off on a trip makes it easier, we don't have to leave town to be creative.

Lambert works best from his studio, surrounded by all his tools and materials. Sometimes, when he can't get there, he works from home. But since being creative for him looks a lot like spacing out to others, he puts on a special, bright yellow, "I'm-being-creative-don't-bother-me" hat to ward off well-meaning incursions and conversations from his live-in partner. You don't need to do this (and Lambert's partner wishes he wouldn't). Having a space to be creative, more practically, also means preparing a physical space and clearing the clutter. When we lay out the tools and materials we need, we don't have to get lost searching for them. With a space to write and draw, to spread things out, but still see and access everything you need, we create a space that fosters creativity.

