



In Art, We United; In Compassion, We Trust: A Review of the Believe In Truth Roundtable Discussion

Gordon Fung

Believe in Truth is a Painting and Drawing program-wide project that called for artwork submissions in response to our current moment of political and social unrest. The exhibited works reflected various styles, including traditional oil paintings, digital painting, and textile works. As part of a roundtable held on October 28th, after the online exhibition had opened on Instagram, faculty members and young artists gathered together in this virtual breathing space to reflect on how their practices had changed since the outbreak of the pandemic.

In the months before the election, we experienced collective mental trauma, intensified by the lockdown and social unrest. Mary Graham—a third-year Individualized Major event moderator—recounted her experience as a young artist during this surreal period. As an artist at the beginning of their artistic career, Mary felt that she had experienced a year of growth in the six months of lockdown. Ordered back in March, "Shelter in Place" granted the students an early spring break. However, this lockdown's unexpected impact shook everybody's lives by, ironically, putting everything into stagnation. Faculty present at the roundtable also expressed they felt puzzled as their work-life balance became more challenging to maintain, yet crucial to preserving one's sanity. This lesson was especially notable for faculty members with children at home. Karla Wozniak, a Painting instructor, and Jaime Austin, Director of Exhibitions and Public Programming, expressed frustrations around such challenges. To accommodate this new way of living in the home office, they have to deal with a compilation of online teaching, administrative work, and children's remote learning, all in the same four walls.

In addition to the challenges of work-life balance, we encountered a new sense of loneliness during the isolation. Humans have a natural urge to touch and be near other beings, but to prevent the spread of a deadly virus, we unfortunately have to give up this basic necessity. The inability to hug friends was heart-wrenching, Mary

Graham recounted. Brian Kwon, a sophomore in Illustration, acknowledged that everyone is going through the same dark tunnel. As a first-semester transfer student, Brian remained hopeful and anticipated the possible re-opening of the CCA campus in the upcoming semester. In his account, everyone was focused on their duties without many social interactions since the COVID surge. He pictured a future where we create meaningful collaborative projects once the distancing policy alleviates.

Danielle Lawrence, a painting faculty, viewed the shelter-in-place period as a time for self-reflection. Upon some introspection, Danielle felt the weight of her choices as an individual impacting the world when making decisions about their art-making. For example, as they witnessed the amplified environmental injustice under the pandemic, the artist began a practice of ensuring their materials of choice are eco-friendly. Danielle also contemplated contributing a percentage of sales to Indigenous people as a gesture to decolonize their personal wealth, acknowledging the economic and safety disparity Indigenous communities in North America have experienced for five hundred years and acutely during this pandemic. Due to social distancing, we gain more territories to encounter our inner selves and acquire a deeper understanding of one's role in society. Danielle urged fellow artists to recalibrate their practice and ask how our artworks exchange with the world. To Danielle, self-care became the top priority under this challenging situation, a method that allows one to forgive themselves for being unproductive.

As many continue working from home, some artists are challenged by a lack of studio space. Cameron Bunting, a senior student, quoted Linda Geary, Chair and Professor of the Painting and Drawing Program, saying, "you are always in your studio." Since we are now in our "studio" all the time, we should start examining how working at home affects our practice differently from working in a studio. Though the lack of usual resources challenges us, it is also an opportunity for us to reflect on and alter our existing practice—echoing Danielle's earlier comments on self-reflection.

Audrey Howatt, a junior, expressed that new opportunities came up during the COVID-19 outbreak. As everyone was forced to engage with a hyper-present moment of the pandemic in March, we had to go with the flow the pandemic dictated. Audrey felt grateful to reexamine the compassion shared in their neighborhood, as they got to know their neighbors and bonded over shared anxiety. Besides interactions under safe and distanced conditions, Audrey also tried to learn about forgiveness—forgiving oneself and people who had wronged them. We all deserve a chance to restructure ourselves from a faulty past by being gracious to each other, which can be a humbling and relaxing experience.

As a closing note, Linda expressed her gratitude for the love and compassion shared in this virtual meeting space. Seeing the roundtable's effectiveness to facilitate mutual caring and appreciation, Linda advocated for more gatherings like this one in the future. She also advised us to continue making and be radically joyful about it, as art-making is a tool for survival.

It has not been easy receiving the bombardment of information during this chaotic year. At CCA, we are blessed to have a cohesive and supportive community of faculty, staff, and students from different cultural backgrounds, open to cultural and constructive exchanges. Though we are challenged by dystopia, institutional racism, environmental damages, and all kinds of inequalities that will not be mended overnight under new governmental leadership, our community ties keep us healthy and strong. As artist-activists and creative citizens, we are obligated to monitor the progress of our government. We have to be ready to give critical responses to any future societal defects through creative activities. Americans' values may be polarized, yet in Compassion and Love, We Trust. Finally, we extend our gratitude to all the poll workers, mail carriers, and volunteers, among many essential workers, for their selfless contributions in the entire voting process.

Check out the exhibition for more: Instagram [@ccapainting](#).

This roundtable discussion is presented in conjunction with [Believe In Truth](#), a Painting program exhibition leading up to the election. On view October 25—November 3, 2020. This event is part of the [Creative Citizens in Action](#) initiative at CCA (CCA@CCA), and is funded by an endowment gift to support The Deborah and Kenneth Novack Creative Citizens Series, an annual series of public programs focused on creative activism.

Do you have questions or opinions about this response? Have you seen an event at CCA on which you'd like to report? Please email exhibitions@cca.edu to contribute to our Letters to the Editor series or submit to *Review Rewind Respond*.

Gordon Fung is a composer, folk-instrumentalist, and cartomancer. Gordon is pursuing a BFA in Individualized Studies in light of bridging the multi-disciplinary practices for creating installations, performance, and conceptual works.