

Checking In: Chloe Wise Asks, “What’s an Art?”

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The artist Chloe Wise is a refreshing connection. She’s usually full of energy, and not afraid to spend most of it creating art that speaks to our times. Her paintings and sculptures explore our culture’s relationship with consumerism, shed light on the male and female gaze, and point out the misconceptions in various subcultures.

Today amid COVID-19, however, she’s getting back to personal basics—spending energy by cooking, listening to music, and connecting with her neighbors. From her studio in New York City, she updates Whitewall on how she’s staying connected, what she’s listening to, and why she’s rethinking the meaning of being productive.

WHITEWALL: How are you doing?

CHLOE WISE: At this point I’ve adapted and am getting used to this new pace. I’m feeling fortunate to be safe and comfortable in my studio. The macro level anxieties regarding public health, the death toll, the impending impact on the economy, and the political situation are overwhelmingly upsetting, and the first few weeks all those big issues and sorrows were really painful.

There are only so many tears you can cry. At this point, since staying home is the right thing to do, I’m focusing on making the most of being homebound, and trying to avoid complaining since I do feel so lucky to have my health and my kitties.

WW: What are you listening to, reading, watch?

CW: Listening to a very eclectic mix, as always. I made a playlist called “Quarantine-age-dream.” Always listening to Saada Bonaire, lately some Cambodian rock from the 60s like Sinn Sisamouth. Also, lots of Doja Cat and Mort Garson’s Plantasia.

I’m also listening to the Audiobook How To Do Nothing: Resisting The Attention Economy by Jenny Odell. And I’m watching Harry Potter and tons of videos of cute animals on Instagram.

WW: What are you cooking?

CW: I am cooking SO much. It’s honestly all I’m doing. This past week I made kimchi pancakes, tamago, roasted a chicken in bacon fat and brown butter (oops), made Caesar dressing from scratch, homemade pasta in many shapes and forms, chocolate chip cookies, many pesto varieties, honey olive oil granola... I can’t stop.

WW: How are you staying connected?

CW: FaceTime. And at 7 p.m., as all of NYC has been clapping for the doctors and nurses, I go up on my roof every evening at sunset and clap with all my neighbors who feel like my new friends. It's heartwarming.

WW: How are you staying creative? Are you able to make work at this time?

CW: Barely. I started a painting and I'm working so slowly that I am surprised I was ever productive at all. I paint for a few hours and then I spend three days cleaning, doing dishes, texting friends, attempting to do a dance class on Instagram Live, cuddling my cats...

It actually goes by so quickly. I've had to re-establish my understanding of the word "productivity" and allow myself to not be productive in the usual sense. I'm letting the really human things become my priority. I'm a full-time cat-mom, food blogger, therapist, niche housekeeper, dancer... What's an art?