

Dear Impractical Laborers,



How are you? Are you OK?

What a trying time this is. A truly Trying Time.

A Time to Try being otherwise: slower. Quieter. Trying to take better care. Trying not to check the news obsessively. Trying not to stress about _____. Trying to re-prioritize. Trying to read, rest, reflect, relax, reassure. Trying to find ease in being ill-at-ease. Trying not to rush. Trying to help the more vulnerable. Trying to be a responsible community member. Trying to connect. Trying not to touch our face. Trying to go outside while trying to go nowhere. Trying patience, flexibility, patience, p a t i e n c e, p a t i e n c e. Trying to wash our hands more often. Trying not to force the future. Or: at least, trying to plan the future loosely, like a basting stitch, provisionally. Easily undone.

All of us are trying and tried, now. But we recognize some of us are in more threatening situations than others. Those of us who are able to work remotely and maintain incomes are experiencing a very different type of chaos and uncertainty than the crises of those who rely on gig, service, and shuttered brick + mortar economies to support themselves. Many are on the frontline of caring for others, and have no time for rest and reflection.

Regardless of our personal situations, we find ourselves disconnected from our usual patterns, habits, interactions, assumptions, routines, and faced with new ways of being, doing, and making. Some of us find ourselves absolutely exhausted. Some of us wonder about other modes, possibilities, potentials. What have we been doing, that has gotten us here to now? How can we choose differently and contribute to something otherwise?

We have grown acutely aware of the recent-past's sense of security and assumptions that allowed us to plan with faith. What we had been steadily and sometimes panic-ly working toward has been canceled. So what next? And what the hell were we doing, panicking about some deadline? Is there a possibility of remembering this perspective, going forward? And yet: still present is the urgent drive to respond to the specificities of this moment through making.

But first, to go back, to what we cultivated together months ago: as you may recall, in last May 2019, we asked you via the ILSSA listserv "What frameworks are essential supporting structures for your practice?". Over 40 of you responded, from which we identified the commonly shared themes of Handwork, Risk, Questions, Care, Attention, Environment, Routine, Pace, Community, Embodiment, and Alternatives. We interpreted your responses into a zine and letterpress printed prompts, resulting in our last mailing to you, *ILSSA Frameworks* (July 2019). Your responses were exhibited at Unrequited Leisure in Nashville, TN, from September 7-27, 2019.

In the first days of 2020, your ILSSA Co-Operators, being by nature optimistic and prone to planning, outlined the rollout of the *Frameworks* themes as topics for ILSSA to explore over the next two years, beginning with QUESTIONS + COMMUNITY in January–April 2020.

But now, have we learned anything from this current moment?

Yes.

And are we a little bit wary of this tendency to plan so far ahead?

Yes.

We now realize that these themes could be of most use as prompts to explore our current situations, in real time, as they arrive.

So we have loosened our plan for the next two years. For now, we will consider new themes to explore as the time arrives.

But to start, our present January to April 2020, remains QUESTIONS + COMMUNITY.

And we invite you to join us in exploring these through two new projects:

1) *A Trying Time: An ILSSA Quaranzine for Working Together, Alone*

We are always heartened by the creativity and generosity that surfaces in difficult times. Those of you on social media may be seeing all kinds of new initiatives to reframe this time, including on Instagram @self_isolation_residency, where all artists are invited to consider self-isolation as a residency in which

they're currently living; or efforts such as @sonyahuber's daily public meditation sitting at 1pm; or @douglasdegges selling drawings as a fundraiser for art workers currently without sources of income. We are creating a new publication *A Trying Time: An ILSSA Quaranzine for Working Together, Alone* to document your activities, questions, challenges, suggestions, strategies, remote collaborations, invitations, reading lists, priorities, boundaries, and social distance projects. How has the Coronavirus / social distancing / shelter-in-place / remote everything affected your practice? What are you reading, and/or what do you hope to start soon? What new resources have you found? What are you trying? Email the whole listserv at ilssa@freelists.org to share in real time, email just us Co-Operators at operator@impractical-labor.org, or mail in your response: **ILSSA / 1069 Connecticut Ave #4-310 / Bridgeport, CT 06607**. Please respond by April 15 so we can get the compilation zine to you in a, uh, timely fashion . . . perhaps later this spring, if here in Connecticut the shelter-in-place orders that begin the day after tomorrow don't endure for too very long. We realize this may just be issue #1. If social distancing continues past the summer, there will perhaps be multiple issues . . .

2) *Surveying the 2nd State of the ILSSA Union*

Enclosed you will find the *Surveying the 2nd State of the ILSSA Union*, where we ask you to assess your working conditions as impractical laborers. First issued in 2012, the responses to the original *Surveying the ILSSA Union* charted ILSSA's course for the next several years, including the ILSSA Convergence in Asheville, NC (2013), and *It's About Time: A Workbook for the Working Person* publication and exhibition at Colorado College (2014). Now, in the tumultuous first months of 2020, we ask you to (re)visit these questions in order to orient our (flexible) future activities. We ask you to respond to the questions by email to operator@impractical-labor.org, or through the mail to the above address, using the format of your choice. Please respond by May Day, May 1, 2020. All answers will be compiled anonymously into one document, the *2nd State of the ILSSA Union Report*, and mailed back to you.

Here are some things we anticipate possibly happening soonish maybe:

July 7, 2020: every year, on the seventh day of the seventh month, we celebrate the Festival to Plead For Skills: a day to hone a technique, try a new skill, in concert with other impractical laborers around the globe. We invite you to consider organizing a local event, perhaps with an outdoor component, in celebration of the summer and togetherness, if possible at that time. We hope that July 7, 2020 will be far from this contemporary moment of social distance . . . but working together alone has always been the ILSSA way, so we will find new ways to share this holiday if we are still in isolation over the summer.

Sometime this summer: We anticipate sending you the *2nd State of the ILSSA Union Report*, along with some long-overdue member manifesto(s). Those of you who have sent in your *Frameworks* prompts sheets will receive your replacement sheets in that mailing. As you may have gathered, there will be no ILSSA Group Residency this year, at least not of the residing-in-one-place kind. We are always open to (and in fact rely upon) suggestions for next year, 2021.

Fall 2020: A selection of prompts from *ILSSA Frameworks* will be installed in the exhibition *Better Together*, curated by ILSSA member Leah Mackin, at String Room Gallery, Wells College, Aurora, NY. The show has been postponed from opening in March to sometime, perhaps, in late fall. Details will be shared once known.

And in early 2021: we anticipate an ILSSA "solo" exhibition at the UConn Contemporary Art Gallery in Storrs, CT. But more on that in due time. That feels far too far away, right now, to think about.

. . .

As always and ever, we welcome your ideas, proposals, collaborations, opportunities, and inquiries.

As always and ever, we love you.

In social distance we await your missive: operator@impractical-labor.org.

Thank you for all that you do, and are.

Take care + be well -----

Your Co-Operators,

Local 347 Shop FS / Bridget Elmer, St Pete, FL

Local 917 Shop RC / Emily Larned, Bridgeport CT