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As told to Loré Yessuff, 1342 words.

Tags: Art, Design, Publishing, Politics, Process, Collaboration, Identity, Inspiration.

On collaborating on equal footing

Designer and artist Zoe Minikes discusses creating new spaces, releasing expectations, and the importance of listening.

Considering all the day jobs you've had and all the community organizing that you have been a part of, what have been your favorite projects to work on so far?

The first one that comes to mind is the Detroit Popup Alliance. Before moving to Detroit, I ran a community resource kitchen on the Berkeley-Oakland border in the Bay, where I grew up. I traveled across the country to see who was doing similar work and what I could learn and share. When I came to Detroit, I felt an immediate affinity with this city. I worked with my friend, Nick George, to put together the Detroit Popup Alliance as a way to meet collaborators and friends. I don't work on it anymore, but it started as a resource for people running pop-up kitchens and restaurants in Detroit. That gave me a way in and a way to feel comfortable and centered in Detroit when I first got here.

The second would be Victory Kitchen, which is a resource kitchen. I grew up in the Bay, and I had a community of friends and family, but I was interested in fostering a place of belonging for people who might lack that strong sense of community that I had growing up in that place. We'd always make soup, and often people would bring ingredients for that soup and make it together. Someone from the community would teach a skill. We learned unicycling one week. I taught cider pressing another week. It was a space that I felt like I personally blossomed into. It was a great way to learn about welcoming people into a space, stepping back once that space was open, and just letting things unfold.

The third project obviously would be Flower Press. I feel like Flower Press is the most intuitive work I've ever done. With many of the jobs or projects that I've run or been a part of, there was a lot of learning on the fly and randomly Googling how to write a business plan or SOP, or whatever. But, for Flower Press, a lot of the work feels intuitive and internal, like the wisdom has been there all along.

How has working on those projects impacted your values? What habits have you learned to let go?

The primary lesson that I've learned is to release expectations. In any good collaboration or improvisation, there's a sense of being able to bear witness and listen so that you can interact in ways that further the conversation or the project; that make the joke funnier or make the dinner yummier.

I guess something to mention is I'm also a Design Director at Bandcamp. My career world has almost always been working in tech. And I exempt Bandcamp from this, but, honestly, a lot of my career life has been in spaces where the loudest voice in the room is the one who gets their voice heard. I've never felt that to be the case in any sort of community or collaborative projects I've worked on. So, I think the most important thing I learned in facilitation work is that the less that I was saying or doing in the room, the better the facilitation.

Let's talk about Flower Press. What was the impetus for Flower Press, and what is the week-to-week workflow like?

I am really lucky to be surrounded by lots of self-publishing friends, and a few years ago, I looked around at my community and was like, "You know, we're all using different resources and different printers; some of us are going to the book fairs but have separate tables. We're all in, you know, gentle competition with each other." And I thought, "How can we consolidate resources and cross-pollinate the people we share our work with?" So, I asked a few friends if I could carry their work under the banner Flower Press.

And then my friend—I didn't know her at the time—Katelyn Rivas reached out to me within a few months that I started the press and asked if I would publish her chapbook, which was the culmination of her graduate

degree. The chapbook is Radical Self-Care for Black Women, and I said, "Of course." I hadn't actually considered producing and publishing work, but her ask felt like an invitation to think about the press in a different way. So, that was the original impetus. I owe a lot of what Flower Press does now to Katelyn just reaching out and asking that question.

In terms of what the week-to-week or month-to-month work looks like, it's been a rolling process; it's pretty ad-hoc. I basically invite people to submit work in whatever form they're most comfortable with, with as little or as much preamble as is desirable for them. Historically, I've just been able to work one-on-one with people from the start of each project.

Now, fortunately, and unfortunately, we're sort of inundated with submissions. My hope is that over the next few months to the next year, I can transition to more of a seasonal process that respects time for rest; take a month in the winter and a month in the summer to just chill from work for a minute. The idea would be that in the winter to spring months, we'll be publishing, editing, designing, and producing work. Then, from June through November, we'll celebrate that work, share it broadly, and get an audience for these various publications we're putting out. And then, I'm going to take the end of the year to just rest and recoup. December is just going to be the hot chocolate season for me.

I just had an image come to mind of like a relay race, and you pass a baton to a really cool artist, and then they pass the baton to someone else, and they pass the baton to someone else, and in the end everyone wins. It's like a circle of beautiful ideas and captivating art that you're ushering.

I think that's it. And then everyone is more connected after that. One thing that I think about a lot is the concept of affinity spaces, which is essentially the idea that all people within the space are encouraged to collaborate on equal footing whether they have intensive tacit or word-of-mouth knowledge. Within an affinity space, your experience with the material or the space doesn't matter, your age doesn't matter. There's no segregation by age, whatever the topic might be. The idea is that the affinity is always to the endeavor and what is happening in the space, rather than to people, or to each other. That's one way that I've organized my work as well.

What are some other presses that currently inspire you?

I recently met up with my friend Fey Nguyen, who's published through the press, and they shared with me that they started a press called swallow::tale press. I love their description of it: "a press for mad people." And deeper than that, it's a press for folks who identify with madness in all ways that might manifest.

I recently picked up Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication again, which is published by Co-Conspirator Press and written by a writer named Meenadchi. It reminded me of how inspiring Co-Conspirator Press is; just the breadth of that work and Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication is especially resonant to me right now.

There are a bunch of local presses, publishing projects, and library projects that I've had my eye on. One is Nox Library, which is a radical mobile library. Danielle, who runs the library, goes around Detroit and makes radical works accessible to the neighborhoods. They also run a reading group and focus on a different publication every month.

Zoe Minikes Recommends:

Touching clay

Roller skating (if that feels available to you)

Taking a bath with salt in it

Learning a new game

Asking for help, even when it feels hard

Name

Zoe Minikes

Vocation

participatory designer and artist

Fact

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