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December 7, 2022 -

As told to Miriam Garcia, 2113 words.

Tags: Film, Art, Collaboration, Identity, Success.

On rejecting productivity

Filmmaker, performance artist, and musician (Special Interest) Alli Logout discusses doing things because you want to do them, not compromising your vision, and community as an essential resource.

On your website, you have a statement that says "Through stories that are lived in they propose a new form of being, not as a fantasy, but with feet firmly planted in the now." What do you mean by that?

That means a lot. I think from the beginning of being a filmmaker and an artist I noticed that I'm really anti-representation. I feel that was something that felt important to me before I realized how compromised and capitalized-on representation actually is.

I think just as a storyteller, I was really interested in stories that were about us and about the lives that we are living, in times, places, and moments that feel true to ourselves and true to our lives. I feel I also play with the genre of fantasy or things being really whimsical, in a way, because those moments are in my daily life. At the same time, my daily life is filled with a lot of sorrow and grief. So I like to use fantasy in a way that's not unrealistic, in a way that is very relatable to us and to our experience at this moment and place in time.

Can you elaborate on what you mean when you say you are anti-representation?

I think buzzwords lack clarity. And I have watched over the past few years how black artists have been experiencing from the dawn of time, but just watching your art get capitalized on, in a way that it's reaching also a group of people that it doesn't need to reach. I'm not interested in creating stories that are based on stereotypes, but also in a way that's not fetishistic. I've realized that just my work as an artist and the work of my friends has been capitalized on in really scary and intense ways that we weren't anticipating because everybody wants to hear a black queer story. Those are the buzz words. And though I'm excited about more platforms to be giving us that time and space, I'm not interested in creating a story that's heteronormative or capitalistic. I'm not interested in telling happy, go-lucky stories. I'm not interested in having to conform to those ideals or having to conform to just any general what you going to call it, respectability politics kind of situation.

I read that when you were younger, many of your choices were based on proving people wrong. So for example, proving to people that you could sing or that you could be good at school. How did that drive like this perception, impact your creative work, and if you're still dealing with that?

I feel far less motivated by spite than I ever have been in my entire life. That was really important to me. And even though it's kind of sad and intense, I'm happy that was something that has pushed me to this point in my career. But I don't feel driven by that anymore. I think that I had to really go through a lot of bullshit to get where I am of being operating by spite. But then once I did start getting recognition or entered into things, then I realized there's this whole other world of me being fetishized and dealing

with that and going through the motions of those things of being exploited as an artist. And those are all things that are sad that I just had to go through to get where I am now. Now I am in a place where I just feel like I can create, I'm not trying to do anything for anybody. I feel like I have a better understanding of myself as an individual and as an artist and what I want to keep moving towards and researching and studying—spite isn't as much of the motivation anymore. And I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders.

So now I'm just kind of cruising. I feel like it's within these next few years that I think for the first time, I'm actually going to blossom as an artist. Now that I've been through all these things and have had to really work through them because they are psychologically quite damaging. It has taken a really long time for me to go through these things, to process them in my artistic and in my personal life. And now I can say I'm at a point in my career where there's so much unknown and that's really exciting. I don't feel like I need to prove anything to anybody. I know what I want. I know what I need to do. I know what I'm towards. I know what I need to keep studying. I know the people that I do need to be talking to or working with. I can't get deceived anymore.

What do you think were some of the resources that helped you get where you are right now?

This is really complicated question because it's like, I don't know, resource-wise, I haven't had any sort of institutional backing in a way. I think the way I have grown is by collectively knowing other artists that are also like-minded. For example, my collaborating partner Juicebox Burton with whom I do most of my film stuff. I went to school for film theory but I didn't know any of the technical parts. So it was honestly just both of us pushing each other, being like we're going to do it. We deserve to be able to do these things. We're fully resourceful. Now we actually know how to use a camera, it has just taken a lot of time. And a lot of hours, it's taken a lot of self-work.

You are a filmmaker and also a musician (in the band Special Interest). How does your work as a filmmaker nurture your work as a musician and vice versa?

There's so much that goes into my performance as a musician, that also goes into my performance as a filmmaker. But I think the key thing that has helped me in both of these is learning how to collaborate properly, learning how to collaborate with my band, and knowing their different needs has really helped me also be a better director and listen to others and what their needs are. What they're feeling, what they're thinking, how to take criticism, and also how to state what you want sonically or visually.

I think that's maybe one of the greatest sayings besides just generally learning how to perform and how to remember all the world's stages in a lot of ways. I hate that I said that, but also it's just so real...but I think mainly collaboration and learning how to collaborate with both my actors or just talent in general and also with my band, you really have to tune in to people's needs.

And I think I've had to reel in that part of myself and in my work life and in my personal life of just learning how to listen, how to take advice, and learning how to be there for individuals and also for my bandmates. I think that they both inform each other in a really beautiful way. There's just so much overlap.

What are the challenges of being the lead singer or director?

I feel really intense about it just because I've really had to work on myself to learn how to actually be in a community with people, to be able to talk and listen to them. I didn't know how to listen. Even just a few years ago I had no idea how to listen and I had no idea how to take criticism or take advice and when you are a band's front person all eyes are on you. Whereas actually, it's 1000%, this band is a collaboration, but all eyes are on me. And then also directing, being on a set and everything I say goes, they both come with a lot of responsibility and a lot of room for really intense emotional mistakes. And they're all high-risk environments that I'm kind of just in that position to facilitate for people. And sometimes that's a lot to facilitate on me spiritually and emotionally, but that's also something I've really learned over the years is how to protect myself within that.

I had an incredible conversation with the artist Kelela. I was talking to him about how some of the audiences are either people who love us and there's also a bunch of kids or we're playing to 10 old white men and how intense that feels for me and how I finally feel like after 10 years, I now know how to deal with a crowd like that. I used to get really angry, but now I know how to protect myself, and something Kelele said to me is that I had to learn how to push with my voice. And that thought has just been ringing in my head over the past few days, especially because the last show we played had just a few people in it. And I realized I was pushing with my voice. I was annoyed by the show, everybody in it, but I was pushing with my voice and I think I'm being more of a responsible front person, I just feel far more into myself and my energy in these spaces where all eyes are on me. It's intense. It's a lot to hold.

Can you elaborate on what you meant by pushing with your voice?

What I took out of that advice was that I don't have to be any sort of way other than doing what I need to be doing, which is playing my music and I can be still, I don't have to be super performative. I can elaborate and push my voice and blow people away with just that, I don't have to be fully full body into it to be able to push people away.

Your creative work, both in film and in music is certainly political. I'm curious to know what you think about certain statements related to labor and work in the creative fields. For example, being productive

or what failure means when you are working on a particular project.

Well, first and foremost, I don't believe in work. What I am doing with my band and filmmaking, can be considered work, but that's not work. I reject the idea of work and having to be productive in any sort of way. I'm doing this because I want to do this. I am in this band and I am playing all these shows because I want to be playing these shows, same with filmmaking. I want to be making this movie. I want to be in this place right now. It is my decision. I refuse at this point in my life to be doing something that I don't love. And that mentality has gotten me in a lot of trouble financially over the years.

Me and my best friend who did the studio, we had to make a really big commitment. We're not going to work. This isn't how we want to live our lives. So we decided that we weren't, and it's been really hard, but things are really paying off at this point now. I refuse to labor for anybody else except for things that feel good and positive to me and the people around me.

For the kind of work that you do, what would you say are the most valuable resources?

I think my most valuable resource is having access to very compassionate, loving people. We're also artists who have ridiculous ideas that sometimes I don't agree with and I absolutely love helping them to make that a reality. My biggest resource is that love that I get to share with those folks. Because that's honestly the only resource I do have. I don't have money. I have mild success in my band. And for me, that mild success is like playing in another country. It never thought that would happen, you know? But what does that do at the end of the day? What good is any of that? The most valuable resources just are just the loving, compassionate, people that are in my life.

Alli Logout Recommends:

Book: *Mucus in My Pineal Gland* by Juliana Huxtable

Book: *The Undercommons* by Fred Moten

Album: *Painless* by Nilufer Yanya

Film: *Come and See*

Name

Alli Logout

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