



JRB ART AT THE ELMS

Paseo Arts District

OUR INDEPENDENT SELVES

By Joy Reed Belt



Allen Birnbach, "Starlight #21, Ed. 4/25," 2017, Carbon Pigment Print, 24 x 36 in., \$2,500

When an electronic device stalls or otherwise fails to work properly, we all know to unplug the device and wait a few minutes before reconnecting it. I was incredulous when I first heard about this “fix” from a trusted repair person. He strongly recommended I try it before calling him in a state of panic or before dialing a 1-800 number and becoming increasingly irritated when I was put on terminal hold.

It was hard for me to accept that the simple act of resetting could be a solution. Eventually I did take his advice. But old habits die hard. Even now, when one of my devices quits working properly my heart stops, I will call out to a colleague or even a casual passerby while automatically reaching for my list of people to call when things go wrong. Then I remember, “Joy, unplug or disconnect, take deep breaths and wait for a few minutes while everything resets. “The very act of being able to make an inanimate object reset is empowering.”

One of the outcomes of our combined current political, public health, economic, and racial and social justice crises is we, as individuals, have lost a great deal of our personal independence. We can’t travel, dine out, go to school, or attend a sporting or cultural event with the abandonment we used to enjoy. Instead we are necessarily charged with protecting ourselves and our fellow human beings with

the hope that things will get better. But our fear and anxiety increase daily as we receive conflicting information about what to do to alleviate our collective problems.

Indeed, things seem to get more hopeless every day. Our elected officials and decision makers are so stressed that they are behaving like aging adolescents. The battle of the masks is a case in point. "You can't make me wear a mask!" Or, by refusing to social distance.



Christa Blackwood, "Santa Elena," 2013, Hand Pulled Duo Monoprint Encaustic Photogravure, 18 x 24 in., \$2,750



Christa Blackwood, "Chola," 2013, Hand Pulled Duo Monoprint Encaustic Photogravure Printed on Rice Paper, 18 x 24 in., \$2,750

Obviously, I don't have the wisdom or knowledge to propose a national or global solution to alleviate our current crises. But I do have a "Modest Proposal," and it is a much happier than the one Johnathan Swift proposed his satirical essay in 1729. I propose that we use the arts to reset our individual and collective selves. The act of resetting will put us in touch with our essential selves, make us feel calmer, more in control, more creative, and ultimately more hopeful. COVID-19 is a very innovative virus, therefore we have to be creative in our fight against it. We must develop successful strategies so that our businesses survive. We have to reinvent learning experiences for our young people so they will be prepared to exploit life's opportunities. And it is important for us to be creative, caring and thoughtful in repairing the human fabric of our society.

The arts are healing, inspiring, and empowering. Since the advent of digital technology, they have become increasingly accessible. Museums and galleries all over the world are currently offering unprecedented access to their programs and collections. Yesterday I heard that during this upcoming holiday weekend we will be able to stream "Hamilton" with the original cast performing. This morning I read that Oklahoma Contemporary will be streaming readings of the "Odyssey." Musicians are performing virtual concerts and there are millions of wonderful books to read. In July and August, JRB Art at The Elms will be presenting, digitally and by appointment, a wonderful exhibit of four photographers selected by New York City based Curator, Julie Maguire. Julie has assembled the work of Brett Weston, Christa Blackwood, Allen Birnbach and Catherine Adams in a show entitled "Photography and Place: Fragments of the World." Viewing these photographs will safely transport you to Cuba, California, and the great American West.

This weekend, declare your independence by using the arts to reset.



Catherine Adams, "The Acute Charm of Ruin & Development, #5 (San Lazaro), Havana, Cuba," 2017, Chromogenic Print, 36 x 24 in., \$1,900



Catherine Adams, "Escuela Nacional Cubana D Ballet No. 9," 2017, Chromogenic Print, 36 x 24 in., \$1,900

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