

ASHLEY STULL MEYERS



From November Over

I'm unabashedly angry. As a woman, a person of color, as a queer body, as an arts worker—I'm angry. This is an observation that seems trite in consideration of the above classifications, but it took me time to arrive here.

I've navigated spaces wherein I stand apart, tokenized, for most of my years. My schools weren't sure what to teach me, my museums weren't sure what to show me, my collaborators not sure how to best include me. Now, that tenuous acceptance to the space around me includes my country. The creative and academic narratives around me are cis, and white, and male. The images fore-fronted to me in this world are nothing like me at all. They're rigid where I am soft. They've created edges where I prefer curves.

There are rumors that in April, our President will defund the National Endowment of the Arts. He has already held my friends and those I admire hostage in airports. He has denied their collective mobility because the spirit that moves them is a different color—because their skin is color. Mine is too. In the spring he may hold them hostage in their creative and political practices. But, I won't. And I hope you won't.

The capital 'M' museum is a particular sort of space. In the changing of the political tide, it's now a space that's grown particularly cautious. My heart breaks that the same people who find value in a thing like "art" are captive to a definition of value that speaks to practices I may never have—that my friends and mentors will likely never have. They say "He will not divide us", is divisive. They acquisition protest signs, but only those coated in optimism and glitter. Formalism is as radical as they can reach. I wonder how much longer they will reach me.

I write this from a plane that will land in Dallas, Texas. I grew into my skin here, beneath the noses of those who voted for Donald Trump. I think I still know them, though they certainly don't know me. The Modern Art Museum will greet me with an exhibition of the artist, KAWS. I wonder if he thinks about the brown bodies that lift him to the height of his resume. I hope I can lift them to the heights they've truthfully earned without me.