



Artist Statement;
Upike Archival Department
Reflections During a Pandemic Project
Artwork by C. Epling
Artwork Title: The Great Dollar Tree
October 2020

I am not a reflective person. Despite being somewhat consumed by the terrors and beauty of the human condition, I do not reflect very well. Worry, yes. Stress, more so. Value and appreciate, of course. All together at once in some instances. But reflect, no. I remember and I consider, but that's where I draw the line, sometimes quite literally. Nothing can prepare a person for the events we've been through recently with Covid19. As I write this even, our county and state seems to be overflowing with new cases. Had this been in the dark ages, we would see millions of lives lost. This era has everything a great suspenseful movie would have. Conspiracy, fear, horrors, heroes. Unseen enemies, magnificent antagonists, and all of it thrown into a political soup. How could a virus become politicized? How could it not? Currently I serve as the staff editorial cartoonist for six newspapers in eastern Kentucky. Looking back over the weekly submissions over the course of this year, it's all been Covid19 related. If not indirectly, then directly. Like us all, I am unwittingly purged everyday, whether I want it or not, on the current dilemmas surrounding a vaccine, my elderly family members, and the anger of not having any real control over any of it all at the same time. I suppose this is reflection in a way. Worry, yes, for certain.

The artwork here is inspired by all of these things mentioned above. It's not political, but yes it is too. It can NOT be. Nothing can NOT be anymore it feels. The decision to wear a red hat with white letters on it throws one into a certain ideology. The belief, and it is a belief, on whether to wear a mask or not in public is an indicator of one's political leaning. But please don't take this as a 'Trump' nod, or the opposite. It's simply a snap-shot one might see in any given isle in any given grocery store here in EKY today. I selected a 'dollar' mart to place my elderly Trump supporter, in the hopes to reflect the state of the economy in someway. His overalls showing his tradition, and his hat showing his faith. Make America Great Again, when all around us it feels as if we're entering the world of Mad Max. Racial divide, social unrest, and not any of us can watch a single movie at the movie theater anymore. That bothers me just as bad. The colors I selected in this piece weren't planned to be honest, but you'll notice there's a heavy use of red, white, and blue. I selected a 'clay board' to paint/draw this on. Before adding color, I washed the board with artist medium, allowed it to dry, then carved out my line art. Color was added slowly, building up on it bit by bit. I am happy with the results of using the medium before hand, for the painting looks 'dirty', rough, and a little nasty. All the things the virus is.

I have to end this statement with this one thought. Above all, if there's something in my being that comes close to being reflective, it's this; my daughter just turned one in July 2020. I want her to experience all the things I did as a child, which translates into social constructs involving us being able to be around each other within more than six feet apart. It makes me sad that she is growing up during a time when

A vaccine is acting like a magical key to unlock a fulfilled childhood. Will it come? Most likely. Will it come soon enough? I don't know. But in the meantime, we will do what we have to for her. That's what people do in the mountains. We do what we have to do to make it. That's what we all want, is to make it. So political, this is not, but it is all the while it is too. I see an extraction based economy slowly dying, a virus slowly growing, and the only real option coming from the opposing political party being to eliminate 'dirty coal'. We ALL want a healthy Earth, but what I am hearing seems to be death without a replacement plan for us to make it. No replacement. No vaccine. No childhood. I throw myself at this point on my faith, and my heritage. Will it be enough to make it? It has to be.

So with that, I hope you have a glimpse into my thinking right now. I hope it doesn't seem too bleak. Serious, yes, but hopeful. Just like the old man I painted, I want my daughter to be able to grow old and healthy and of a sound mind. I hope she has more options at this old man's age when it comes to selecting leaders that will lead. Better yet... I will do all I can to see that she has the opportunity to be that leader herself, instead.

Chris Epling
PO Box 183
Regina, KY 41559

