

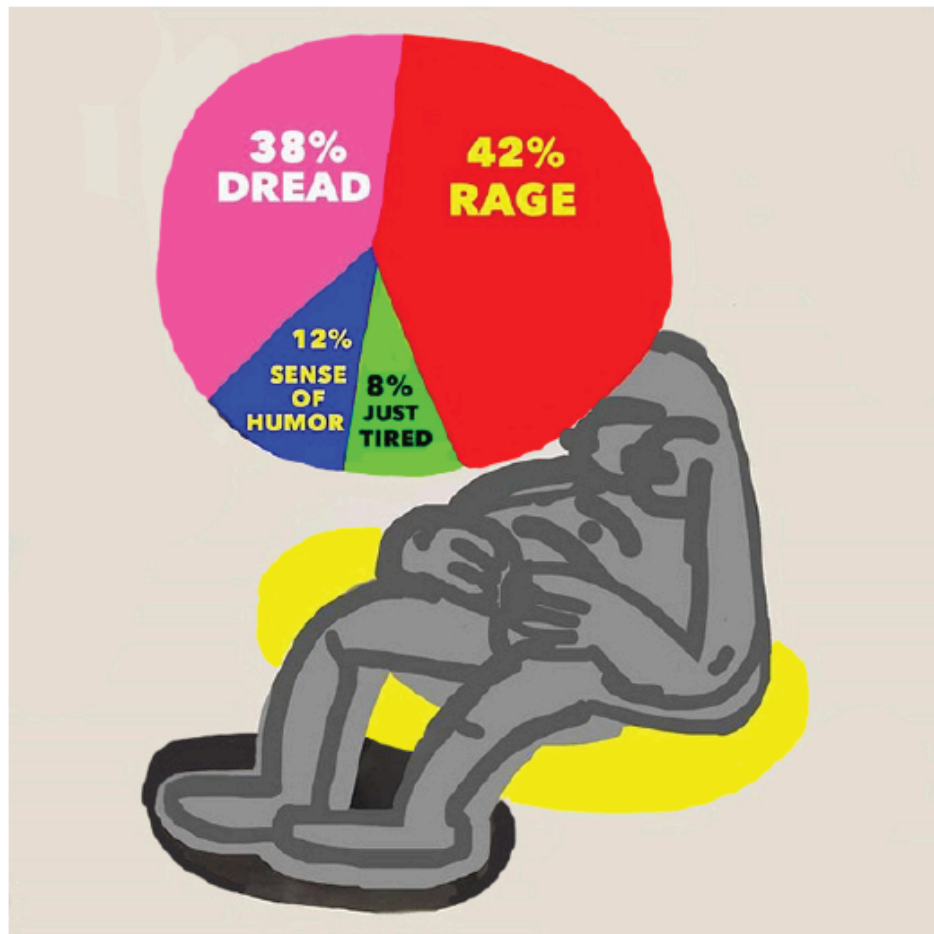
GLADSTONE GALLERY

Amy Sillman, "Unpresidential Times," Artforum.com/slant, January 5, 2017.

SLANT

Unpresidential Times: Amy Sillman

01.05.17



The following is something I jotted out the day after the election. I happened to be making a zine for a show at the Drawing Center in NYC, and purely by coincidence the printing deadline for the zine was that week. I was shocked by the election results, and had no idea how to process the news or how to make art for a show that would open in January or how to return to a studio at all. But a zine is a fast and furious public/private form of address, so I just knew that I should write something, a kind of letter, about how to approach this new time.

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A FEW YEARS AGO we were knocked out by the first line of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "I want to speak about bodies changed into new forms." What the hell: That was written in, like, the year 8 AD, and it's still totally up our alley. We are on the same wavelength with Ovid in at least one sense: total fascination with a structuring logic of endless change. But meanwhile, this work is being shown, dismayingly, on the literal eve of the inauguration of you-know-who, and we face a global rise of neofascism. Changes are urgently required, but how exactly to refuse and resist now as artists, citizens, educators, people? How to split up one's time, how to keep going to the studio, to go defiantly, or not go at all? Should we not be in shows, not sell work, not go to art fairs? (Call us old-fashioned, but personally we really don't understand why artists go to art fairs anyway—networking while someone sells your work from a booth?? We don't get why this is "fun"—but whatever...) What do we do right now? Our desires are conflicting and ill-fitting... do we re-tool our art practices, or just keep going, putting the anger into the work? What would be the point of abstraction now? Our immediate answer was refusal, but does that refusal actually function to do anything except turn us against our own methods? After a few days the answer seemed to be: Don't allow them to take away your sense of humor. Keep making that awkward, slow, funny, unaesthetic, non-product-oriented, skeptical, passionate, complicated thing you want to make with all your heart, *and with the anger*. Gang up with your friends. Don't be silenced. We enjoyed the weirdness of the Agnes Martin show at the Guggenheim Museum (an artist whom we respect, but at whose altar we have never worshipped), and noticed that we could see it better—rather than asking why Martin was making abstract paintings of grids during times of political crisis, the work beamed out its stoic, clear-headed, purposeful, classical, stubborn weirdness... good qualities even

in those extreme times. But we don't care about "the grid"—we are committed to something different: something scrappy but complex, earnest but smart, ironic but not cynical—a strange FORM! We're not in it for the money and WE'RE NOT MONEY. We're not coins of the realm, easily identified by our denominations; we're definitely not thin paper currency meant to slip inside a wallet. We don't make sense. We have rough edges and contradictions. What the fuck is "thing theory" anyway—we're like things that *talk back*. Where is emancipation located? Should we split our time between art and politics? Is art enough? Is it possible that our work, our love, our beliefs, our symbolic gestures, our senses of humor, can amount to any meaningful resistance? Does resistance come in different lengths; a long game and a short game? Does everyone have to do it the same way? We haven't figured it out but we love art that offers *change above all*: insistent, unremitting change that won't resolve into finality or finesse. We don't know quite what to do but the qualities that mean something have shifted: knowingness is out, a goddamn "good" painting seems irrelevant, smug... we don't need someone to tell us which painting is "better." Fuck that. Plowshares? We need to sharpen our senses of humor into swords. We need to know what we love and what to toss out. We need to not normalize. We need to stick together. We have no answers. We have questions. We send these questions out with love to the people with whom we're walking home. We refuse to be stripped of our complications. With love, Amy

Amy Sillman is an artist based in New York. Her animated drawing "After Metamorphoses" is on view January 20 through March 19 at the Drawing Center.