

VOLUME 1/3

POEMS
FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL
ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT

JULY 31-AUGUST 3, 2018
BEREA, KENTUCKY

ANGEL
C. DYE

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INTRODUCTION

Angel C. Dye is a poet and scholar of literature from Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas. She is currently a second-year MFA in Creative Writing candidate at the University of Kentucky and an alumna of Howard University. Her poetry has appeared in *Sixfold Journal*, *About Place Journal*, *The Pierian Journal*, and *African Voices Magazine*. She writes in the tradition of Lucille Clifton, Amiri Baraka, and Sterling A. Brown hoping to discover what Audre Lorde calls “the words [she does] not yet have.”

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The Call

I think if I could call myself an artist
I would want to call myself free,
call myself wildflower and wind.
I'd want to breathe the breaths of a thousand brown children
and march to the beat of every hurting heart.
I would answer only to the names that my ancestors could not,
give them back the music that was muted into memory.

If I could create something
I'd craft a multicolored, many-faced mural—
a beautiful backdrop beyond binary bounds.

If I could really call myself an artist
I would be an earthen vessel, clay and water and sun.
I would be hallowed and hollow, sacred and open.
If I could be carved I'd want to be inscribed
with symbol and song,
a medium for the divine and mortal.

I'd be meeting ground paved in footprints
with no imaginary borders or asinine allegiance.
If I could call myself an artist, I mean really call upon something,
I'd be fist raised, sign raised, chant raised.
If I could be counted among the gamechangers,
the changemakers, the stake raisers,
I'd want to be hand clap, tambourine, organ, snare,
and there and there and there
and everywhere.

If I could call myself anything,
I'd call myself listening.

Because the call is not an appointment or accolade.
It's an incitement and acknowledgement,
a recognition of work to be done
and an invitation to act.
The call is for forging freedom from fire
and rendering art from darkness.

The call is to empower and to lead, to feel and to be.
The call is booming, loud, and lifting us to our feet.

Can you hear it?

Why must we create?

I.

Because Starbucks
Because Waffle House
Because black bodies anywhere
Because my fear of red and blue lights
Because slurs are widely accepted
Because racist is not
Because 53%
Because marches
Because a Pepsi commercial
Because hoodies
Because cigarettes
Because tea and Skittles
Because heritage
Because statues
Because flags
Because Alt Right
Because Netflix
Because H&M
Because Dove
Because Shea Moisture
Because Urban Outfitters
Because cornrows
Because Timberlands
Because doorknocker hoops
Because baby hairs
Because Native headdresses
Because eskimo
Because gypsy
Because spirit animal
Because (bottom of the) totem pole
Because powwow
Because black-

mail

ball

sheep

list

face

out

market

(...)

Why must we create?

II.

Because “first black...”
Because Make America Great
Because Angry Black Woman
Because Welfare Queen
Because Mammy
Because Sapphire
Because watermelon
Because chicken
Because Kool-Aid
Because in 1492
Because Thanksgiving
Because Presidents’ Day
Because Juneteenth
Because Rosa was tired and her feet hurt
Because MLK quotes
Because the Black Panthers were terrorists
Because the KKK are not
Because strange fruit
Because crosses burning
Because poll taxes
Because bombings
Because four little girls
Because The Help
Because The Butler
Because Twelve Years a Slave
Because Underground
Because Django Unchained
Because Birth of a Nation
Because #AllLives
Because #BlueLives
Because Harambe
Because Cecil
Because rock
Because hip hop
Because Africa is a country
Because Africa is poor
Because get your shots before you go
Because third-world
Because developing
Because ghetto
Because oriental
Because dispensaries
Because higher sentences
Because three strikes

Because War on Drugs
Because War on Crime
Because War on Poverty
Because War on Terror
Because gentrification
Because calling cops on neighbors
Because crossing the street
Because clutching purses tight
Because following me around a store
Because how do you speak French
Because I don’t work here
Because transracial
Because Ethnic Haircare aisle
Because Ethnic Foods aisle
Because exotic
Because cinco de drinko
Because everyone is Irish on March 17th
Because Jesus is white
Because Rue in Hunger Games
Because The Sunken Place
Because Oprah for President
Because you’re so articulate
Because HBCUs are racist
Because White History Month
Because #Allgirls are magic
Because American Airlines
Because Delta Airlines
Because TSA pats down my hair
Because reparations
Because the Pledge of Allegiance
Because the National Anthem
Because #TakeaKnee
Because Colin Kaepernick
Because patriotism

(...)

Why must we create?

III.

Because the American dream
Because we're all afforded the same opportunities
Because bootstraps
Because Hottentot Venus
Because HeLa cells
Because gynecology
Because Tuskegee experiments
Because I have black friends
Because Obama's birth certificate
Because no indictment
Because suspended with pay
Because charges dropped
Because #SayHerName
Because TERFs
Because Dakota Access Pipeline
Because four years of Flint water
Because Uber
Because the race card
Because race-baiting
Because my dad is serving 35 years
Because no means parole
Because Sandra committed suicide
Because rough rides in Baltimore
Because sundown states
Because Charlottesville
Because Cheapside
Because homelessness is illegal
Because codeswitching
Because I am not the other black girl
Because we all look the same
Because capitalism
Because classism
Because colorism
Because intersections
Because Ancestry DNA results
Because poll rigging
Because Clinton was the first black president
Because the free world
Because 3/5ths
Because Notes on the State of Virginia
Because Phillis Wheatley was not a poet
Because I am and all my poems sound like this

Artists Thrive

Artists arrive
carrying stories and self,
crafting and threading
across Bluegrass foothills.

Small steps toward
failing forward—
the practice of leaning in
to impact.

Better together
we harness healing
as praxis and power,
communal artisan activism.

Momentum is magic
coursing through the
urban-rural coal country
as lifeblood.

In truth and earnest
endeavor
Artists Thrive.



Spirit

We meditate
in the low hum
of intention,
traversing rugged planes
of strategy and error.
We strive to thrive,
turning illustration /
performance / theory
into interconnected
energy.



The Tool

Tool becomes
tale and tell,
real talk toward
readiness and solutions.
Movement
makes us one,
a braid of beliefs
ribboned with diversity.
Tool is self-
care assessment
determination
for present and future
innovation.

When They Ask

When they ask who we are,
we reply in results:
needle exchange for opioid epidemic,
community theater for consciousness.

When they ask what we do,
we answer in ambition:
council, commission,
convene, create.

Civic practitioners,
homegrown craftsmen,
city representatives,
collectives—
we coalesce.

When they ask where we come from,
we pinprick the map
from Berea, Lexington,
Harlan, Corbin,
every Bluegrass / Appalachian /
Midwest / Northeast / Northwest
Southeast / Southwest corner
and beyond.

When they ask why,
we cry we are we,
strong in solidarity,
a crisscrossed network,
and we are artists
who must thrive.

Power

The power of possibility
is in our needs,
the voids and voices of
communities.

It's in the wilt and sway
of trees, the delicate call
in the breeze.

The power of possibility
is in our works,
hands calloused from
sowing and weeding,
throats hoarse with
edifying and singing.

It's in the hurl of our
bodies into the unknown,
the thrash and beat of hope.

The power of possibility
is the bounty of harvest,
and it's the beauty of
believing and striving
when the soil
is its hardest.

DNA

Identity is found in purpose
and maybe vice versa,
but the call of the artist is certain.
You poet / practice / paint /
orchestrate / originate
with intent.
Turn tides and shape minds
without relent
because in your verses and visions
is a promise, a mission.
Imperfectly wrought future
where sunsets do not always
mean death and sunrise brings
even more than newness.
The work is the benefit of itself,
a beckoning deeply felt
and truths becoming widely held.
A tight circle of trust
around a bonfire of love—
vulnerability embraced
in the wake of what was
and praised for what's to come.

Rainsong

There is a rain of change
cloud-bursting and ready
to pour and overtake
the drought long hardened
into the earth by hate,
the rough roots and
weed shoots strangling
the flowered buds
of our fruits.

The sky sags with
optimism, full-bellied
torrent ripe to exploding,
burdened with refreshing
the bounty made deathly
by evil and oppression.

This downpour cannot wait,
its blue the purest
and its baptism the surest
we have seen in so long.

Listen.

Incline your ears
to the rainsong.

How It's Done

To thrive is
to live and give,
to overturn stones
and fortify bones,
to till and plow,
question the whys
and hows,
gather up stars,
make up-close
what's far,
part rivers,
drink deeply,
care out and inward,
serve freely,
count sand grains,
collect storm rains,
stoke and kindle,
recite and remember,
zoom in on
the details,
translate chimes
and bells,
carry truth
as knapsack,
moonlight the
darkest black,
work and plan
and execute.
To thrive is
to be
unapologetically
you.

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