

Dawn Nelson is an emotionally charged painter, usually working on large expressionist surfaces. Energy undulates with an internal tempest, the artist re-acquainting herself with it constantly, resulting in a cathartic release. From December 26, 2016, to February 15, 2021, Nelson focused this energy into smaller surfaces to create a diary of sorts. She started a chain reaction to the highly charged atmosphere of politics, both worldly and personal, random news items, the deception that arises from unchecked technology and simple observation. This came in the form of 1,517 individual daily collages and drawings on calendar pages, as she examined her inner content in reaction to outer circumstances.

She considers this a subset of her larger body of work. Although the larger paintings are immediately abstractions, Nelson feels the landscape and human body are ever-present in the works, and that the bridge to the diary installation lies in the narrative.

The artist considers this vast body of work a historical document, in which she tried not to react with judgment, but with observation. Although she described that time as "terrifying," she felt that she was simply reporting what was affecting her, what was important to her personally and creating a balance in the overwhelming collection of anxieties that she had been experiencing since the 2016 election.

Through these entries, she investigated what brought us to that point, describing the election of 2016 as a "lightning rod for reflection," asking whether it is "minutia that has the making of the pathology of our nation." Although she insisted that her "One Day at a Time: Four Years of Chaos" installation at the Eclipse Mill Gallery this November is meant more as a diary than a political statement, through the artist's own emotional filter, she tends to look at the domino effect of events straight in the eye.

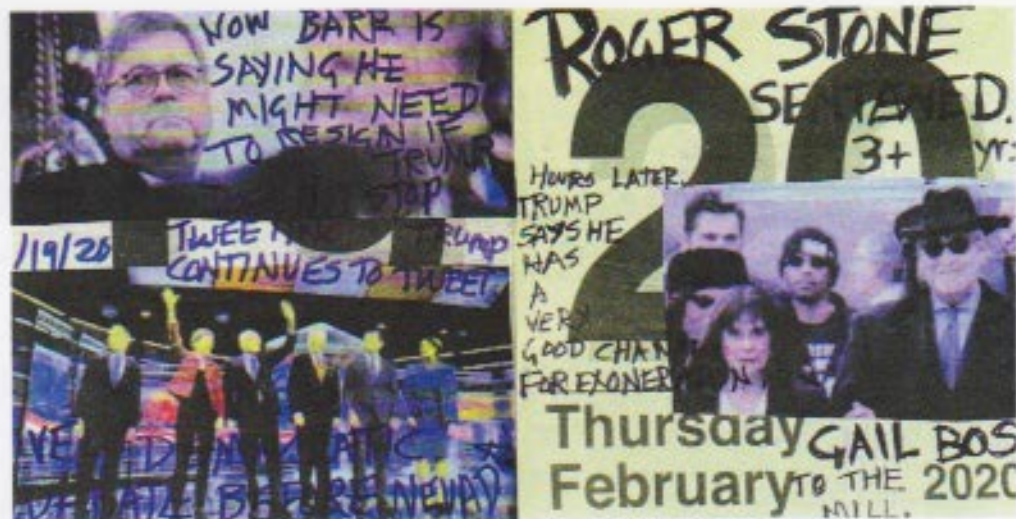
Nelson cited Marshall McLuhan, whose concept, "The medium is the message," rings in her ear amid sensory overloads. This is a two-fold observation: one, this refers to the increased media bombardment that McLuhan actually predicted; and two, the installation acts as a collection of artifacts. The installation consists of orange clothesline wrapped around the sizable Eclipse Mill Gallery several times, most likely up to five room revolutions. The works will be hung on the clotheslines in order date-wise, one entry leading into the next. Nelson described the pieces as being sometimes crystal clear, and sometimes rather ambiguous.

Nelson considers herself what she refers to as, an "American kid," coming up in a time in which she was poised to immerse herself in the context of those living on the edges of democracy. A suburban kid, spoon fed, young and untried, she soon considered the false premises of the perfect American dream; those that are put in place for some and not for others. As the ideal of American safety waxes and wanes, "One Day at a Time" is meant to eliminate personal weaponry. This installation acts more as a release, a cleansing to be shared universally.

There is a long history of protest in art to be attested to. Nelson is building on tradition, the activist aspect of an art as social statement. One might wonder as to its relevance in a new series of political references. One might also ask the question of whether this is a new decade or just history repeating itself. A cornucopia of protest art comes to mind: George Grosz, Ben Shahn and Arnold Trachtman, to name a few. In the wake of the repeal of Roe v. Wade, countless contemporary artists took a seat at the table. There never seems to be a shortage of material for inspiration.

"One Day at a Time: Four Years of Chaos" is on view from November 3 through 30, with an opening reception on Sunday, November 3 from 6:30-8:30pm. The gallery is located at 243 Union Street, on the first floor of the Eclipse Mill Loft building, North Adams, Massachusetts. Gallery hours are Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m., by chance or by appointment. Call (617) 543-3825 for more information.

Marjorie Kaye



TOP: Dawn Nelson, Diary Entries, 2020, collage, drawings on calendar pages.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Dawn Nelson, Compilation of Diary Entries, 2016-2021, collage, drawings on calendar pages.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Dawn Nelson, Compilation of Diary Entries, 2016-2021, collage, drawings on calendar pages.