



KIM ZUMPFEE

WRITTEN BY
VIRGINIA ARCE

*“letters
written as
a necessity to repel the nothing
to my
fictional lover
my audience
my love”*

Bathed in the blue light of her immersive installation *outside the length of a room* | *OR* | *diving into the blue sun*, Kim Zumpfe and I share tea and catch up where we never quite left off. The installation interrogates the concept of safe spaces and proposes that no action exists in a social and political void, ideas that have similarly brought this journal into being. We are meeting on the eve of the final activation of the installation in Santa Ana, California, in a juncture in time that we’ve both carved out in our exceedingly demanding lives.

We talk about our shared skepticism of futurity in increasingly fraught socio-political times, about the spaces we discretely navigate in the social and psychic topographies of Los Angeles, and about what it means to labor in systems of production and consumption that make

critical engagement with the world as working-class people both imperative and tenuous. Our conversation largely revolves around survival strategies and modalities of critique that inform gaps between text, performance, the past and present. In retrospect, my conversation with Kim will highlight the necessity for this journal to focus on the conditions of production of non-object based art, and make space for artists who work within such ephemeral mediums to articulate the risks they take in moving their practices forward.

As our conversation winds down, Kim hands me three envelopes, each containing different letters she wrote, and which are meant to inform and give context for the installation we've been sitting in for two hours. *Letters written as a necessity to repel the nothing to my fictional lover my audience my love* provide glimpses into single-sided conversations between the artist, an imaginary lover, and audience. They document questions, feelings, and thoughts that inform, shape, and inhabit the final installation and give a voice and afterlife to the conceptual and affective framework that is unseen and wholly vital to the execution of a public work of art. While *outside the length of a room...* calls into question "the possibility that

social and political actions can exist in a vacuum," removed from context and consequence, the letters shared in the following pages similarly call into question the notion that time-based works can be understood outside of the discussions and thoughts that bring them into being.

Hiiiiii sweet you,

i can't believe its been such a short time since this all started. and its been so long since that time. i saw you when everything changed. it happened more than once. i told you (vaguely) before, and i told you again and here again, again in a little more detail this time again. i think about i keep thinking about the sun that always burns so bright. well, not always bright, but so continually, so fucking continuous. and sometimes it loses consistency and blows material out into darkness. a rage it seems. that feeling inside. and i know there was time when it started, not this starting but the one before, far before i knew i lived a possibility warmed by burning. and i know i know there will be end. explosion or implosion or just a point a condensation. i hear that vacant chant when the dust floats. there it drifts lit by rays. an end to the burning so bright. long distances stretched out. untouchable. unlivable. frightening. desirable. necessary to sustain this thing we live. with flares and magnetic storms, these relative magnitudes that provoke. we feel those. you told me i'm sure. or maybe you didn't tell me but you showed me. i don't know where maybe a dream. something to bask in. something to hide from. it seduces me for sure. seems like it's the moon that seduces when the edges flicker but no it's the sun it's seduced so successfully i get lost no matter what color it is. it changes color, the sun, did you notice sometimes its blue about to explode? did you hear me scream when i shut the door that day? there. the potential harm, burn, burn, potential death, from inside the sun too long too warm too hot it scars and boils. the light scatters all the way into darkness the deep dark of the other sky we can't see except in photographs sometimes but usually not at all. not at all. because its not even there just parallel time. those other places duplicates. we don't even think about them even though the darkness is everywhere around and inside of us. together i'm so glad we're together now. that scream. i screamed over the pale color. i screamed over your gaze an expanding foam a pressure. made from that darkness. not the dreamy milky way when (in rare moments) but that's not a sight for us in pale cities. that light scatters all the way into outside, or in intervals, places where i imagine no pain from end and no beginning and we don't have to worry about things like loss or grief or death or emptiness. the light deviates or really departs doesn't stick. around it's the atmosphere. it keeps light in and chases away, a scientist told me. or some science person who wrote a physics tutorial on a website about Laws and Vectors and Momentum and Waves and Reflections and Refractions. all very scientific. all very pragmatic. if i read informational information too close the magic dissipates. not the same magic as i mentioned before. or maybe it is. its so hard to tell so i read with distraction. or i write with distraction. i am distractible that's for sure. and, if i don't read close enough i sometimes miss the magic in explanations and directions for those science projects. Are sunsets lower in the sky than they actually are? Is the sun hotter than it feels? Is the sun really round? Is it really a sun or just a big light bulb plugged into a universal socket? Is there such a thing as a universal socket? Can we travel inside it and through it? Will my screams cover the loss of color? Can we live in the stiff glare? Can the sun be a different color? Can i explode like a blue sun?

i feel like i can. like i already had a kind of blue mini explosion that made it all fall apart. again, i hope you know what i'm talking about. i like to imagine that you feel it too

all my love
kim

Heeeeya you,

its me again. again here again trying not to breach. trying to hold it hold it in. here with words. walls i mean lines, boundaries cause refractions. right? you said that you thought so too the last time we spoke. divisions that tran-s-mogrify things from one state to another. boundaries cause other things too. right? like inevitability. or imminence. or scars if dug too deep too entrenched. so practical sometimes prevent. create insurmountables. nebulous ruin. a fog i'm in some kind of fog. a vapor that vibrates or maybe a reactive volatile. an airborne compound its just that. and i want to tear it all apart. all of it, or rip it up and throw all those lines into the narrow where yellow threads barely hold on. so what's possible? how to be flexible? how to tear? how to remake love in these terribly dialectic times that won't end before we end? how to surpass these learned and actual limitations of unlivable structures? love was formed. not for us. how can we fight our own frail stupidity an impulse and have expansive. satisfying. approachable. recognizable passages. or slog along gracefully. how can we sustain in and off center? is it possible? for us? for you and me? can we make room? i've got some already. want to tear lines into fissures. even if it terrifies me

such a short time into this and nothing. and everything. i wish it never started. i'm grateful to have what we have. we already did what we needed to. we made it nowhere at all. we have everything already. we didn't even. we weren't mediocre. we've had such amazing. we have a vast empty. so glacial some days. possibility is not a mineral. a tone but there was a without. an undecipherable hang into a delicate narrow. knowing this is nothing more than just an instructive exchange. a handsome reserve but it is and you are here and you. are not here you vibrate. we are potency that stretched us out for more and maybe more and more. full of conduits and circuits. do you feel it? did you shudder? does it shock when you fall asleep? we already ended and we've just begun

breach borders, your skin, your heat. i will embrace the delicate. we will mutate. i will let and i will too. i've lived so many lives with you already

i am here. and i know that you can't possibly exist. except right here right now. i'm so happy you are with me

xo
kim



Virginia Arce: How does a performance based practice manifest in your life?

Kim Zumpfe: Performance happens all the time: daily gestures, large strides, small refusals, labor of care, doing nothing and coping with the undesirable. I really don't see the difference between these daily rituals and attempts at living something called "a decent life" as a discourse inseparable from my relationship to art. I suppose that's what makes performance so relevant for me as a form. It holds such urgency in relation to this clearly dysfunctional political experiment that we live inside of. For me, time is unruly and can't be tamed or tapped into. My experience of it and how people describe their relationship to it is so untouchable. Engaging in time-based practices is tricky because of its ephemerality; it's hard to experience even when physically present. Performances that might be most relevant are ones that we may not be aware of until some future time, if at all.

VA: Can you speak about the politics of your practice being primarily non-object-based?

KZ: My work is both performative and deeply rooted in the material world. There are objects and materials involved that are almost always associated with performance and social engagement, but the status of these objects is questionable and exists mostly outside of monetary exchange. I think, I hope, that these objects are deeply

embedded in other, more important economies.

VA: How do you reconcile working in a non-object based practice with limitations of audience access?

KZ: I primarily work in installation because I think that creating space is a way to address performance as continuous. It's important that people can traverse a space in other moments and witness what remains, changes, and shifts in space and time. I try to make spaces active in this way. Time passes and memory fades, and that should be acknowledged in the structures of performance for audiences and performers.

VA: What are your thoughts on documentation in relation to your work?

KZ: I try to make spaces active rather than being too concerned about documentation. I think that presence is necessary and that documentation is only a view into the viscosity of the space. a flat surface. a drained exterior. Documentation is an unfortunate solution, but it helps us all overlap and address actions in pasts and futures. Would I like these moments to be continuous? I really don't think so. I think that the very fact that they are contained allows them to be functioning propositions about alternate possibilities of moving and living, rather than being structured into a state of permanent continuity.

VA: Does a practice of archiving affect or inform your work?

KZ: The act of archiving does not directly inform my work, in fact, much of my work is difficult to consume through photographs since it's not meant to be viewed in static images. However, I've had most of my work documented over the last three years, though I avoided having a website until recently when I had to make one out of necessity. I was trying to avoid traditional ideas of professionalism and access to my work, and instead create some way through which people would have to meet with me in a more personal way outside of an easy form of consumption. However, in a dispersed geographic distribution of colleagues inside and outside of Los Angeles, lack of access has also meant a slow build of conversation around my work. So, I've given in and become more professional. I think of the idea of professionalizing in this way to be questionable, but it's an unfortunate necessity.

VA: What are the risks of working in a time-based medium?

KZ: I've been thinking a lot about risk lately and what that means. It's a term that is thrown around so much, especially in academic institutions. I question what it means to risk making art under the safety umbrella of institutions rather than being at risk in daily life. Who am I taking risks for? What kind of affects does it have on me and other people? I think the only way to truly risk something is to take a chance

to lose something, if not everything. Do I take these risks? Definitely in some ways but not in others. There is always only so much capacity for risk. Life forces specific people to be at risk in ways in which others are not. There are so many people who work in performance who put things on the line in so many ways: time, reputation, stability, finances, voices, bodies;-- their very lives are put on the line for things that feel necessary.

Of the many risks that I'm aware I take, I think working collaboratively is worthy of discussion. The enacting of collaboration is already performative and a dedicated practice. I feel lucky to be able to continue to build my art practice directly in conversation with other artists. The risk is that audiences, and even people I work with, sometimes have trouble differentiating which labor belongs to who, and assessing the value of that labor. This is both extremely exciting and deeply troublesome—this quality of misunderstanding—because decision-making is impossible to parse out.

VA: Speaking of finances - how do you balance having a job and making artwork that non-object-based and/or challenges conventions of ownership?

KZ: An important mentor of mine told me that living as an artist is an unnatural life, and I agree. I've gotta say that financially I barely stay balanced, and in other important ways of living a stable life emotionally and

structurally, I gave in to do this art thing.

I've never sold work but I have received stipends for art-making. I prefer to work on projects I care about, mostly so I can try to focus on something I consider to be a cultural contribution. I teach and take odd jobs, mostly professionally oriented, but these jobs generally have very little art-career potential. I love teaching, but college adjunct work is unreliable at best, and there is no cash cow anywhere else for me. I've learned to keep my fear of instability in check, even as I get older. It takes a kind of faith for me to put my energies towards a life worth living rather than a life of stability in a totally unstable world. I prefer to make work that somehow activates a world of possibilities. However, I'm fully aware that the not-for-profit-institutions I prefer to work with function parallel to for-profit galleries, and in many capacities are unavoidably steeped in modes of laissez-faire economics. This is a financial world that most performance artists are not able to tap into, only the wealthy or extremely wealthy whose names are associated with such institutions. There appears to be no escape from the neoliberal, only decisions about how to interact with it. I'd love to know of another way—I'm always on the hunt....

VA: On the subject of risk: can you discuss the relationship between collaboration and risk?

KZ: The myth of American individualism is extremely troubling since it is clear to

me that nobody is ever successful alone, and what we call “solo exhibitions” only upholds this idea. Our culture is extremely collaborative; artists and other cultural workers have conversations and exchanges that confuse authorship all the time. It seems that people who try to fly solo have the most difficult time finding sustainable ways to live. We need to ask who does this help and who does it hold back?

VA: What does site specificity mean to your practice?

KZ: I think site-specificity has grown beyond its conception of site being attached to specific histories. I’m still trying to grapple with the notion of site, or maybe just get a handle on it. I see site as an intersection of social, political, and geographic relations. Yes, I attempt to take these factors into consideration, but I have gone from thinking about specific sites, to place-building, to some sort of post-place conception. I’ve moved towards some sort of internal idealism that feels like insanity, but is grounded at the same time. There is something about the way that information travels now that has completely changed my idea of specific geographies. All this information slipping and sliding around, and so much of it appears to be so unreliable, that it has created a kind of dislocation of site from information. I definitely take specific relations into consideration: the communities that my work goes into, who might interact with my work, how that work exists in relation to the local area as well

as a larger discursive structure. I still think presence is the most important quality in art and life, even if I often feel totally detached from time and place. My work seems to be headed towards understanding splits in space in specific locations and how these splits are a nowhere and nothing place. A place of ultimate possibility, that defines and destroys through demarcations. These are specific and speculative, meaning they are deeply tied to how places are both defined and immensely dislocated from any place at all.

VA: Do you see your work responding to a political timeliness?

KZ: Absolutely. It all feels necessary all the time these days. There is a terror that is overtly bouncing about and so many people are terrorized. The word ‘terror’ is so often misused to dominate in the name of prevention, and hope is a difficult concept to contend with emotionally and critically. For me there needs to be SSSSSSsomething different than hope, and I guess that’s why I use the word necessity. So many people are working just to live, just to hold an ontological position, to have a life that can be recognized. All over the world — black, indigenous, women, queer, and so many others. It’s never post-traumatic, it’s a regime that propagates conformity when conformity is impossible.

I usually want to stay home most of the time to rest and recharge, but the necessity of living and voicing means that I have to get

out. I think that getting out and moving and practicing and practicing and practicing for moments —is necessary for what is to come—whatever that is.

www.kimzumpfe.com



place where, before, In A In, Kim Zumpfe, 2019
(Photo by Christopher Wormald)

Kim Zumpfe works through individual and collaborative work, where the built environment is resituated as a way to address the deep entwinement between materials, space, and sociality. Alternate possibilities in the order of things are considered through working with architectures and infrastructures that engage with space as a psychology and qualities of bent time(s).

Virginia Arce's practice as a curator and writer is invested in political and aesthetic debates regarding alterity and temporality. I endeavor to develop a body of work — through the development of exhibitions and concomitant texts — that complicates conventions of viewership while simultaneously exploring historic and contemporaneous parallels between creative practices and debates that have been positioned in singular and segregated conversations.

IMPRINT

The Invisible Archive:
Kim Zumpfe
(Vol. Los Angeles, Issue 3)
by Virginia Arce

Editors
Virginia Arce
Yon Natalie Mik

Copy Editing
Audrey Min

Design Online Edition
The Invisible Archive

All texts and images
© the author and the artist unless
otherwise stated.

All rights reserved. No part
of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system or transmitted in any
form, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying or otherwise,
without the written permission of
the publisher.

Cover image: where is this place,
i pinch myself, Kim Zumpfe, 2018
(Photo by Lainey La Rosa)

Website:
invisiblearchive.com

First Print Edition published in
2019 as part of The Invisible
Archive's Inaugural Edition by
Goodbye and TIA.
Online Edition published in 2020
by The Invisible Archive.

Los Angeles

ISSN: 2693-1184

The Invisible Archive is committed to creating a dialogue that investigates how ideas on performativity and embodiment complicate and inform the conventions under which performance and time-based art are made and understood. By manifesting new relationships between rigorous writing and the radical nature of time itself, the journal collects, documents and reflects on the distinct forms of knowledge developed by artists who work primarily with ephemeral media. TIA seeks to bear witness to the lives and works of our artists and to collectively build an archive that expands the conversation of the artistic strategies discussed beyond the scope of performance art studies, and into far-reaching fields of political and sociocultural production.