



*Art curator and writer*

One of the best things about growing up in Chicago was the visits I made with my family or on class trips to the Art Institute. The building seemed like the most magnificent and grand, yet somehow cozy and intimate home I could imagine. I wanted to live there. Walking up the majestic stairs off Michigan Avenue, the lions would greet me, and I would step into the cool, calm of the entryway. As a young person, the artworks I was most drawn to were some of the museum's greatest hits. When looking at *Paris Street; Rainy Day* by Gustave Caillebotte, one of my favorite painters, I could feel the wet cobblestones underfoot and smell the fresh rain while hearing the hurried click of women's shoes. It was here in the Asian galleries that I encountered an exquisite granite sculpture of the Buddha sitting peacefully, inviting us to share in his meditative state. Swimming between artistic styles and periods, geographic regions and appearances, I wondered how one place could house such vastly distinct things. What could they possibly share? Despite their differences, they all had one thing in common: they were created by an artist.

Many people value artists because they make things, which in special cases like these can transcend time and place, long outliving the maker. Yes, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel receives millions of visitors every year and Michelangelo is long gone. We don't even know the names of the Edo artists who made the Benin

bronzes, but these statues were stolen from Africa over a hundred years ago and are only now being returned.

What truly makes artists important, however, is less what they create and more so how they think. To create art, something wholly new that may not serve any instrumental function, both requires and refines a capacity to view the world beyond what it currently is. As humans, we've established our systems, and roads, our infrastructures, and laws. We've created rules that claim to govern society, circumscribing how people should behave, live, believe, love, parent, learn, fight, and consume. But it's artists who remind us that these are merely illusions. They're hyperrealistic mirages that can fool us into thinking they're real, when, in fact, other worlds are entirely possible.

Artists are trained to see beyond the here and now and to engage deeply in the practice of creating new possibilities. Through their work, they demonstrate new possibilities for how we might live in the present. Their efforts over time, what we might call a "creative practice," are punctuated by moments of form, what we might call "artworks," which can move us as viewers out of the realm of the cerebral, and often more deeply into our bodies. In an encounter with art, we sometimes forget time and place. Put another way, we remember that "clock time" as described by philosopher Eckhart Tolle, which shapes how we experience most of our days, is just an invention. When moved by an artwork, we feel somehow linked to the maker and to each other, a quiet reminder of our deep interconnectedness with all things. In a moment like this, it's possible to even lose our identifications—with our nation, our gender, our social class. We're reminded that these too were never real, despite their very real impact on our lives.

The artists in this book represent a scintillatingly dynamic, wide-ranging group from the most highly lauded, the academically trained, the self-taught, the mainstay of the Western canon, to the most courageous, nonconforming artists of today. Not everyone needs to become an artist, but our world would surely benefit if we all, in our own domains, practiced thinking like one.