

## **A Responsibility to Light: An Illustrated Manifesto for Creative Resilience and the Artist's Duty in Dark Times**

**“Feel all the things. Feel the hard things. The inexplicable things, the things that make you disavow humanity’s capacity for redemption... Feel afraid. Feel powerless. Feel frozen. And then FOCUS.”**

---

*“This is precisely the time when artists go to work,” Toni Morrison wrote in her electrifying case for [the artist’s task in troubled times](#). “There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. That is how civilizations heal.”*

But in such times of civilizational trauma, when the book of life itself seems to have come unbound, where are artists — who are not only human but perhaps the most human among us — to find the fortitude of spirit necessary for rising to their healing task?

Illustrator [Wendy MacNaughton](#) and writer [Courtney E. Martin](#) offer a heartening answer in a collaboration that stands as a mighty manifesto for our time and a testament to the only mechanism by which the creative spirit has ever pulled humanity out of every abyss of its own making.

# THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

FEEL ALL THE THINGS. FEEL THE HARD THINGS. THE INEXPLICABLE THINGS, THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU DISAVOW HUMANITY'S CAPACITY FOR REDEMPTION. FEEL ALL THE MADDENING PARADOXES. FEEL OVERWHELMED, CRAZY. FEEL UNCERTAIN. FEEL ANGRY. FEEL AFRAID. FEEL POWERLESS. FEEL FROZEN.

and THEN

# FOCUS

PICK UP YOUR PEN. PICK UP YOUR PAINT BRUSH. PICK UP YOUR DAMN CHIN. PUT YOUR TWO CALLOUSED HANDS ON THE TURNTABLES, in THE CLAY, on THE STRINGS. GET BEHIND THE CAMERA. LOOK FOR THAT PINPRICK OF LIGHT. LOOK FOR THE TRUTH. (YES, IT IS A THING - IT STILL EXISTS.) FOCUS ON THAT LIGHT. ENLARGE IT. REVEAL THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW. REVEAL HOW SHATTERED WE ARE, HOW CAPABLE OF BEING REPAIRED. BUT DON'T LAMENT THE BREAK. NOTHING NEW WOULD BE BUILT IF THINGS WERE NEVER BROKEN. A WISE MAN ONCE SAID: THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN. GET AFTER THAT LIGHT.

# THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This is your assignment.

Feel all the things. Feel the hard things. The inexplicable things, the things that make you disavow humanity's capacity for redemption. Feel all the maddening paradoxes. Feel overwhelmed, crazy. Feel uncertain. Feel angry. Feel afraid. Feel powerless. Feel frozen. And then FOCUS.

Pick up your pen. Pick up your paintbrush. Pick up your damn chin. Put your two calloused hands on the turntables, in the clay, on the strings. Get behind the camera. Look for that pinprick of light. Look for the truth (yes, it is a thing—it still exists.)

Focus on that light. Enlarge it. Reveal the fierce urgency of now. Reveal how shattered we are, how capable of being repaired. But don't lament the break. Nothing new would be built if things were never broken. A wise man once said: there's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in. Get after that light.

This is your assignment.

Perhaps inspired in part by Sol LeWitt's famous ["DO" letter](#), and reminiscent in spirit of the [Holstee manifesto](#) and Neil Gaiman's iconic [Make Good Art](#) speech, this vitalizing call for creative resilience began in response to the political turmoil of 2016, which left so many so dispirited. Hungry for a counterpoint to the despair and apathy of the cultural climate, Martin and MacNaughton created one themselves. Written shortly after Leonard Cohen's death, the manifesto ends with a tender homage to his [famous clarion call for democracy](#).

Martin, who has advocated beautifully for [reimagining our cultural ethos of success](#) and who wrote most of the "FOCUS" piece while walking in the desert of New Mexico with a newborn strapped to her chest, explains:

While creating it, we imagined people hanging this poster on their office and studio wall as a reminder that they are not alone in their sadness and fear, and that they must must must keep doing the work. It matters.

**CharacterDriven**

rocking your world view

<http://characterdriven.com>

---

# THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

FEEL ALL THE THINGS. FEEL THE HARD THINGS. THE INEXPLICABLE THINGS, THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU DISAVOW HUMANITY'S CAPACITY FOR REDEMPTION. FEEL ALL THE MADDENING PARADOXES. FEEL OVERWHELMED, CRAZY. FEEL UNCERTAIN. FEEL ANGRY. FEEL AFRAID. FEEL POWERLESS. FEEL FROZEN.

and THEN

# FOCUS

PICK UP YOUR PEN. PICK UP YOUR PAINT BRUSH. PICK UP YOUR DAMN CHIN. PUT YOUR TWO CALLOUSED HANDS ON THE TURNTABLES, in THE CLAY, on THE STRINGS. GET BEHIND THE CAMERA. LOOK FOR THAT PINPRICK OF LIGHT. LOOK FOR THE TRUTH. (YES, IT IS A THING - IT STILL EXISTS.) FOCUS ON THAT LIGHT. ENLARGE IT. REVEAL THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW. REVEAL HOW SHATTERED WE ARE, HOW CAPABLE OF BEING REPAIRED. BUT DON'T LAMENT THE BREAK. NOTHING NEW WOULD BE BUILT IF THINGS WERE NEVER BROKEN. A WISE MAN ONCE SAID: THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN.

GET AFTER THAT LIGHT.

# THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

2017

Three versions of the poster are available online — [red, white, and blue](#), [black and white](#), and [rainbow](#) — with all proceeds donated to [Hedgebrook](#), a rural writing residency for women, whose alumnae include [Gloria Steinem](#), [Eve Ensler](#), [Dani Shapiro](#), [Naomi Shihab Nye](#), and [Sarah Jones](#).

# THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

FEEL ALL THE THINGS. FEEL THE HARD THINGS. THE  
INEXPLICABLE THINGS, THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU DISAVOW  
HUMANITY'S CAPACITY FOR REDEMPTION. FEEL ALL THE MADDENING  
PARADOXES. FEEL OVERWHELMED, CRAZY. FEEL UNCERTAIN.  
FEEL ANGRY. FEEL AFRAID. FEEL POWERLESS. FEEL FROZEN.

and THEN

# FOCUS

PICK UP YOUR PEN. PICK UP YOUR PAINT BRUSH.  
PICK UP YOUR DAMN CHIN. PUT YOUR TWO CALLOUSED  
HANDS ON THE TURNTABLES, in THE CLAY, on THE  
STRINGS. GET BEHIND THE CAMERA. LOOK FOR THAT  
PINPRICK OF LIGHT. LOOK FOR THE TRUTH. (YES,  
IT IS A THING - IT STILL EXISTS.) FOCUS ON THAT LIGHT.  
ENLARGE IT. REVEAL THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW.  
REVEAL HOW SHATTERED WE ARE, HOW CAPABLE OF  
BEING REPAIRED. BUT DON'T LAMENT THE BREAK.  
NOTHING NEW WOULD BE BUILT IF THINGS WERE  
NEVER BROKEN. A WISE MAN ONCE SAID: THERE'S  
A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN.  
GET AFTER THAT LIGHT.

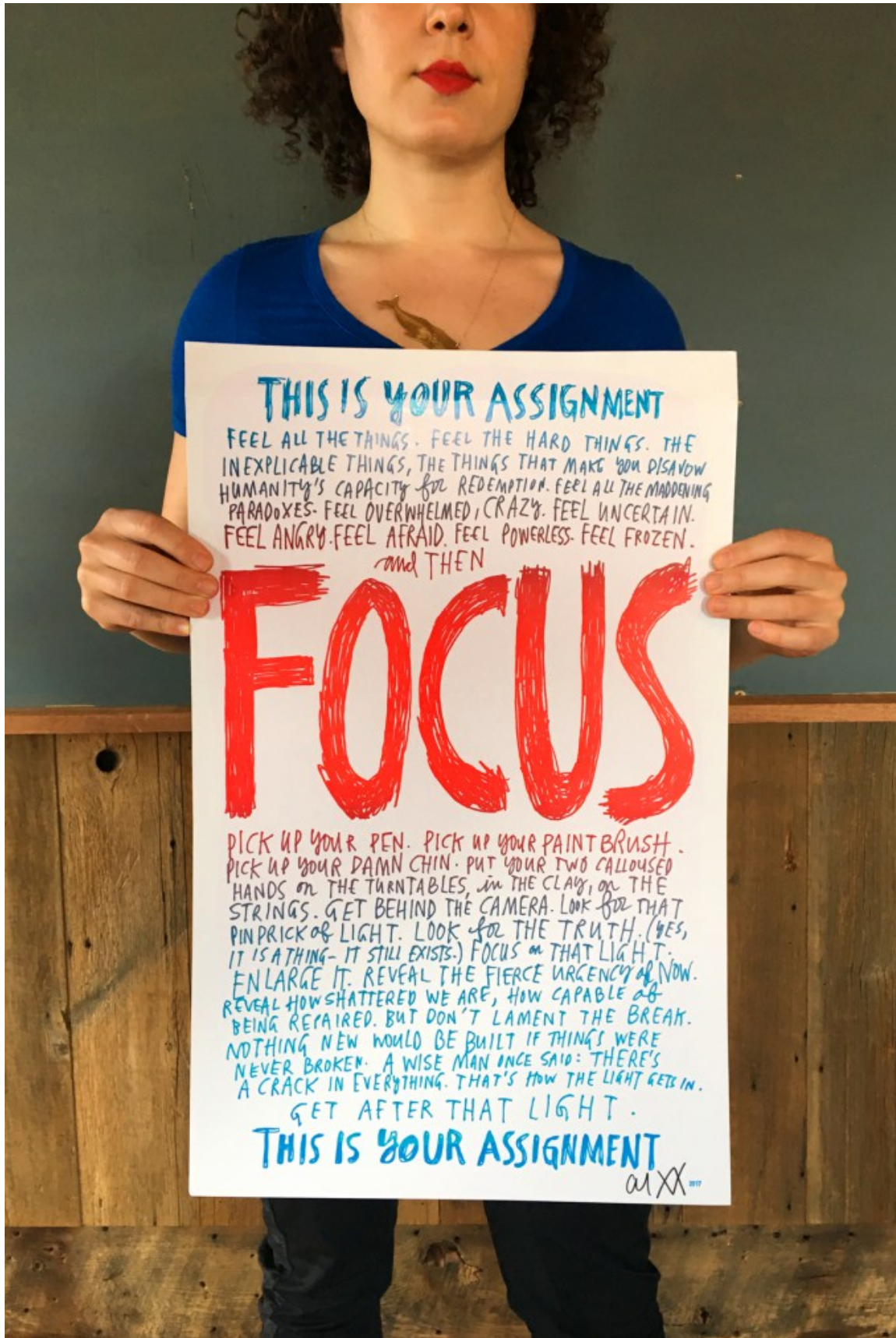
# THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

2017

An additional limited edition of signed letterpress prints are being given away for free, until they last, at several independent bookstores and cultural centers around the country:

- [King Carl's Emporium](#) at the 826 Valencia Tenderloin Center, San Francisco, CA
- [The Loft Literary Center](#), Minneapolis, MN
- [BookPeople](#), Austin, TX
- [Green Apple Books](#), San Francisco, CA
- [Point Reyes Books](#), Point Reyes, CA
- [Bluestockings](#), New York, NY
- [The Sanctuaries](#), Washington D.C.
- [Books Are Magic](#), Brooklyn, NY
- [Creative Mornings](#), Oakland, CA





---

## **donating = loving**

Bringing you (ad-free) Brain Pickings takes me hundreds of hours each month. If you find any joy and stimulation here, please consider becoming a Supporting Member with a recurring monthly [donation](#) of your choosing, between a cup of tea and a good dinner.

---

## **newsletter**

Brain Pickings has a free weekly newsletter. It comes out on Sundays and offers the week's most unmissable reads. Here's [what to expect](#). Like? [Sign up](#).

Source: BrainPickings