

RADICAL

ARTIST

DIALOGUE

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ISSUE 2

RYAN FORESTGREEN

Hey thanks for agreeing to this interview, can you introduce yourself?

Hi!

My name is Rayan (@Rayan.forestgreen on instagram) and I am a printmaker currently residing in Paris. I make prints about Anarchism, ecology, mutual aid and other similar subjects all in the aim to raise money for animal sanctuaries and other mutual aid projects.

You predominantly create lino prints, what's your creative process like? How long does it take to get from a concept to a carved block?

The prints I've worked on so far have many personal elements within them and usually reflect on how I'm feeling during that specific period of time. Almost every print starts with a small sketch on a sticky note, then from there I create a digital illustration that takes me anywhere between two weeks and a month depending on the size of the illustration and the amount of details that I have in it. For the carving process, I try to take my time with it. I find it to be a very meditative activity and it helps a lot with my mental health. This usually takes me between two to three weeks of work.

What are some of your main inspirations for your creative work? Music, film, art, books?

As much as I enjoy watching movies and listening to music and even though I'm always fascinated by the art works of great anarchist and non-anarchist artists, I find what fuels my inspiration the most are current and past events in my own life since I use lino as a way to express myself. I grew up in Beirut, a war-torn city, and I come from a family of resistant leftist farmers.

Several of my prints have olive trees or olive branches in them because my grandfather used to grow olive trees and these same olive trees are a symbol of Palestine. The print with gardening tools and the quote that reads "from the ashes of your cities, our flowers will bloom" is composed of tools I saw my grandmother use when I was a kid, while the quote / the idea of the print came after several racist attacks against non-white people in my neighborhood, here in Paris. The "housing for all print" was created during the wintertime when a lot of my homeless



From the ashes
of your cities



Our flowers
will bloom



friends around my neighborhood were struggling with the cold, while at the same time and in the same neighborhood there were several empty buildings that were completely locked off. I integrated a house with an architecture similar to the ones I used to see in Beirut as well as a rope with hearts on it between the buildings. The rope with hearts is something my mother told us to do to feel closer and connected to our neighbours during the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006. So going back to your question, everything starts off as an idea or something I feel the need to express because of current events and then I include elements of my childhood or life in it.

How did you arrive at Lino printing? Did you have a creative upbringing, do you have any formal artistic training?

I started lino printing during the Covid lockdown. I initially offered free prints for people that donated to Lancaster farm sanctuary and it slowly evolved from there to printing bigger pieces and dividing the donations to several sanctuaries and/or other mutual aid projects. My father is a war photographer so in some sort of way I was around "art" at a young age. I have a degree in animation and a degree in VFX. I took a couple of drawing courses during my time in university, but it wasn't before I started carving that I developed a specific style (that is still constantly changing and evolving).

You also do 3D character design? Is that a day job gig or a hobby?

I am a 3D character designer and an instructor in a couple of universities. It's a field with a lot of moving pieces, a lot of instability, but also a lot of enjoyable moments creating and working on interesting projects. I enjoy the teaching part of it, being able to pass on the information I acquired during the years, all while encouraging people to work together (not something commonly done in this field as people tend to work separately and can be very competitive at times).

It's clear through your work that you're an anarchist, does that inform your creative work naturally? What first made you want to create political art?

Anarchism is something that came naturally to me at a young age,



MIGRATION IS NATURAL

DESTROY ALL BORDERS

especially as a person that was always into punk and hardcore music. I also come from a family that was always heavily politically engaged. What first made me create political art and share it with people was a mix between my anarchist beliefs and the need to raise money for solidarity projects. It is a second voice for me.

You currently live in Paris, how long have you lived there?

I have been living in Paris for almost 7 years now. There are definitely a lot of people doing interesting projects in Paris and in France generally. Being a person of color and not a French person, I personally have found it a bit difficult to connect with other artists here or to share a space with most of them. This could be due to the lack of representation and opportunities for non-French people or maybe it's just a personal feeling I have. The left in France is very Communist-leaning so there's a lot of that. A lot of queer projects as well and that's beautiful to see.

You recently had some work published in Dope magazine, how did that come about?

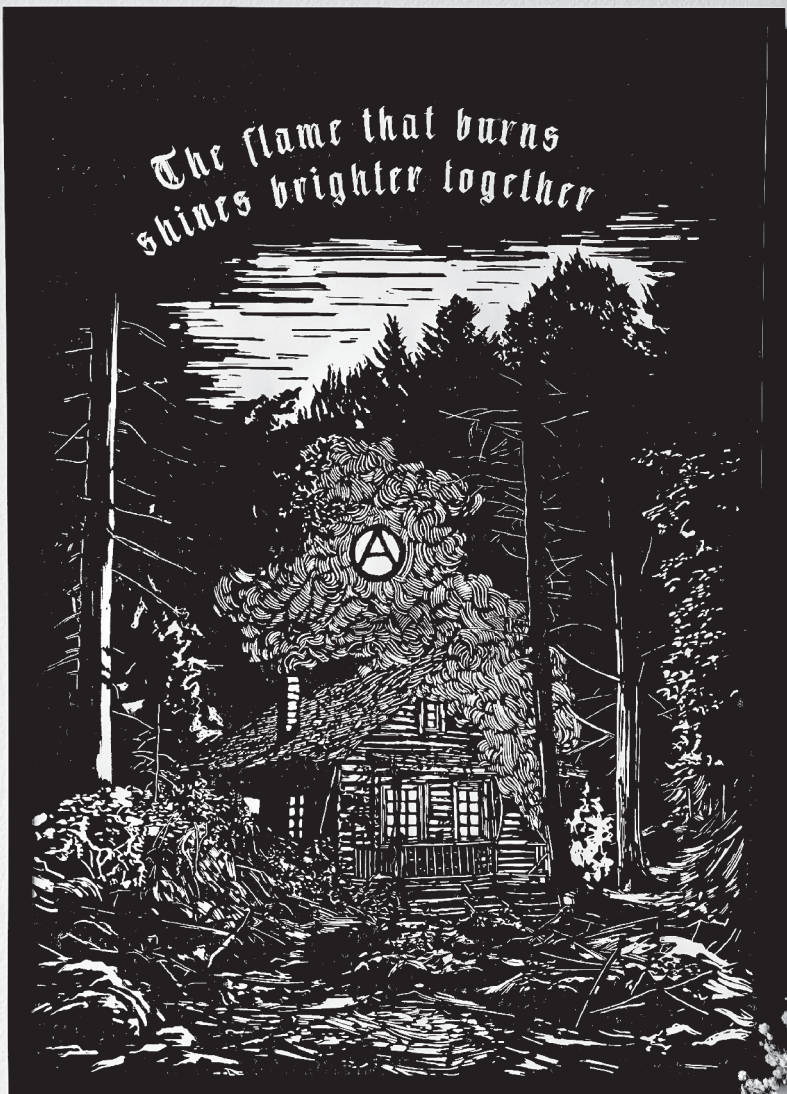
I have been a fan of Dog press for a while now, I have several of their books in my library and I have followed them for a couple of years. They reached out to me via Instagram and I sent them a couple of prints. Personally, it's one of my favorite projects that I was fortunate enough to take part in this year. Their work, much like Food and not bombs, have been a major influence on me and a motivator to do more solidarity projects for fellow homeless friends.

I saw you made some criticisms of left wing artists staying silent amidst the recent genocide in Gaza. How important do you think it is that artists use their platforms to raise awareness etc?

It is very important for us to remind ourselves that Anarchism or believing in Anarchy is the belief that people are stronger when they are united. United against all sorts of oppression and supporting total liberation for all. It has been amazing to see solidarity amplified with art these last couple of years. We've seen beautiful support to the queer community, support to the black community, art in solidarity of

ecological movements such as "Les soulèvements de la terre" in France or "Stop Cop City" in the United States, art "normalizing" and "encouraging" direct action and a lot of other current social movements. That said, on the subject of Palestine or non western conflict we see a lack of support and solidarity. As I write this email, the death toll of Palestinians this year has reached more than 9000 and the number is growing quickly. The number of children killed in Gaza is more than the number killed in armed conflicts globally over the course of a whole year, for the past three years. It has been 29 days since the start of the attack on Gaza and it is just til recently that a lot of western artists that initially stayed silent or condemned the violence that the resistance used against the oppression are starting to speak up about the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people. It is nevertheless incredible to see the attention that people are giving towards the subject of the ongoing genocide in occupied Palestine but I wish it didn't take us that long. I wish we didn't wait for it to be "trending" so we could raise our voices. I wish people had more interest and information on conflicts outside of their own. (It is completely okay to not be informed on all subject matters and later on change our opinion once we're more aware of what's actually happening). The Palestinian struggle for freedom has been ongoing for more than 75 plus years. To be on the fence in such a subject is mind boggling to me especially when we remember that humans, animals and nature are all paying a heavy toll due to the occupation and the destruction that comes with it. When you posted a piece about Palestine a day after the people of Gaza broke out of the human prison they were in, broke out of the walls the occupation built around them, people called you all sorts of names and accused you of supporting extremist groups. When in fact you only depicted the Palestinian flag in your art piece. This shows the effect that propaganda has on people, leading to xenophobia and racism (all within our anarchist/leftist movement but not only limited to that). Currently in France, Germany and other European countries protesting in solidarity with Palestine is illegal. Mix that with all the misinformation online and the false propaganda on the news and we're left with no one to raise their voice against the ongoing oppression. This is why the role of an artist can be important as they can be vocal and transmit messages through their art that would be aligned with anarchist/leftist values such as the right to resist oppression and fight colonialism, the right for people to determine what they want and move freely within their country. The right

The flame that burns
shines brighter together



for people to simply exist. By doing that I truly believe that unity can be achieved through solidarity. Political art can make people feel less alone and that was definitely the case for me.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Last thing to add would be that in this interview we talked about Palestine but we won't forget the Armenian people, the Kurdish people and so many others struggling and fighting for liberation and resisting any sort of oppression.

We are not free until everyone is free x



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