

Seven ways to use this book

1.

Start as they all started. Start in anger or recognition. Start in refusing caricatures or silence. Start in love and concern. Start because you must and take a step. Call yourself an artist, a maker: someone who can pick up a pen, a camera, can listen, can say “no,” or “yes” when the time and place require. Know that taking on the name “artist” comes far easier for some than others. Look past names and labels (as Leeway —as we all— struggle to do.)

2.

Engage. The work is huge. Endless. Complicated. Think of this book as a guide to some pressing issues and necessary action. Learn who these 65 people are, this sampling of brave souls. Settle down and read about people sewing / dancing / juggling / singing / writing / filming / painting / documenting their way and ours. Meet them through these pages and remember. Keep an eye out for their names and work. Notice. Pay attention.

Making art for social change is rarely a solo endeavor. Most often, this is work done in community with others, for collective benefit. What is art? What is social change? Who are artists and change-makers? Who risks? Who benefits? No easy answers. This book (and Leeway) asks that we name ourselves and our struggles in our own terms, as best we can. This book says we can learn from one another and from this work. Use this book as an invitation to sisterhood and struggle, to movement-building and responsibility, to strategies and mediums, to what it means to be an ally.

3.

Imagine: What would you do with a Leeway grant? If you had the time and freedom that one of these awards might allow, what would you do? What possibilities can you see and work for? How would you make some measure of social change—more equity, justice, peace, freedom — in the middle of the mess in which we find ourselves? On whose behalf / at whose side will you labor? Where and how might you spend time and (most precious of all) attention, love and respect? Start by seeing yourself among those in these pages. What difference could you make with what \$2,500 or \$15,000 might buy?

4.

Consider: What does it mean to be in this book? The money is important. Necessary. But one of the most enduring gifts enjoyed by those named in these pages is that someone told them “Yes.” A small selection committee, people who would also say they are engaged in some work of art and social change, read their applications and said, “Yes. We want to see what you can do with this chance, this time, this money.”

Struggling against the odds, it matters to be affirmed and encouraged, to have others find us worth investing in, not out of our minds. The people in this book know: The first step is believing in ourselves, in our own capacity to speak and act and make a difference (regardless of how a selection panel chooses).

5.

Count. There are many ways for an advocate to read this book. Here is one. I am committed to keeping folk and traditional arts — local vernaculars — sustainable and vital. I believe in the importance of these deeply rooted and fundamentally alternative forms of cultural heritage (contemporary yet also grounded in community-relevant language and practice). Working in this area for decades, I can tell you that these kinds of artistic practice are both crucial spheres for enabling diversity, self-determination, and local authority AND chronically marginalized, overlooked, dismissed, exoticized, and under-funded. Nationally, people working in folk and traditional arts generally can expect to get access to only 2 – 4% of arts grant dollars. In contrast, at Leeway more than 15% of awardees are doing work in folk arts and cultural heritage. This is significant: It shows that Leeway gets out there to places and people who aren't the usual suspects on grant lists, that it takes seriously people whose credentials are embodied in their own work and measured in neighborhood respect. It shows that you can work at access and fair process. You can work to keep doors open, kick them down, pay attention to what might be barriers. This work makes a difference in who gets a shot.

6.

Listen to just four of those represented here:

“I am a minority within a minority and it has been an important responsibility to preserve this tradition and speak out.”

“I am changing possibilities for girls and women.”

“I was outraged: I decided to speak up. This was when I realized the true power of an artist.”

“We can reclaim cultural traditions that we were denied for so long, and, by doing that, make our sense and practice of community building even stronger.”

7.

Toast in gratitude and appreciation, in honor of this book and those it represents: Leeway, the awardees, all those who applied and all who have yet to apply, all those who struggle for justice and joy. To our health and well-being. May we thrive in just and good work, and may this book be one of many signs that there is wider company than we imagine. May our contributions be useful, enduring resources in larger struggles. May we support one another and find justice and joy in good measure. And may we all say Amen.

—Debora Kodish
July 2, 2008

Published in *Leeway Foundation Grants and Awards 2007*
<http://www.leeway.org/grantee-info/artist-books/flipbook/book2007/index.html>