

2025 Annual Members' Project Pitch : Entry # 779**Your Name**

Dorothy Smith

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In the Beginning Was the Broadside or Broadsides for Democracy

Topic:

Using contemporary broadsides, a historic means of expression, to document current attacks on democracy

Inspiration:

In April 2017 I attended the March for Science in DC and was blown away by the handmade posters. They were joyous, science-based, and funny (see slideshow in Attached document below). These human signs, often made by families, made me hopeful and proud to be an American. In the current climate, homemade signs have made me want to share and amplify the voices of our fellows who are suffering retribution for their service to the country or just being who they are.

In mid-February I arrived at a local Italian restaurant in Charlottesville just after an ICE raid on the kitchen (the officers said they were doing “community outreach”. On the 5pm TV news that night, I heard the tail-end of coverage of another ICE sweep that day; a Latina was saying, “I want people to know that they are targeting Hispanic grocery stores.” I expected to see a story about the raids on the 6 o'clock news, but saw no reporting on either local station or the newspaper next day. Why were ICE raids in town not reported? Management censorship? Government proscription against reporting them? Our local encounters with ICE were quickly replaced in the news cycle by some other affront to democracy.

About a week later during a VBAC Printing History Intensive, I was introduced to the Scholar's Lab in Shannon Library, which describes its mission as the “intersection of technology and culture”. In the lab all kind of making goes on, using all kind of tools from 3-D printers to sewing machines, including digital printing presses. Right by the door is a rack of “zines”—printed pamphlets for broad circulation. The zine “Don't Just Do Nothing: 20 Things You Can Do to Counter Fascism—Yes, You! Yes, Now” was written by self-identified Jewish anarchists as a continuation of the work of all the ancestors who have struggled for freedom. The pamphlet is headed by the famous Jewish quote, “You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”—Pirkei Avot (2:21). [<https://itsgoingdown.org/dont-just-do-nothing-20-things-you-can-do-to-counter-fascism/>] The kids produced this preparation for resistance back in November 2024.

Another zine DIY Web Archiving from Zine Bakery leads with the headlines “Things Vanish from the Internet*, *sometimes are deliberately disappeared, Care about stuff on the Internet?, *You* need to act to archive it, Anyone can do it—this zine shows you how.” [<https://zinebakery.com/homemade-zines/bakeshop-2-diywebarchiving>] Students and educators are putting free tools out on the Internet for other dissenters to download and use in their work.

Many activist newsletters are using woodblock printing images to lend street cred to their activities. Check out an image from the C'ville Dems Newsletter of Feb16 drawing attention to the list of upcoming nationwide economic boycotts:

[Hopefully in additional documents below]

Online newsletter Meditations in an Emergency headed the article “The She Made Him Do It Theory of Everything” by R. Solnit with a woodcut print pasted on a wall in Oaxaca, Mexico, Jan 2025:

[Hopefully in additional documents below]

Note the broadside stylings already in use at the Zine Bakery.

I have already been deeply moved and entertained by two posters seen at demonstrations in little old Charlottesville. NOT WITHOUT ZELENSKY (against Trump's private meeting with Putin to divvy up Ukraine) brought tears to my eyes. IF IT LOOKS LIKE A COUP, AND WALKS LIKE A COUP, IT IS A COUP (with COUP inside a woodcut-like duck outline) made me grin.

Concept:

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For each aggression against an institution or job or law or category of protected people, the members collective will create a broadside. Each one will be based on a homemade sign by a demonstrator who is speaking from the heart—which means speaking from all our hearts. We will scour news coverage of each mass demonstration for protestor posters and as a group pick the best one to represent standing up to that particular action against American rights and values. Members can choose which broadside they wish to design.

Why broadsides? Broadsides are the historic backbone of the printing press. Long before the English speaking populous was even literate, they were used to share news and opinion. The most famous American broadside is the Declaration of Independence—printed fast and spread wide.

Who better than the VBAC to record history in real time using their historic Vandercook printing press? Each broadside will be created first as an archival art form limited edition, then possibly turned into something more populous, like posters for telephone poles, and finally, following the students' lead, posted on the Internet for free use by activists. At the very least a visual archive of demonstrations all over the country will be valuable to future Americans.

I am told that the UVA rare books library has an extensive holding of broadsides. A visit there for the project collective to look at broadsides against the government (Vietnam War, votes for women) would be an education and inspiration by citizen activists from our past as well as a source of styles and images.

I believe this project could engage members with different skills in ways that suit them best. Here is a tentative list of responsibilities: Track down photographs of demonstrations against various depredations (we will need to play catch up), select and enlarge handmade posters (not the people, just the posters) from each event for members to choose from, accurately identify the event details, date, location, etc. for labeling cheaper, widely distributed reproductions, design the broadside, prepare type and images, arrange printing parties for each broadside, handle copywriting of the broadside as appropriate, arrange next steps for smaller-format bulk copying and distribution, collaborate with Scholars Lab and Zine Bakery about disseminating original images to other groups, prepare food for large group activities like printing events. I believe those interested could function like a collective.

Form/Structure:

A limited edition set of broadsides documenting protest against attacks on our institutions and values.

Skill-Building:

See Concept above

Additional Notes/Comments

I understand perfectly that the VBAC may be unable to consider this as a member project because it is too partisan for a government backed entity such as the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. However, every single list of suggestions for action in this time, says, "Do not obey in advance," "Do not self-censor," Do not cede power to authoritarianism."

[<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2024/11/10-things-to-do-if-trump-wins/>] And of course there needs to be respect for people who support the Trump Administration. Perhaps this submission should not be posted at this time for the member project. I certainly don't want to embarrass the VBAC, much less create a fracas about political activism before any product is there to be adjudicated. I am wondering if this idea could go forward as a "smaller collaboration initiated by individual members" as Bonnie describes it. You guys know everything about printing and printers and presses in the larger area. Could we have a conversation about possibly borrowing your fat type or perhaps composing a page at the Center and printing elsewhere. All help appreciated. Thanks for your consideration. Dorothy Smith

Attach Documents:

- [Boycott-from-Dems-newsletter.png](#)
- [March-for-Science-Washington-DC-April-22-2017-1.m4v](#)