

## Arc Studios News March 2021

**A Conversation with  
Priscilla Otani  
Arc Studio #207  
By Sherri Cornett**



I am fascinated with Priscilla Otani's mix of intelligence, social conscience, desire to lift others up and humor –a humor which she calls sophomoric, but always brings out a chuckle in me and . . . how this all plays out in her art.

**Sherri Cornett:** From my perspective, COVID-19 hasn't slowed you down. I see new activist and nonactivist works on [your website](#) and social media, references to documentation efforts, continued work at Arc Gallery and with NCWCA and, yes, your humor. What has changed for you over the last year?

**Priscilla Otani:** I had my Bernina sewing machine tuned up last January, so, when I decided to work more from home, I had the opportunity to get back into sewing. I was in the middle of an ArtTag series themed on Chaos and, through YouTube, learned how to do a crazy quilt. It seemed an apt metaphor for the Trumpian world, so I made one out of my husband's discarded ties, embroidery and beading.

**SC:** And your recent quilted piece is in [Deadlocked and Loaded](#), a show in Syracuse, New York, which looks at conversations around guns and violence.

**PO:** Yes, it is titled "At A Young and Tender Age." Gun ownership is strictly regulated in Japan but my father had a license, kept a gun cabinet at home, and hunted regularly. Although I grew up with guns, I never owned one, and it took a very long time to come up with the concept for this show. I researched toys and badges related to protest, law and order, and gun ownership rights and was surprised at how many items were available through Etsy and eBay! The piece includes some of these as well as image transfers of rag dolls and embroidered names of children killed in school shootings.

**SC:** And, you continued doing collages with your Hyperpartisannalia postcard series, which highlights politicians and name calling (the collage on this banner is London Breed). What motivated this series? How did you pick the subjects?

**PO:** In late August I became increasingly distressed with the rise in partisan rhetoric leading to the elections. I feared that if Trump didn't win, he would ultimately incite civil war. One of the ways I process fear is to make art. I own a large collection of free ad cards collected from the sidewalk and shops near my studio. They advertise BDSM clubs, fetish services, underground bands, small plays and independent movies in the Folsom Street Area. I decided to use the backs of them to collage portraits of Republicans and Democrats and the unkind nicknames they gave each other.

**SC:** This grew into quite a large project!

**PO:** My goal was one card a day, alternating between the parties. I started on September 1, 2020 and ended on January 20, 2021 with 142 portraits of 141 different people! Although I had a starter list of famous elected officials, I soon let the news dictate who I would feature. My list widened from national politicians to local ones, to newscasters, movement leaders, comedians and more. To find the appropriate nickname or tagline, I sometimes had to dig deep to learn more about these people. I posted a **daily portrait** on Facebook and [Instagram](#). I knew that *Hyperpartisannalia* was the correct title for this topic when several of my friends became distressed with the snarky nicknames given to some of their favorite politicians.

**SC:** You also made additions to your [Kitsune series](#).

**PO:** Yes, the kitsune series falls into my art related to my Japanese heritage and are nonactivist works. I grew up loving ghost stories and horror movies. I was fascinated with the Japanese reverence for the white fox. There are shrines dedicated to them all over Japan and I try to visit a few each time I am home. The fox means a lot of different things in Japan, from the Shinto association with rice and fertility to the more folkloric concept of shapeshifting and revenge. My work on the topic of kitsune has been on-again, off-again since 2011. In 2020, due to COVID, I switched from using paint and made a dozen collages.

**SC:** Besides working more from home, were there other things that kept you going during the pandemic?

**PO:** I am never at a loss for inspiration. I have inherited my mother's curious mind – there are many things that interest me. Last year I started keeping a notebook of ideas and in-progress projects. I try to document what I make, the processes involved, and the mistakes made. I also maintain a parking lot of ideas for future projects.

My work at the gallery and [NCWCA](#) precludes me from pursuing a full-time art-making career. Although the COVID shutdown delayed or digitalized many 2020 exhibitions, it also reduced my non-artmaking tasks. I am very grateful to colleagues who curate my work into their shows, for the juried opportunities that NCWCA offers and for [ArtTag](#), which challenges me to make artwork on a topic I might never have chosen and on tight deadlines.

Priscilla's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/mrpotani/>

Priscilla's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/mrpotani/>

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