



# Survival through art

When a dear friend was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, I asked her what she needed from me, offering soup, a walk, any small comfort I could provide.

"Poetry," she requested, "bring me poems." Similarly, the poet Maggie Smith has said she knows when something tragic happens in the world because her viral poem "Good Bones" begins to make rounds on the internet again, shared by millions to millions of readers looking for language to sooth, resonate, and explain something about our suffering. Here, we say, take this distillation of image and sound and understand newly. And, miraculously, we do.



by Sarah Pape

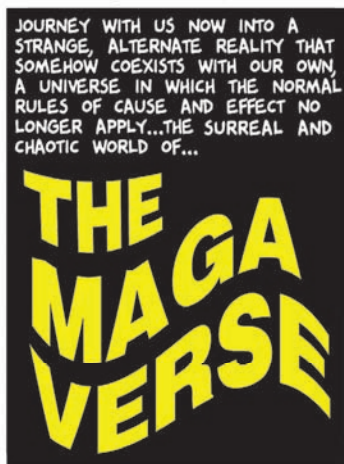
The author is an instructor and editor at Chico State.

Of course, I lean into poems because that is my form, my portal into the ineffable, but the same could be said for visual art, music, theater and dance. Our community is home to galleries, museums and performance venues that for decades have offered artistic awakening, healing and connection.

Chico has launched and supported many artists on their way to becoming—in part, because we comprise stellar audiences and enthusiasts, like the best parents and collaborators, watching, listening, as if to say, *Keep making! Keep imagining!* And while some of these spaces weathered the pandemic, others didn't. As with so much right now, this is a loss we've only begun to measure.

In her book on creative process, *What It Is*, the writer and artist Lynda Barry says image is "the soul's immune system and transit system." This definition holds new meaning for me after this year and a half of virus and quarantine. Made to stay inside, I witnessed myself and others reaching for art in ways that felt more like survival. At times when online teaching felt futile in the face of so much unrest, my students said writing kept them sane, grounded. I was reminded again: Art is not a luxury, it is a necessary element of human life. We take the material of our experience and transform it. Memory becomes sonnet. Loneliness becomes song. Fire becomes sculpture. And in this way, we continue forward—Chico will move forward—reimagining all that's been lost.

## THIS MODERN WORLD



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