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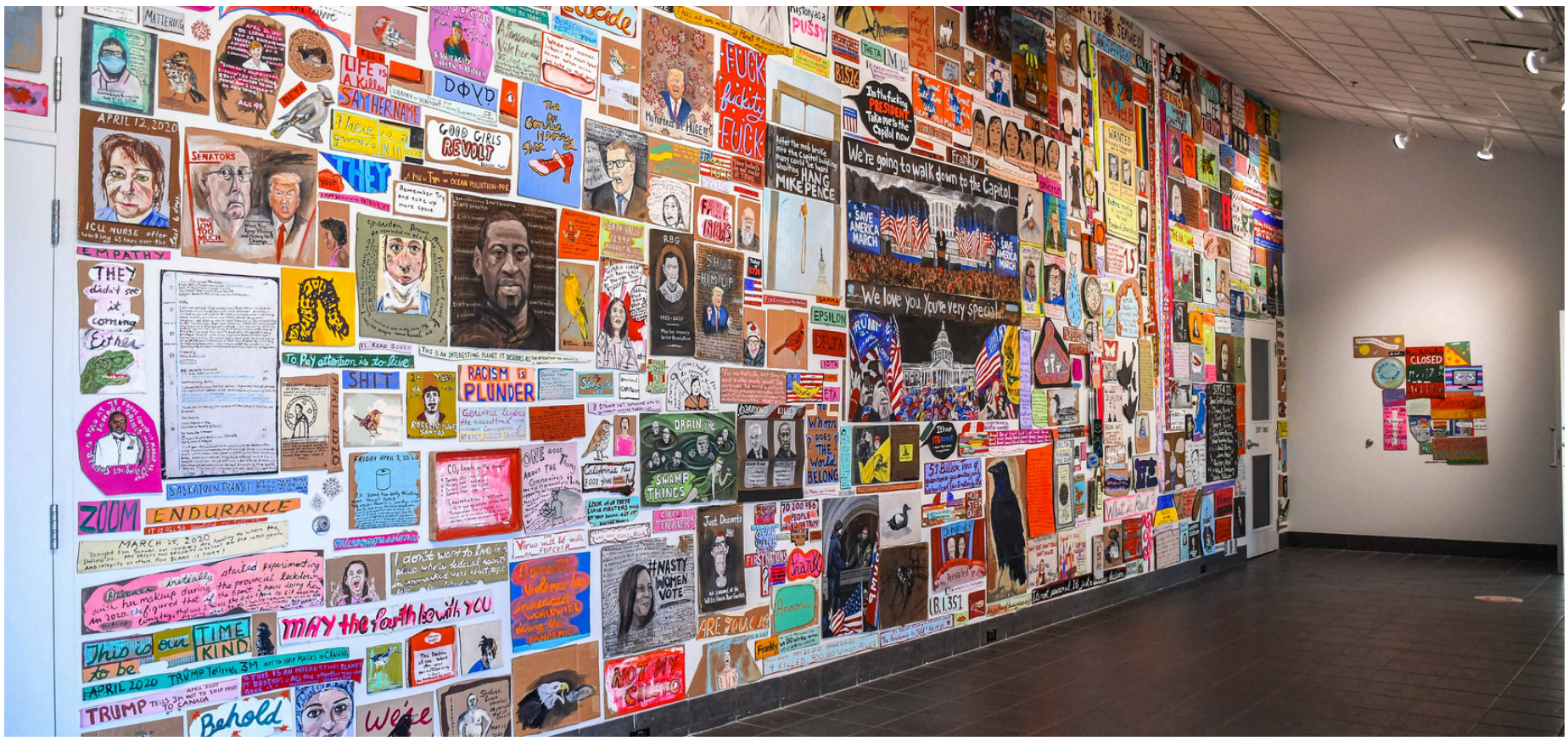

Journal of the Plague Year(s)

A Project by Betsy Rosenwald and Donna Rose

June 22 – August 19, 2023

Dawna Rose and Betsy Rosenwald are painters. They work in other genres including installation and sculpture, but painting is at the centre of their practices. For over 20 years, they rented adjacent studios in Saskatoon's legendary Tees and Persse building until they were evicted with other artists when ownership changed in 2018 – which is to say, they have long been colleagues, but not collaborators. When COVID erupted, they embarked on an epic collaborative project, documenting their responses to the increasingly erratic and polarized character of public speech and behaviour around the world. They write:

Journal of the Plague Year(s) is a series of collaborative installations and paintings on post-consumer cardboard begun in response to the pandemic and toxic politics of 2020.

The project's title pays homage to Daniel Defoe's 1722 book, A Journal of the Plague Year, billed as "observations or memorials of the most remarkable occurrences [...] in London during the last Great Visitation in 1665 [the Great Plague]." It is especially appropriate, as the project begins with our own observations and memories during a most remarkable year—the year the entire world shut down. (DR and BR)

While both artists' work tended toward introspection, subjecthood and painterly concerns, the Journal launched them into the world of politics, ideology and social conflict. With eyes trained on the news-of-the-day, they responded – quickly, with images and text – everyday.