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CREATIVITY & CONSTRAINT

Sharing the idea for an anthology is like lighting a fire under one of those brilliantly colored paper balloons made in Guatemalan pueblos, or corking up a message into an old, salt-scoured bottle and tossing it beyond the surf. It requires a trust in lilt and drift. The act is both a completion and an invitation. We have valued a question that arises out of some incongruence, some essential tension, in our lived life enough to bring it into haphazard relation to other lives, other realities. By voicing the question, setting it aloft or adrift, we are creating "room to reconsider our reality," what Ai Weiwei describes as one of the core purposes of art.

What returns in response often asks something completely different of us. Sometimes it makes us realize we were really asking another question entirely, and now we need to answer both the question we let soar and the one that has returned to us.

There is something resistant, grounding, often miring in this engagement with the other—whether the demands of intellectual order, limits of material properties, intractability of social facts, the scantiness of our own intellect, skill, or temperament. But isn't this what we asked for: real life pushing back? "To a large extent my work is dependent on reality. I don't rely on it for self-expression, but I must connect to it to feel the desire to create," Ai Weiwei observes of his own process. For this resistance also inspires. It is proof that a conversation is taking place.

Anne Truitt, the sculptor, observed in *Daybook*, her first journal exploring her artistic process that if art were only having an interesting idea, we would all be conceptual artists. Instead art is the result of that idea tangling, most intimately, with matter.

The ideas in my head are invariably more radiant than what is under my hand. But something puritanical and tough in me won't take that fence. The poem has to be written, the painting painted, the sculpture wrought. . . . Life just seems to me irremediably about coping with the physical.