

DEAR AUNTY BAZ

Dear Aunty BAZ,

I was in the butchers buying some Cumberland sausages the other day. The butcher's first line to me was 'day off is it sir'? I replied no, I was working. I was going around all the charity shops buying Barbie dolls. 'Oh really sir, and what would you be doing buying Barbie girls for sir'. I informed him they were for an installation I was doing that involved 500 Barbie girls. 'Oh really sir, and that's what you call working is it?' he replied. I was completely stumped for an answer. I've worked really hard finding 500 Barbie dolls on the cheap but no one seems to understand outside of my arty mates. 'What exactly what do you do sir?' I tried to explain to the inquisitor in question that I was an artist. 'An Artist Sir!' came the reply. 'I thought artists painted pictures and carved shapes out of stone Sir. Sorry Sir, I didn't realise that buying Barbie girls in bulk made you an artist'. I tried to explain to him that artists do all sorts of things and come in all shapes and sizes, but he seemed to have made up his mind, particularly the fact that it must have been nice for me to have time off in the middle of the day. I've begun to question my existence Aunty BAZ. In fact, I'm not really sure what an artist is anymore?

Yours existential,

Dave

Dear Dave,

I suggest you buy some sausages from his shop and make a sculpture from them. Take this back in as a gift for the butcher. Problem solved. He'll love it!

Aunty BAZ

Dear Aunty BAZ,

My partner is addicted to the jobs and opportunities section on the a-n magazine website. His behaviour is becoming increasingly erratic. He sits at his computer all day and even gets up at 3.00am and 5.00am to check if any other opportunities have been added. He never even gets in an application for as soon as he starts writing he abandons it to begin on another one.

Yours frustrated,

Daisy.

Dear Daisy,

This is very serious - you need to give him an ANBO (an Artists Newsletter Behavioural Order) immediately. Total abstinence from listings for six months.

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

I've just got my first residency - at a hospice. I think the reason I got the job is because I told them that I had been looking after my dying grandmother for the last two years. The problem is, I lied on my application - my grans an absolute picture of health. I only applied because the pay was good. I don't think I can deal with been surrounded by death. What should I do Aunty BAZ? Tell the truth or try and get through it?

Yours severely worried,

Anna.

Dear Anna,

This is a difficult one.
Best of luck,

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

My partner is a performance artist. His pieces usually involve bounding up to people in public spaces on all fours and pretending to urinate on their legs. He then videos peoples responses to this. Usually they call him a wanker or something similar. Recently he has begun to get really hostile responses - he now does it on Friday or Saturday nights on Broad Street. He has ended up in hospital for the last four weekends after being badly beaten up. When I go to pick him up the hospital staff say he needs to stop doing this or he'll be arrested. He tries to explain to them that it's art but they say he's a drain on valuable resources. What should I do?

Yours worried,

Annabel.

Dear Annabel,

This is a very common problem. The vast majority of letters I receive are from the partners of performance artists, usually seriously concerned about the increasingly erratic behaviour of their partners. I also have a high proportion of letters sent in from depressed artists who are injured and house bound after undertaking Bas Jan Ader re-makes. The problem is that if a performance artist wants to perform, then there is very little you can do. One does not become a performance artist, rather one is born a performance artist. If your boyfriend wants to bound up to people on Friday nights and pretend to urinate on their legs then you have to accept that. I suggest that you maybe accompany him on his little adventures. If people begin to get hostile towards him then you can perhaps help out by explaining to them that this is art, not mental deficiency. I'm sure the Broad St clientele will be more than understanding!

Yours,

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

My boyfriend is a sculptor. He's not a particularly good one, but he tries nevertheless. He mainly makes very heavy odd looking objects out of building plaster. Our house is full of them. I would move them but I don't want to hurt his feelings, and I'm physically unable to. It's like Easter Island downstairs. Fortunately they are too heavy to carry upstairs. I thought the upstairs of our house was safe from his art - until recently. I am worried, very worried. He has gone into making sculptures for the 'bedroom' - large crude mechanical devices to help with our love life. The problem is they are all made from large rusty bits of metal - often with sharp edges - he has reclaimed from the breakers yard for some cash in hand. Last night he got in at 6.00 pm, but we couldn't go to bed until 11.30 as he was busy constructing Performance Machine Mark Four 'Excalibur'. This was so heavy the plaster cracked in the living room and fell on the kid's dinner. When 'Excalibur' was eventually constructed we became trapped between an old iron bed frame and a BMX. We had to call the kids to help get us out. I can't take this anymore Jane. What's more I'm terrified I may get tuberculosis from the rusty metal. What should I do Aunty BAZ?

Janet.

Dear Janet,

I suggest you sneak out under cover of darkness, taking your children with you. Once a man begins to build machines for the bedroom there is very little you can do I'm afraid. Either get out or risk an imminent and messy death.

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

Art is ruining our relationship. We're both performance / video artist's - we predominantly film ourselves engaged in strange and bizarre situations. But we're getting scared that one of us may die soon - and we can't stop. We're addicted to the thrill of performance. Our most recent work is called the lovers cliché series:

Love is blind. Marriage is the eye-opener (we got married and put match sticks between our eyes for three days; we required hospital treatment).

Love is not just gazing at each other but looking together in the same direction (we stood on a hill for four days looking in the same direction without food or water. We required hospital treatment).

Love is the unity of two hearts beating together as one (we super-glued our selves together so we resembled Siamese twins. We required hospital treatment when Andy tried to run from a wasp and tore all the skin off my left hand side).

We are becoming very worried that our collaborating is going to end in a near death situation. Collaboration is a dangerous thing. What should we do Aunty BAZ?

Yours concerned,

Katie & Andy

Dear Katie & Andy,

I suggest you stop collaborating immediately. I suggest you visit one of the newly opened arts council funded artists rehab centres. You do need to apply for arts council funding to go there though. But they'll let you know within 6 weeks or if you need to go for a long time, it can take 3 months to get a decision. You might get rejected, so on average it takes about 7 months to get in. If you get in you should take the highly recommended Critically Coping with Collaboration Critically (CCCC). Hope that helps!

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

I make timed based ephemeral art - mainly cardboard versions of grandfather clocks which I then set fire to. I then put on nights where I recount the experience. I believe the spoken word is enough as I don't believe in documentation. The problem is that I keep getting rejected from exhibitions - everyone wants to see photos or videos of the grandfather clocks on fire. I'll often turn up to recount my stories at exhibition selection panel meetings, only to be turned away point blank. I've now begun to doubt myself and have begun to think that what I do is completely pointless. Is art pointless Aunty BAZ?

Yours despairingly,

Steve.

Dear Steve,

Yes Art is Pointless! Of course it's pointless. That's its point. It feels my heart with radiant joy that there is someone out there making intricate versions of grandfather clocks out of cardboard and then burning them. You must be the only person in the world doing this. Think of that! You are an amazing person! Keep up the pointless work.

Aunty BAZ.

BAZ

'truth against the world'

Dear Aunty BAZ,

I have a problem. I am obsessed with art. It's fine in my day-to-day existence, as I can hide this. The problem I have is when I have sex with my girlfriend (now ex-girlfriend). Every time I come to climax I shout out the names of male artists I admire. My girlfriend left yesterday when I screamed "kippenberger" at the point of orgasm. She walked out saying she had had enough. Do you think I need therapy? Last week I shouted out Jackson Pollock, but managed to cover myself by saying something about my b*****ks. Yesterday I just couldn't think of anything quick enough to rhyme with Kippenburger.

Yours troubled,

Brian.

Dear Brian
Speaking from experience, I know that you've got this problem for life unfortunately. The only thing to do is to list all of your favourite artists and work out 'covering' rhymes. This way you can be ready. Here are a few examples. If you shouted out Picasso, you could cover yourself by saying 'lets go to Burkina Faso' (which is a desperately poor landlocked country in western Africa; it was Upper Volta under French rule but gained Independence in 1960). Or if you scream out Warhol, you could say 'I've got a large barge pole'. Hope that helps!

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

I'm nearly 40, but I still haven't come out to my mum that I'm an artist. Every time I build up to it, I get an intense feeling of shame at what I do and bottle it. She thinks I've been in the army for the last 17 years. Before going round to see her, I always put on some kit I brought from the local army surplus store. I told her the reason I always wear a 1980s German army jacket (it was cheap) is because I'm working abroad a lot - that's why I'm not around much. In reality I live 12 miles away. I'm too shameful to tell her this and the things I get up with my arty mates.

Richard.

Dear Richard,

As the poem goes...

A Mother's love is something
that no one can explain,
It is made of deep devotion
and of sacrifice and pain,
It is endless and unselfish
and enduring come what may
For nothing can destroy it
or take that love away.

Wouldn't tell her you're an artist though!

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

I have had to stop frequenting pubs on Broad St because I am always made to take off my flat cap by overly aggressive doormen. The other day I said to a doorman, 'Sir, this isn't any old hat - this is an artists flat cap; it is a potent signifier of my profession. I am an artist and I wear a flat cap. My flat cap defines my existence'. He then confiscated the cap, saying I could collect it on the way out. I was deeply offended at this; I tried to explain to him that there is nothing wrong with wearing a flat cap. The only people who wear them are old working class men, farmers and artists. We are the wretched of the earth.

Steve.

Dear Steve,

I suggest you start wearing an invisible flat cap. That will fool them!

Best,

Aunty BAZ.

Dear Aunty BAZ,

I have been thinking of giving up the art and getting a mortgage, job and possibly a smart car. True, I have been progressing up the rented room ladder recently. From a small box room with no windows five years ago, I now have an adequately sized bedroom with double-glazing and a small plastic palm tree. The thing is Aunty BAZ, I'm getting fed up of having my whole existence shaped by the size of my room. Should I give up the art and seek a bit of stability or should I carry on regardless?

Simon

Dear Simon,

I write this from a medium sized bedroom with bay windows and a Chez Lounge; I share a kitchen with some very friendly immigrants. It's fine for me, I'm happy. One day I know I will have a large bedroom and possibly even space for a desk. I say carry on regardless.

Yours hopefully,

Aunty BAZ.

BAZ CAMPAIGN:

STOP THE WILD ANIMAL MADNESS

BAZ have set up an emergency funds appeal to help pay for the cost of hiring a wild animal hunter to remove the wild beasts currently running rampage in Birmingham ARTISTS studios. Please donate generously by sending a cheque or postal order to BAZ WILD ANIMAL CAMPAIGN, Xanadu, Unit A3, 2 Bowyer Street, Digbeth, Birmingham, B10 0SA. Cash and jewellery also accepted (silver or gold).