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ANNESTA LE

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NY**

ART

## TAKE A LEAP — ANNESTA LE

Annesta Le is a Vietnamese-American artist based in Brooklyn (N.Y.). The pandemic flipped her two businesses from her side (studio art practice) to main income, just as her graphic design work dwindled. She has worked in neon glass sculpture, painting, and drawing. She has presented throughout New York: Yi Gallery, Satellite Art Club, Sugarlift, Wassaic Project, David &

Schweitzer Contemporary, Wayfarers. She has also installed her art for private buyers in other parts of the country as well as abroad in Chicago and Italy. I immediately became a fan of her neon glass sculpture — it is stunningly elegant. I met Annesta over Zoom to ask about her art and business. Her biggest piece of advice? “Take the leap. Even if you do fail, at least you’ll know you tried.”

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### **Could you introduce yourself to our readers?**

I’ve lived in New York for 15-plus years now. I love it here. I found myself as an artist here. I actually went to school for computer science. It’s weird how I ended up being an artist — I mean, I always wanted to do something creative. I actually didn’t want to do computer science, but I did it because my dad’s an engineer, and he encouraged me to go into it. It was in the dot-com era, which definitely ages me. I was working in tech, doing tech support for old desktop computers. I remember seeing the creative department, and I was like, “I want to work over there.” So I emailed them, and I was like, “Hey, you guys need to hire a girl. You guys just have dudes on your team.” That’s how it started. In the 90s I was doing digital art, Photoshop battles and stuff like that. It wasn’t until much later that I started the art I’m doing now. My journey has been a little different and strange because I didn’t go the academic route.

### **I believe you recently started doing your art full time, how did you transition to that?**

Like a lot of people here, the reality is that you have to find some way to sustain yourself while you build up your art practice. You start little by little. I worked full-time as a creative director designing gaming apps, landing pages and responsive emails. The money I made from that helped me pay for my studio and art materials. It was really tough to work (on graphic design) full-time and then make studio art in my spare time. I was going a million miles a minute. I also felt this [lifestyle] wouldn’t be sustainable forever, but I had to do this until I had enough studio projects [to subsist on]. I lost a huge design client during the pandemic, and I was like, “You know what? I’ve always wanted to make this jump to work in my studio full time.” I qualified for the PPP loan with my existing business, and I had savings. I decided, “I’m

going to make this leap, even though it's really scary." And I did. I registered it, created the LLC. That's how the studio is now taking up most of my time. For me, during the pandemic, it's been a huge shift because I still have a design business — I'm keeping that company, just in case. I'm in a liminal space between the two.

### **How did you start showing in galleries?**

The reason I even started showing was because the landlord and a curator in my building really encouraged me to show. They had a big open studio event in Bushwick and told me, "You know, you should open your doors and show the public." I said, "I don't want to do that, I'm really scared," but I did, and I got a lot of attention. I think seven or eight hundred people came through that weekend and I got "baby press" (little local mentions). Then I had [more] shows, and that's how it happened.

### **How did you obtain your space? Does it feel necessary to you, as opposed to working from home?**

I have to go back to my very first studio. The reason I was looking for a separate space in the first place, was because I was painting at home on the kitchen table and it started to grow and get really messy. There was no way I could continue working from home without it spilling into other areas of our apartment. This led me to search for artist studio spaces on Craigslist and that's when I found my first 175 square foot studio space. The intention was to use the space for painting to see what would happen. Every artist's needs are different. Some don't need the studio space and prefer to work from their home, and that's totally cool! I find that having my own studio space is extremely important and necessary for my work. When I come home, I want to turn off my mind and be "home". The separation of physical space between home and work is important to me.

### **How has your art changed over time? Has the pandemic affected it?**

You go through life, and you get interested in different things. I took a class learning the glass stuff [neon light sculpting] and when I took that class, I was like, "Holy crap. I love this. I'm obsessed with this," and then that became a

new medium of expression. When the pandemic hit, that glass shop space closed. I couldn't make that work anymore, and I thought, "Well, what do I do now? I'm going to draw." So then the drawings became a whole new thing.

**Do you ever feel like you need a community of women to lean on for support?**

I have a group of female friends of all ages and all career levels that I tap into. I go to them for advice, aesthetic questions or even career decisions. That is so important and helpful for me. I feel like artists, the artists I know at least, we're always alone in our studios. We're basically solo entrepreneurs. You're in your head, you're by yourself, and people who are introverted can have that and are cool with that. For me personally, it's really important to have constant dialogue and feedback.

**Have you ever felt unsafe as a woman going to your studio? Do you have any advice about that?**

Since the pandemic started, I did start carrying an alarm and a deterrent weapon on me. It gives me a sense of safety as I have to walk through industrial and quiet parts of Brooklyn. I walk with a sense of purpose and a confident posture. My advice is to do whatever you need to do to feel safe. Since my space is located in a more industrialized area — if I'm working late at night, I'll usually take a taxi home rather than walk.

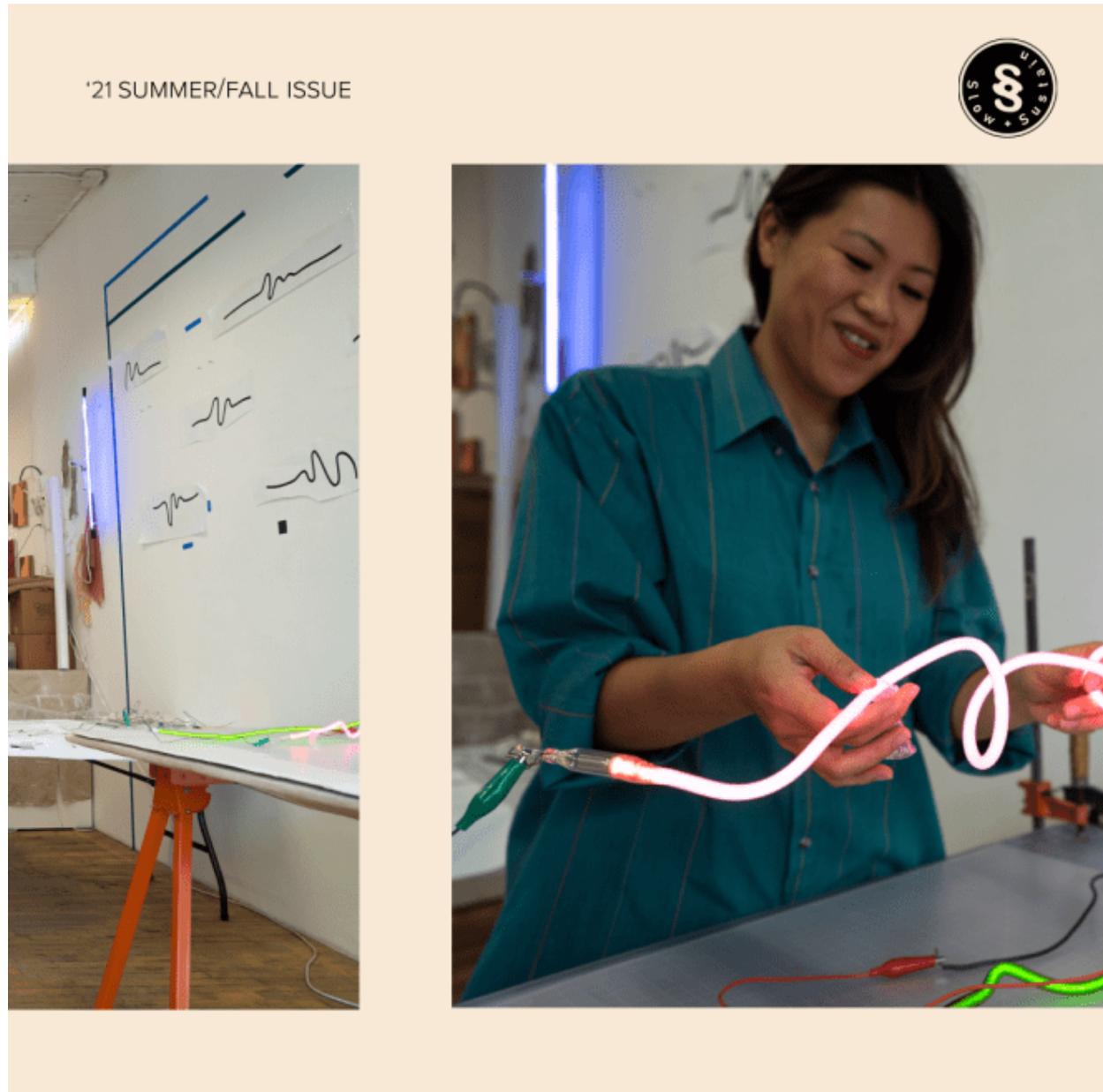
**Do you have other advice for women who may feel ready to seek out their first studio, showroom, or retail space?**

My advice is to take the leap and try to make it work. Allow yourself to fail and learn from it. Then try again. I would start small and then build up as your needs grow. Even if you do fail, at least you'll know you tried to go after your dreams. Seek out spaces where you are near like-minded people or where community is fostered. I think it's important to research the community, if there are like-minded businesses nearby, so you can lean on them. When you jump into that, you don't know what new collaborations will come out of it.

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