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OPINION

BY MORGAN O'HARA

An artist whose work is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery.

The Constitution, by Hand

In January, as the inauguration of Donald Trump neared, I felt the need to protest. As a concerned artist, I had marched many times, but this moment seemed to call for something else. I wanted to stay clear of the campaign's toxic excesses, and take action silently.

On Jan. 5 I woke up with the idea of copying the Constitution by hand. While I often hand-copy texts as part of my art practice, I hadn't thought much about the Constitution before. I only knew I wanted to do it, and to do it with others in a public space.

I love the openness and beauty of the Rose Main Reading Room at the New York Public Library. On Inauguration Day I went to the library with a small suitcase of pens, a few Sharpies, papers and copies of the Constitution. I brought old notebooks, half-used drawing pads and loose sheets to share with anyone who might show up. I began writing.

Soon, others joined me: a friend, then another friend, then people I didn't know at all who saw the work in progress. That first session drew eight or nine people, writing carefully, studying, reflecting on the document intended to protect our basic rights. We have held sessions every month since, with different people each time, and I will continue.

Hand copying a document can produce an intimate connection to the text and its meaning. The writers may discover things about this document that they never knew, a passage that challenges or moves them. They may even leave with a deeper connection to the founders and the country, or even a sense of encouragement.

I began this project motivated by psychological necessity. I now see it as a social art practice. My hope is that it will become a movement of sorts, with sessions throughout the country. It is important for us to become more intensely aware of our rights as citizens of the United States, so that as the current government tries to take them away, we will see what is happening in time to act.