- What are the materials the artist uses, and what subjects are they drawn to?

Salvage. Salvage from the flotsam. This of course might seem harder than it usually is because, well, it's the post apocalypse. That said, I recently read Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm, about the inequalities that Hurricane Maria exposed, deepened, and created, and art was threaded all throughout that book. I don't mean to reduce Puerto Rico to a moral, but it's something that I can draw from to convince myself that salvage art is a viable part of post-apocalyptic thought. Worldbuilding always involves borrowing from other worlds to make your own, after all, this one and fictional ones, and while we're at it will involve tearing down parts of your world and starting again. But you have to be careful to make it your world. Then it can (hopefully) become everyone else's.

(It's important to me for some reason to explicitly put myself in the picture. Of course in this case I'm already in the picture, but as a creator as opposed to a character.)

It's really more that, after a generation, how much salvage is there going to be. Most of it will surely already have been used to patch up people's immediate living situations. Then again, life always creates detritus to toy around with. Maybe there's not a lot to come by from time to time, and the Sawdancer will just have to be frustrated, content to simply imagine what can emerge. Imagination is always key to the artistic experience. The proportion of imagination to everything else may vary. I'm finding that it's important to me to have a note of absurdity in this post-apocalyptic scene, but I want to be careful not to have it tip over into cynicism. It's hard to say how successful I actually was at this. I'm also finding more and more that worlds without their people are nothing.

(That said, I want to point out that this is not at all a knock on previous participants who de-emphasised characters in their responses to the prompts. It's more that when the prompts talk about specific characters, it would be wrong if I didn't put thought into them as well.)

I'm calling them the Sawdancer. They don't use saws, in general, and they don't dance. Something about that name seemed right to me though, once I thought of it. It's a synthesis. It seems to get to the heart of their hybrid approach. Or rather dualistic approach. They haven't tried combining their disciplines yet. Some disciplines they've hardly tried at all.

They call themselves the Sawdancer, sometimes. Sometimes they call themselves Amiel. People aren't always sure what to make of the Sawdancer, as a name, but generally it's accepted with confusion but good grace.

It should be said that the community is accomodating to the Sawdancer, and the Sawdancer to them. For there is a community, a small one for sure, but nevertheless it is. It's not an unconditional accommodation; there will always be those holdouts who, understandably (it is the post apocalypse after all), aren't sure if what's good for one is what's good for all. Even if people aren't convinced of the importance of art to themselves specifically, though, they generally agree on the importance of it to the Sawdancer, and the importance of it to the World at Large. Because there is still one out there, and they are a part of it. Surely.

It helps that the Sawdancer does what they need to do for the community, sometimes without even having to be asked. It helps that art has a practical utility from time to time, and skills obtained can be transferred between it and wider life. The Sawdancer isn't an abusive artist either, thankfully. The decline and fall of the Abusive Artist as a concept is one of the few (?) upsides of life after the Nifties. All of this is a way of getting at that there is no inherent contradiction between being an artist, and being a part of the wider society. There never was.

All this and I haven't even said what they do with the salvage. Or what other types of art they pursue. The Sawdancer uses the salvage to create dioramas, dioramas of what life was, is, and may someday be. And also just how they're feeling now.

They're also looking into starting to explore poetry and drama. Literature was looking tough there for a bit; writing material is even harder to come by than salvage. Then again, the oral tradition hasn't entirely gone away. Literature doesn't quite require nothing, but the conditions are different. Sometimes it's easier than others. They expect that the poems and dramas will cover similar themes to the rest of their art; they're looking to branch out, but not quite that much. It'll all be different expressions of similar things, like a lot of art is.

Their relationship to fiction is… tricky. They flirt with it, but they're also not entirely sure that luxury exists anymore, or if and when it will come back. We know not to ask about genre. Wry comments about living in a hoary post-apocalyptic novel grew old years ago, or else they've evolved. Now we're more likely to make sure we don't fall (back) into one.

We did, however, carefully ask them why they were interested in multiple disciplines. What we were told is that they just feel an absence of art, and want to fill it as best they could. Why not? While they may choose to narrow it down (again) in the future, they're happy to explore for the now. In some sense, they said, their desire to explore multiple forms of art is related to their hopes for what's to come. Something specific they mentioned about that stuck with me for some reason: we must always be free to imagine a multiple-choice future. I would modify that by

adding that it depends on the choices, and that part of being a better person is knowing when to accept those choices, and when to reject them.

- How does the Sawdancer distribute or display their art?

They do! In fact, my compatriots and myself just happen to have arrived at their community as the latest version of that takes shape. Life isn't always like the stories, even the post-apocalyptic one(s), where things start up at or around a decisive point. Nevertheless, this is like that. We don't really have any advice for them either. They're open to it, but even the most artistic of us aren't overly artistically inclined, and the world isn't at a point where telling someone to follow their heart has gone so far into the trite parade that it's come back to being meaningful. We're nearly there though.

(Music, I should say. Music still exists, and is going strong.)

A decent-sized building has been set aside for the Sawdancer to display their dioramas. There has been some… disagreement over this, concern expressed over the Sawdancer's dark purposes in- well, not really. More seriously though, people might think that art is all very well, but a whole building? When the community - fittingly - tends to live more communally? And resources are still reasonably scarce? They also just worry that the Sawdancer is going to become self-absorbed because of this, more isolated. It's not our place to interfere - yet - though we do respect where everyone is coming from. There's also a light hope offered that the building will become a hub for all who are inclined towards art; it will always be a place for the whole community. That has eased some of the tension, but not enough.

They have no need of a separate studio; they liked to say that their studio was the World. (Then again, sometimes the weather disagrees with that. When it does, it's good to have a space to store things so that the weather won't add too much to the artistic process.) It was very important to them that the housing site was in one of a specific number of locations, though they weren't so demanding as to insist that it had to be here or bust. Former buildings from life before the Nifties, you see, emanate a low-level psychic aura of their presence. Nothing too drastic, mind, but you always know they were there. As such, we can safely say for sure that the Sawdancer's gallery is situated somewhere that was important before, important to art. It may even have been a shopping center of some description. Then again, it's been a generation. If it may have been a shopping center, it probably was. It's not clear if the auras will fade as time goes by, or if they will simply be… replaced.

The Sawdancer talks about their art to the community; the community doesn't really travel, so the only way word gets out is through those who pass through. They make smaller pieces available for a satisfactory compensation, and don't mind one way or another whether more people hear about them through that. They generally mention what they're working on to the community, whoever they happen to be with when they feel comfortable sharing, with a kind of modesty. They don't have grand illusions, big assumptions that their art will Shake The World!, but they still do want to make something that they're proud of. The process is actually quite freely collaborative; tools and material are always required, but people are known to bounce ideas off each other. It's encouraged. In a small way, the art is the expression of the community, and the Sawdancer is the primary conduit.

When the Sawdancer talks, the word spreads. They're hoping to have a special corner, that they'll use for their future pursuits of poetry and drama. The community doesn't really have corners as such, but they remember the concept of a corner being important and vital. The Sawdancer will perform on and off, as announced in good time, and all are welcome to attend as they can. They will place a lot of importance on intention and the expression of emotion, as they always do. And as I tend to do, come to think of that.

- How do you and your compatriots feel about the art?

We feel quite mixed all in all. We're a varied group! That said, we've been through enough over the time we've been together that disagreeing over something like this won't tear us apart. This isn't one of those paranoid post apocalypses, you know.

As for myself, I am not me, but I am a lot like me. Fittingly I'm not sure how I would react. I expect I'd feel good, without knowing exactly why I feel good, or whether I should feel good. It'd take me some time in the background as a running process, to make sure of what I feel and why.

(Side note: autistic people happily thrive in this post apocalypse. We don't know whether the Sawdancer is neurodivergent or not, but we accept that they will reveal themselves as they will.)

To touch on just a few of my compatriots… Old Tedesco? Old Tedesco is very happy about this. It's tempered with a little of the pragmatism the post apocalypse has embedded in us all, but overall he is very happy. Old Tedesco is of course not particularly old at all, but he does have some prior connection with art, some sort of art history to him. Either he used to be an artist, or his parents dreamed of being artists, or maybe his grandmother was once immortalised in art.

We don’t really know for certain. There’s a lot we don’t know for certain about Old Tedesco. Again, we accept that he will reveal himself as he will. But there’s a lot.

He’s definitely glad to know the Sawdancer exists though. There was even a sense (which we may admittedly have intuited more than his outright confirming it) that he might want to settle down here, join the Sawdancer in their community. Ultimately, he decided to continue with the group. Happiness isn’t the end of the road, and in any case he doesn’t feel he’s reached his yet. Parva disapproves, naturally. Her signing on the matter is vigorous. It’s not personal; she’s just always been one of the more practical members of the group, she’s had more trauma in her life than most. Her wife Rebecca is more appreciative; Parva signs for herself, of course, but also signs to assure the Sawdancer that they themselves like the work and to concur that Parva is not reacting out of malice. Everyone allows Parva some space after this, not to conform with the rest of our opinions, more to take some time to get to know the dioramas. (Finding out that the Sawdancer isn't some self-absorbed recluse definitely helped.) By the end, she tells us that they are… not bad. As art goes.

We knew art existed before this, of course. It’s not uncommon; mushroom bucks are still scattered around the world. (There was an unspoken consensus after the Nifties that something about fungible just didn’t seem right. Another term was required.) Dramatic productions like the Sawdancer talked about doing spring up every so often too. We’ve heard rumours of travelling orchestras in the Haudenosaunee performing ukulele music and The Voyage of Captain Kathryn Janeway. Someone else once attempted to revive something they called “Mr. Burns, a post-electric play”; they were greeted with disapproving stares when they mentioned it, and the idea quickly died.

(I should say; there is space for all to express and take part in their culture, within reason, and despite all of what I’ve mentioned up to this point. [By within reason, I mean bigots can get fucked.] It’s not just the “normal” cishetero white English speakers who get to have all the fun. They get to have fun too, of course. As a treat.)

All this and I haven’t even talked about why we’re here. Even in a post apocalypse - especially in a post apocalypse - there will always be those who are compelled to wander. We’re not the only ones, but we are some of them. We’re not looking for a home, not yet in any case. Some of us want to see the world, some of us would rather be anywhere than where we were (to put it mildly), and we’ve all decided to do it together. That doesn’t make us freeloaders though, never mind how much of a loaded term that is. We aim to wholly bring ourselves to wherever we go, pitch in as and how we can and are required to. And if there’s some injustice going on, it generally doesn’t last long once we get there. We have a wide-ranging skill set, and a powerful

sense of right and wrong. We try not to outstay our welcome though; at least that's what we tell ourselves. Something new is always calling out to us from tomorrow, and the road rolls beneath us.