

A collage artwork featuring a grey paper envelope, a map of Australia, and various handwritten text strips. The envelope is partially open, revealing a map of Australia with labels like 'Toowoomba', 'Warwick', 'Tarragower', 'Lithgow', 'Goulburn', 'Part', 'mbala', and '5,160'. Several strips of paper with handwritten text are scattered around the envelope, including 'Dear', 'I hope I shall have another opportunity to meet you', 'I am,', 'Hoping to hear from you, I remain', 'Sincerely yours', 'Very truly yours', and 'please reply'. The background is a dark, textured surface with a blue and green gradient.

Creative Correspondence

Program Resource Guide
2008 Art Inquiry
NEW URBAN ARTS

Creative Correspondence

**A Program Resource Guide for the
Summer 2008 Art Inquiry**

New Urban Arts

Summer 2009
Providence, Rhode Island

About New Urban Arts

New Urban Arts is a nationally recognized interdisciplinary arts studio for high school students and emerging artists in Providence, Rhode Island. Our mission is to build a vital learning community that empowers young people as artists and leaders, through developing creative practices they can sustain throughout their lives. Founded in 1997, New Urban Arts is housed in a storefront art studio, located in the West End neighborhood of Providence. Our facilities include a gallery, darkroom, screen printing studio, tabletop printing press, resource library, administrative offices, computer lab and 2,000 square feet of work space. We serve over 300 high school students, 20 emerging artists and over 2,000 visitors through free youth programs, professional development, artist residencies and public performances, workshops and exhibitions each year.

NEW URBAN ARTS

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About this Publication

Creative Correspondence is a program resource guide based on the 2008 Summer Art Inquiry at New Urban Arts. It is published as a resource for educators, artists and young people. Each summer, New Urban Arts brings together artists, scholars and high school students for a thematic exploration of the human experience as it intersects with creative practice. The theme for the Summer 2008 Art Inquiry was mail art and creative acts of correspondence.

In the following pages you will find an accumulation of ideas, information and interpretations that stimulated and sparked our collective inquiry of the act of postal correspondence as a creative act itself. Read responses from our public letter writing project, Dear Providence, which collected letters written to Rhode Island's capital city. Eavesdrop on summer long conversations between teenagers and artists that occurred through the mail.

This publication seeks to share and generate new knowledge about making creative thought and expression a part of all of our lives. We hope you find this resource guide useful in sparking new ideas for your own creative practice or educational environment. We encourage you to alter, combine, or adapt these activities to your liking to best meet your specific needs.

The resource guide can be downloaded at no cost by visiting www.newurbanarts.org. Published through Lulu Press, Inc, the curriculum guide is also available in full-color print for purchase at <http://stores.lulu.com/newurbanarts>.

The resource guide was created by New Urban Arts Program Director, Sarah Meyer with design by Filomena Riganti and photography by Jesse Banks III. Cover art by Deb Dormody.

Forward by Rick Benjamin. Rick is a poet and educator in Providence, RI who served as the Scholar and Artist in Residence for the 2009 Summer Art Inquiry. See the Appendix F for details on this role.

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FORWARD

When we stopped writing letters we lost an intimate form, the epistolary equivalent of what Virginia Woolf says is a little language such as lovers use. Meanwhile, our emails are as full of disclosure as postcards, teen-aged and even middle-aged relationships end in text messages, we communicate almost to our heart's gratification on G-chat, Skype and I.M.—the agility of our communications is startling, the content remarkably dull.

When I was away from New Urban Arts that summer I wrote postcards: some of them were absurd, some had poems on them, some of them were imagined letters that would hint at intimacies only suggested. None of them had anything to do with the pictures or scenes depicted front-side: no grand canyons or monuments here; but for a week I kept track of my own imaginative transits through these snapshot-correspondences and also risked circulating them to a few others, my Providence Letter-Posse back at New Urban Arts.

Before I'd left the city for Maine and then Vermont, a group of us from the studio on Westminster had gone to the North Burial Ground in Providence, a very old cemetery in one of America's oldest cities. It was a wicked hot August day. Back at the studio I'd been talking about La Dia de los Muertes, and how a 9th Century Japanese poet had said, "I'm alive, right? Don't we say that? We don't think about the bones we walk on." which certainly didn't seem to cheer them up; I followed up this chestnut of uplifting wisdom by invoking the notion of talking to the dead. OK, so I wasn't exactly distinguishing myself as a workshop leader, but my excuse was that I'd thrown my back out the day before; it had taken me 2 ½ hours just to get out of bed this morning; my friend, Julie, had given me a massage just so I could stand up bent over. In terms of correspondence, I was half-way into the grave myself.

Writing letters to the unremembered dead was the best I could come up with that day. In retrospect, I'd make the following case for the exercise, and chalk up my good but unconscious intentions to muscle relaxants. First, writing letters is an august activity, a performance with some demonstrable wisdom behind it. I have no doubt that emails and perhaps even text-messages will catch up, but for the moment they are not repositories for really good thinking or the sweetest forms of intimacy or life instructions. Second, writing letters to the dead, stays, for the moment, our unremitting dread of dying. It asks us to find connections, to find correspondences across time, to see our own lives as part of a vast continuum. And, finally, writing letters to a strangers downs barriers of difference, asking us to imagine their lives, to inhabit them (at least for the duration of the making), to stop being afraid even of the most fearful strangers of all-- the ones within us.

Rick Benjamin

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INTRODUCTION

What is an Art Inquiry?

Our annual Summer Art Inquiry integrates the arts and humanities in themes that manifest across cultures and history. Students collaborate with artists to investigate a common theme in diverse arts forms, structured activities, field trips, research questions and independent work. They work closely with each other to explore a theme that raises questions on the human experience as it intersects with creative practice. Themes from past summers include shrine-making / commemorative art and map-making / creative cartography.

The Summer Studio provides a learning experience distinct from our programming during the school year, utilizing greater time available in the summer to offer a more structured, intensive program. The goals of the Art Inquiry program are that students learn standards-based skills and knowledge in the arts and humanities and develop employment skills. The 2008 Art Inquiry program schedule was Monday through Wednesday from 11am to 3pm, with 30 minutes for lunch.

Workshop curriculum promotes critical inquiry about the world we live in and the human experience. The Art Inquiry asks students to deliberately test their convictions and pose questions rather than answers, prompting students to explore the “why” rather than simply the “how” behind instinctual creative practice.

Every Tuesday is designated as a Studio Day when students work independently on a self-directed inquiry project, with support from Summer Studio Mentors. These projects are documented on pages 27-51.

The program model reflects research from the John Hopkins Center for Summer Learning, which describes that the most effective summer learning environments allow students “freedom to digress from a prescribed curriculum” through project based learning and encourages sustained in-depth exploration of one theme.

In addition to participating in our Art Inquiry program as artists and students, our youth participants are responsible for demonstrating their learning and engaging the public. During the third week of the program, students are introduced to curriculum planning methods and learn how to facilitate arts workshops of their own design. Students lead at least two workshops, so they may adapt their lessons as they become more comfortable in the role of workshop facilitators.

In 2008, students designed and facilitated eight workshops that reached 80 people at museums, community centers, schools, farmers markets and other community partners. Workshops were typically 60 minutes in length and began with a thematic ice breaker and introduction to the theme. In the appendix, we share resources we used for training youth as workshop facilitators. Students were introduced to curriculum planning methods that emphasized collaborative leadership and building an inclusive learning environment. We discussed personal experiences with effective teachers and mentors from our pasts, reviewed different leadership styles and unique contributions each person brings to the role of workshop facilitator, introduced a variety of warm up games, and described different formats for structuring the timeline of the workshop.

The program culminates with a gallery exhibition and opening reception in October, featuring the work created during the summer. Youth participants are selected based on applications submitted by New Urban Arts students who have consistently participated in our after school arts mentoring program for at least one full year. The majority of the youth served are from low-income, underserved communities with little to no previous experience in the arts. Students receive a \$400 participation stipend upon successful completion of the program.

The Art Inquiry supports each of the visual content standards outlined in the RI Arts Learning Network's visual arts proficiency standards. Specifically the content clusters that are explicitly addressed are:

- Engaging in self or group expression by creating original artwork and interpreting works of art
- Developing the ability to communicate in the language of art forms through the use of materials, tools, and techniques
- Making connections between the visual arts and other disciplines
- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
- Understanding the relationships within personal, social, cultural, and historical contexts

The annual Summer Art Inquiry continues to evolve each year, as it is re-interpreted by its participating artists and students. For more information regarding the specific approach and pedagogy for this summer program for youth, please contact New Urban Arts at (401) 751-4556.

What is Creative Correspondence?

We live in a world where correspondence abounds. Text messaging, chatting online, sending emails. We are saturated in an ethereal world of letters.

Outside the doors of 743 Westminster Street sits a blue box with a semicircular top. You affix a sticker to a package, slip of paper, or envelope; write a destination; and then you drop it into the box and off it goes into the world to be delivered to the destination. What is even more incredible than this whole structured act of sending is that someone, somewhere, receives that thing you put out into the mail. And what's even more exciting is that they might reply...

Now if you affix a stamp to your forehead and walk down to the post office in a cardboard box, it won't work. We tried; there is a video to prove it. But we did explore the wide range of what could be sent via the US Postal service.

Our 2008 Art Inquiry brought together 13 high school students and 5 artists to explore mail art through illustrated letters, handmade envelopes, zines, artist trading cards and other acts of creative correspondence. We tracked where our correspondence was going and coming from on a giant map that

hung on the wall, with the words *Mapping Correspondence* written above it in large capital letters. Soon the map was covered with thumbtacks from California to Canada. A main principle guiding the inquiry was the idea that senders receive.

How do we develop relationships by making an offering or exchange? Artist Ray Johnson, considered the father of mail art, started sending his artwork to people for free in the 1950's, as an alternative to the traditional gallery and museum networks. Often he would encourage recipients to alter the piece in some way and pass it on, sparking an international correspondence between artists.

For five weeks, we started off with what we called the "Idea Generator." For five to ten minutes we shared names of artists, websites, books, movies, articles or any other connection relevant to the inquiry theme of correspondence. We recorded these sources on a roll of craft paper stretched alongside three connecting walls. This idea bank was accessible to anyone, inviting students and artist mentors to return to these resources for inspiration throughout the summer. An abbreviated list of these resources is included in this publication on pages 52-55.

Correspondence can sometimes feel like a series of assignments. Mail the electric bill. Send in that college application before the deadline. Find the SASE to send back that overdue permission slip. Write back a pen pal for school. Don't forget to send the birthday card. Be better about thank you notes.

What if correspondence felt more like an experiment? Put a stamp on the back of a photograph and scribble the address of the person you miss the most these days. Send a postcard to someone you have never met. Try to mail one question every morning for an entire month. Check the mailbox with a sense of urgency and glee from now on.

POSTCARD RITUAL

Try making and mailing art daily, and wait for responses. On 4x6 postcards made from cardboard or card stock paper, create visual works that invite a response from recipients.

Due to the lack of schedule or structure during the summer months and on top of that the extreme heat, opening rituals become an important time to refocus the group's energy. We began each day of our Art Inquiry by making and mailing postcards. This simple daily activity was effective in getting students to write expressively, habitually and independently through visual arts. We limited the time spent on creating postcards to no more than 10 minutes. Since we juggled multiple long-term projects throughout the summer, it was gratifying to have this shorter-time assignment. We varied the postcard prompts, alternating materials and audiences. One day we wrote questions on postcards made from chipboard and delivered to members of our organization's board of directors. Another time, we sent a digital postcard/audio recording to an artist mentor from New Urban Arts who spent the summer in Oregon at a media arts camp.

At first it was an interesting creative experiment to send art out in the world through the postbox down the street from our art studio. It wasn't until later that we connected the act of sending to the act of receiving. Community Artist and New Urban Arts Board Member, Holly Ewald, shared books with us that she sent back and forth in the mail with a friend over seven years. It shifted the way we thought about sending mail art. We became more aware of our actions and intentions. We realized, "Oh yeah, someone's going to actually receive this random thing I'm sending in the mail."

Rick Benjamin, poet and friend of New Urban Arts, later led a workshop on postcards as poetry. We talked about how the small size for text on postcards influences what is written. We read examples from his collection of other people's postcards found at thrift stores and estate sales. The short, simple phrases resembled poetry. After talking with Rick, we began to invest as much in the writing of the postcards as we did making them. After a few weeks of making and mailing postcards each day, we began to receive postcards. We even received a response from someone in Singapore!



MAIL AN INVISIBLE POSTCARD

Postcards become public once they are sent through the postal service. They have an overlooked audience, and can be read by many people before the person the message is intended for ever receives the postcard in the mail.

Consider sending a secret through the mail that cannot be read by anyone but the recipient! Here's what you need to make your own invisible ink postcard:

1. Q-tip or paint brush
2. Bowl or Cup
3. Pen or Pencil
4. Lemon Juice
5. Stamp
6. Card Stock

First, cut the card stock in half to make your postcard. In the center, draw a line from the top to the bottom of your postcard. On the right side, write in the name and address of the person you would like to mail a secret to. Make sure to include the zip code. Put a stamp in the right hand corner. On the left side include instructions so they know how to reveal the secret message. You can hand write the instructions, or type, print and paste the lines below:

YOU HAVE RECEIVED A SECRET MESSAGE.
TO REVEAL IT, RUN A HOT IRON OVER THE SURFACE.

BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO BURN THE PAPER!

TO:

Consider sending the secret anonymously. Or, you could add your name to the first line of the instructions, "you have received a secret message from _____. " Now, turn the postcard over and think of a secret you'd like to send in the mail.

Pour lemon juice in a cup or bowl. This is your invisible ink. Dip a clean paint brush, or a Q-tip inside and write a message of your choice on postcard.

It's time to mail your secret message!

Once it is received, a hot iron will need to be pressed to the paper, in order for the secret to be revealed. Special thanks to Julia Gualtieri, who taught us this activity at the 2007 All Night Art Lock-In at New Urban Arts.

To watch a video demonstration of this project created by New Urban Arts, visit www.dearprovidence.org.

PERSONAL MAILBOXES

These days you are likely to see a fish mailbox, with his mouth wide open and waiting for deliveries. Or a mailbox in the shape of a house, where the roof lifts up for mail to be placed inside. Mailboxes don't just receive messages. They are also a way to send messages, to communicate and express ourselves to our neighbors, postal delivery workers, and other passers by. Using scraps of cardboard, plastic and an assortment of found materials, make your own mailbox to store the mail art you receive, along with your works in progress yet to be delivered. Have fun with personalizing the mailbox – especially by being inventive with the mail slot and how it opens and closes!

3D LETTERS

Next door to our studio, there once lived Gun Molly Video, a movie rental store. They shared storage space with us in our basement. They moved a few years ago and left boxes of old VHS cassette tape boxes behind. We decided to put them to use by recycling them as 3D letters. They acted as mobile dioramas. Maybe you have old music cassette tapes laying around? Try it! Put the address and stamps directly on the outside, and inside, make a 3D letter.

LETTERS TO THE DEAD

Visit a cemetery and select one headstone that interests you and write a letter, testifying and honoring those buried dead with histories not recorded in the epitaphs.

During a visit with poet Rick Benjamin, we visited the North Burial Ground with gravestones dating back to the 17th century. It is over 100 acres with more than 35,000 gravestones. We walked around individually and in small groups, reading the gravestones, and then wrote letters.

First Rick read a poem to us by Lucille Clifton called "At the Cemetery, Walnut Grove Plantation, South Carolina, 1982." He told us how the poem talks about a time Lucille took a plantation tour and was the only African-American person there. When the white docent talked about the family that had lived and worked on the land Lucille asked, "what about the slaves?" The docent said that there were no slaves listed on the registry of the plantation. "That's because slaves weren't considered human," Lucille said, "they were considered inventory. And the women slaves," she added, "weren't even considered property." The poem leaves all of this out, but pays the audible and incantatory tribute of remembering these human beings, celebrating their lives, of honoring the dead.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Why buy envelopes, when you can make them yourself? You can make envelopes of all sizes from any kind of paper. For full instructions on how to make your very own envelopes, visit www.dearprovidence.org to watch a video demonstration created by New Urban Arts.

Consider alternatives to the traditional envelope. Get inspired by reading an online documentation of Postal Experiments by Jeff Van Bueren in San Francisco that shares a variety of different experiments with mailing items not sealed in an envelope, such as a pair of new tennis shoes strapped together with duct tape, a rose with the postage and address tied to the stem, and a dollar bill sealed in clear plastic with an address label and postage attached.

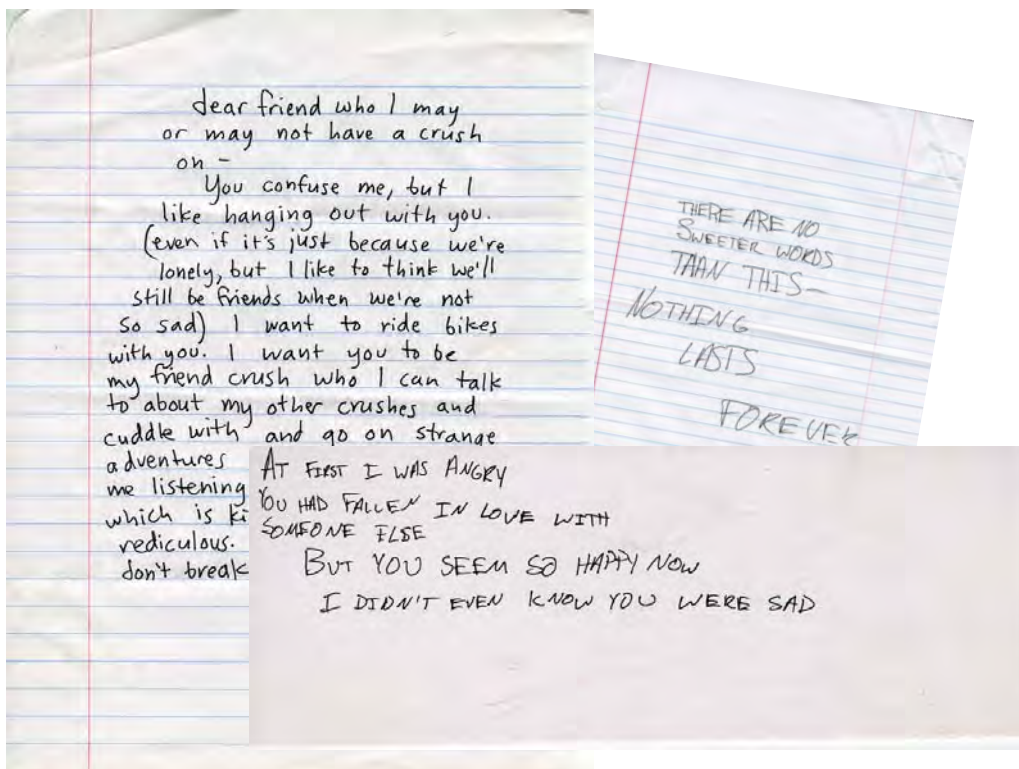


Experimental "envelopes" created by Art Inquiry participants

LETTER WRITING BOOTH

Create a designated spot for letter writing, and watch how this act of placemaking acts as an invitation to writing letters you would normally never make time to write. Create a Letter Writing Booth in a corner storefront window, like we did, or another private location. [Of course sitting inside a storefront window is not the most private of places, but still, it is a cloistered area, where you can sit by yourself and feel away from the rest of our busy art studio.] Provide chairs, stools, or other seating to invite people to sit inside the booth and write, rather than only use it as a letter drop off and delivery station. Leave paper and pencils on each stool or in a basket nearby. Place a wooden box on top of a podium, with a stack of envelopes next to it. Post a sign above the box that encourages people to write and contribute letters, whether signed or anonymous. Example:

Welcome to the Letter Writing Booth. This is where you can write letters you have always been meaning to write but, for one reason or another, haven't. It can be for the living or addressed to the dead. It can offer forgiveness, gratitude or simply say what has, until now, remained unsaid. Please leave your finished letter in the wood box on this table. Thank you.

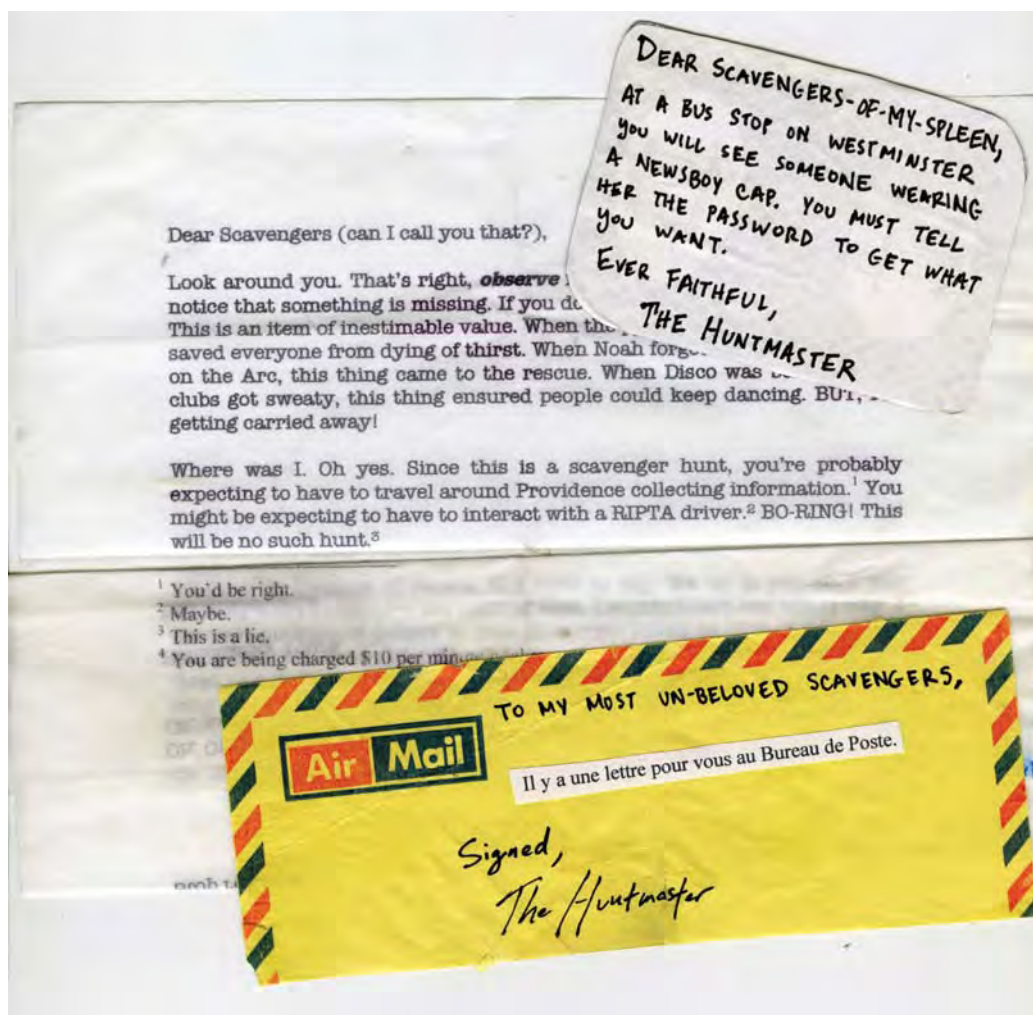


Examples of letters created in Letter Writing Booth

LETTER SCAVENGER HUNT

A friend of New Urban Arts, Claire, left a letter waiting for us in the studio one morning. It lead us to the location of another letter, and another, and before we knew it we were on our very own letter scavenger hunt, racing to find letters in spots all over the city of Providence! Each one offered clues to find the next and was anonymous, signed the "Huntmaster." The final letter lead us to the Huntmaster who had prepared snacks for us. It was a delightful day and we highly recommend you try your very own letter scavenger hunt.

You can split up into two groups, with each half responsible for writing letters for the other half. This way each person gets the chance to play both huntmaster and also enjoy the anticipation and excitement of going on the scavenger hunt. You don't need a group of people to do this, you could even pair up with a friend.



DEAR PROVIDENCE, A PUBLIC LETTER WRITING PROJECT

Dear Providence is a public letter writing project which collected letters written to Rhode Island's capital city. Former and current Providence residents were invited to write and send in a letter that began "Dear Providence." To begin, we researched other public art projects that incorporated themes of anonymous correspondence, including Post Secret by Frank Warren, a well-known community art project where people anonymously mail their secrets on postcards.

Participants in the project were invited to email letters to New Urban Arts or send them through the postal service to our studio. We also devised letter drop off locations throughout the city. We reinvented the typical mailbox design and created our own quirky, postage free mailboxes that were located at a variety of locations throughout the city for 6 weeks in late summer 2008. These locations included White Electric Coffee, RI Cable Car Cinema, Blue State Coffee, The Steel Yard, Broad Street Studio, and Rhode Island School of Design.

Each mailbox held pens and paper to make it easy for people to write and submit a letter on the spur the moment. On each mailbox we posted instructions and a list of writing prompts to inspire responses. The mail slots were intentionally made thin to avoid their misuse as garbage cans.

- Write a love letter to your favorite place in Providence.
- Write a hate letter to your least favorite memory of Providence.
- Write a goodbye letter to a Providence landmark that is no longer there.
- Write a list of things you've lost and things you've found in Providence.

We received over 100 responses from the project, from many different age groups. Some writers grew up in Providence; some moved here recently; some moved away recently. The letters arrived in many forms. A few were typed and sealed in an envelope. Others came via email. One letter was scribbled on an empty bag of cat litter! A common thread in all the letters is the way they parallel most love letters, detailing a deep connection and adoration, but with it, resentment, rejection and loss. We have included some of the letters for you in the following pages, but to read the full collection visit our online letter archive at www.dearprovidence.org.

Try collecting letters written to your city! Start by writing your own, and asking your friends and neighbors to participate. Next make mailboxes and distribute at a variety of locations around your city. Or make fliers with a PO Box and email address and ask people to mail them using the traditional postal service. Find a way to share your collection, whether it be a blog or a gallery show in the mayor's office!

Consider how this public letter writing project could be adapted. A classroom could design mailboxes and distribute them throughout their school and solicit letters to the school itself to be turned into a school-wide art exhibition. It would encourage writing habits while building school community and sparking conversation between students, teachers and administrators.



Dear Providence,

You won't believe the things I miss about you, I barely believe them myself. I miss CVS. Yes I know of all the things to miss about Providence. I mean I miss the way CVS is everywhere in Providence, maybe not to the extent of Dunkin Donuts but you get what I mean. Who would have thought that I would have to take an hour bus ride to go to CVS or an hour and thirty minute bus ride to get to a mall.

In Providence I could hit Providence Place Mall over and over again throughout the day. These are things I used to complain about, I know. Yes I should have appreciated you more but I'm only human. I wanted more from my hometown than easy access to chain stores and amazing local art. Now I live in South Hadley and I still want more.

I wake up to a beautiful view every morning; the cars actually stop about half mile ahead if they see that you would like to cross the road. I miss you Providence more than I would like to admit. I miss your sound, your feel, and just knowing my way around town like I know how every one of my shoes fit.

Don't worry Providence I'll be back in no time and this time I'll bite my tongue when I feel the urge to insult RIPTA. I ask only one favor of you while I'm gone and that is for you to take care of my family and friends. Bring them cool ocean breezes on hot sticky days, light their way as they walk to Kennedy Plaza, give them snow days where school kids can have snowball fights and last but not least leave them content with living in a place like Providence.

Yours Always,
Mary

Dear Providence,

I would like to have every single of your streets lined with pink pillows, and as well, rename all your streets to There and Here Street.

Why you may ask I propose such a ludicrous idea?

Well, first of all pillows are soft, second of all pink is, well, pink, and third, people would have so much in common either living on or next to There or Here Street.

E.g. p1 "Hey! Where do you live?"

p2 "I live Here."

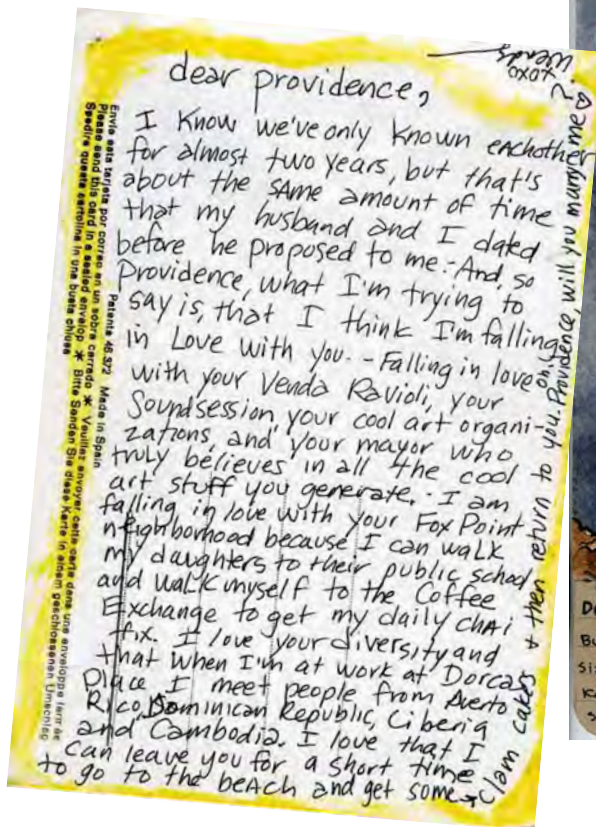
p1 "Hey, so do I!"

p2 "No, I mean Here."

P1 "Yeah, like I said, Here!"

See how this idea makes sense?

Raziel Chavez





Dear Providence,

I don't usually like to share this kind of thing through email, it can just be so impersonal. However, Providence, it's so hard to find a moment alone together. I know I said some things this summer that were unfair and I may have been a little too free with my jabs and judgments, but I hope we can move on. Start fresh. Together as a City and her faithful inhabitant. This may sound forward to a reserved City like you, but I think we need to spice up our relationship and—shall we say—date. Let's turn back the clock to a time when everything was sparkling and new, before we got so comfortable. Let's toss our old routines aside and throw our sweat suits in the trash. This fall—if you'll still have me—we'll watch plays in our best clothes, peruse books together at sidewalk cafes, take long walks in the park arm in arm... listening and looking like we've only just begun. There are so many things we don't yet know about each other. My dearest Providence, let's date.

Yours,
Alyssa

FAUX MAIL

Faux is a French word for false or fake. When making faux objects, attempt to create products which resemble the imitated items as closely as possible. There are many different approaches you can take to making faux mail. The following is a list of prompts to explore:

Create a piece of mail you wish to get. Maybe it's a financial aid award letter from your favorite college choice, or a love letter from a certain someone. Actually send this faux mail to yourself through the postal service, to your home address.

Create mail for fictional characters such as Harry Potter, Hamlet or Hannah Montana. Consider mailing letters to ideas like world peace or the North Pole. When you send mail to these places, you'll need to create a fictional address. Since the recipient is not really going to open the mail you are sending, your audience becomes postal workers.

Consider keeping the fictional mail rather than sending it off and create fictional responses. For inspiration, look at the *Griffin and Sabine* series by Nick Bantock. These books share imaginary correspondence between two soul mates through removable letters and postcards.

DECLARE WAR ON JUNK MAIL

Another faux mail project idea is to spoof junk mail. Collect a sample of at least ten pieces of junk mail and notice the similarities in design and text. What do addresses look like? How is junk mail signed or personalized? What are the kinds of fonts used? Using these trends in junk mail, create your own authentic-looking, fake junk mail! Send pieces to friends in the mail, and see if they can detect the illusion.

One of our favorite ways to declare war on junk mail was using magazine subscription cards as a platform for free postage. Find a magazine and look for the many inserts inside. Tear them out and draw/paint/college on them. Turn them into a mini canvas. Then send these artworks in the mail. For a demonstration, view the how to video on www.dearprovidence.org.

ARTISTAMPS

Artistamps (also known as faux postage) are stamps created by artists that resemble a real postage stamp. However they are not intended to fool or fraud postal authorities. The designs include a large commemorative image, an imaginary price and scalloped edges like a real stamp. The main image can commemorate anything you want, a specific person, an event or idea. Consider making a stamp in honor of a friend's birthday or a family reunion.

AUTO-MAILING

Have you ever mailed a letter to yourself? While obsessing over creative acts of correspondence, we discovered the book *Envelopes* by Harriet Russell which details “a puzzling journey through the royal mail.” The sender mailed himself a series of packages in which the address was disguised through riddles, comics, and puzzles. One package was addressed with a hand-drawn map offering directions, rather than a written address. We were inspired by this idea of coded correspondence and wrote letters that hid what we actually wanted to say. Try it! Write a letter that hides what you want to say through a code that you design yourself.

Write yourself a recommendation letter. Follow the traditional format for recommendation letters that teachers and coaches write for seniors applying to college. Begin with “to whom it may concern” and end with “I recommend her without reservation. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.” Demonstrate your best qualities with specific examples. These letters should be sealed and signed on the back flap. Before mailing them to yourself first read these letters aloud. While writing letters that speak of our best selves is a significant act in itself, it is even more resonant to read them aloud.

ARTIST TRADING CARDS

With correspondence art, the fun isn’t just when you are making, but it’s also in the getting... and in the giving! Artist Trading Cards (also known as ATC) are miniature works of art that emphasize the exchange of artwork from one artist to another.

ATCs are a 2.5 x 3.5 inch card that is collaged, painted, or altered in some way. On the back of the card is the artist’s name, contact info, and the title of the piece. The cards are traded, similar to the tradition of trading and collecting baseball cards. They are never sold, only traded.

To make your own ATC, get a piece of thick paper such as cardstock or watercolor paper. Cut it to be exactly 2.5 x 3.5 inches. Use this as your canvas for making art. Select whatever medium or theme you would like. Sign and date the back, and add a title. Consider photocopying the piece so you have more than one copy to share. Make sure to note on the back what number it is from the limited edition, for example, 3 of 10. Now it’s time to trade them for ATCs by other artists!

THE PEN PAL PROJECT

With the internet, corresponding with new people and developing connection through anonymous communication happens often, through Facebook and other social networking sites. Reading a stranger's personal blog about their daily life has perhaps replaced the practice of reading a pen pal's letter describing their current circumstances.

New Urban Arts spent the summer revisiting an older tradition, letter writing, using the postal system to connect high school students and artists. We renewed a love for the familiar practice of pen pal correspondence, only reinvented with creative interpretations of mail art. Envelopes were often nontraditional, unexpected, and often intricately crafted designs.

We asked 13 artists to deliver a letter to New Urban Arts introducing themselves to one of our students. Each student was given a letter and asked to respond through the mail to their new pen pal. We allowed the interchanges to vary from there.

With the conversation no longer scripted, prompted or prodded along, some pen pals corresponded twice through the mail, using visual art as a tool for conversation. Other pairs exchanged mail art back and forth for over three months, continuing the letter exchange long after the program ended.

The anonymity of the pen pals added a sense of play and mystery for students, and in getting to know someone, students reflected on who they were and how to meaningfully express that in writing and art.

The pairings of artists and students were deliberate and intentional, meant to be reciprocal, and masterfully matched by Andrew Oesch, the Artist Mentor who knew both parties. Thank you to the pen pal participants!

Dear Pen Pal,
 Because I don't know your name
 I will call you..... ~~connu~~ (if u
 don't like it tell me) derived from the
 french word inconnu meaning unknown.
 I want to thank you for the mail
~~connu~~. If you want I could change
 your nickname to your birthday.
 Well best regards
 Ton ami, M.



from Mars or Venus you are
 as a good question - I am still trying to
 that one out myself. However, these days I am
 happy with my home here in Providence, Rhode
 How about you? Do you like Rhode Island? If
 could live anywhere, where would you live?
 As for my interest - I like to read (a
 I am currently reading "To Kill a Mocking Bird" (one of
 favorite books of all time) I also like to cook and
 good food. The summer time is great because there is
 lot of fresh produce available. I like movies, hanging
 with my friends, cats, dogs & animals in general, being
 in the woods with my friends on a cool fall morning
 collecting rocks, spending time with my family and
 getting long letters in the mail (hint, hint).
 Ciao!

Mail Art exchange between Mathias and Emily



Hello my name is
 Mathias. What's yours?
 I made this mailbox to
 show you, I believe that
 wireless ~~mail~~ mail is better.
 Are you from Mars or Venus?
 What are your interests?

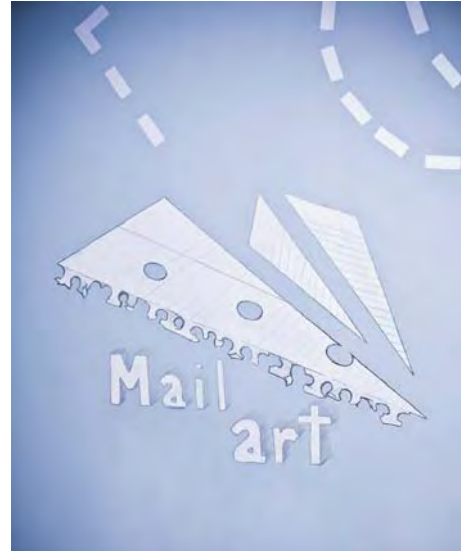
Dear Mathias -
 Thank you for the card and
 name. I love ~~connu~~! Do you speak
 French? Tell me, what does the
 symbol above it mean or stand for?
 Here are some shells & rocks I
 picked up the other day at the
 Sound. Also included is a chestnut
 a tiger-lily petal and (don't eat it
 it is old!)
 two coins (a canadian dime, and a
 very old penny).
 I hope you think these are as
 beautiful as I do. Perhaps you could
 write a short story with them in it, or
 arrange them in a sculpture.
 All the best,
~~connu~~
 Ps. My birthday is
 June 28th. When is yours?

ANNUAL MAIL ART EXCHANGE

Invite a community you participate in, whether it be your school, neighborhood, or family, to create a visual dialogue together. Provide a prompt such as a poem, question, photograph, piece of artwork, or theme, like identity or memory. The possibilities are endless. Give a specific deadline for mailing in the artwork, and send out lots of reminders over email. Along with mailing their artwork, ask participants to also send an artist statement, describing their process and inspiration.

Mail all the materials needed, including a letter of specific instructions, a self-addressed and stamped envelope, and a single sheet of thick white paper. Consider a small dimension that is convenient to mail, such as 4 x 4 inches. Or fit the paper to be the exact size as a business size envelope. Every page must be cut to the same size, to keep it consistent. Putting constraints and parameters around the mail art exchange makes it more likely that people will respond, however do not be surprised if people alter or reinterpret these directions to fit their own creative visions.

Schedule an unveiling to celebrate the works you receive! If you are coordinating a community of people who are not in physical proximity to one another, consider putting the works online as well so every participant can see the many interpretations that were created.



Creative correspondence is a tradition at New Urban Arts, which started in 2003 when artist in resident Holly Ewald and Program Director Tamara Kaplan asked students to identify artists from Rhode Island and the New Urban Arts community to create a mail art exchange. This launched our annual Correspondence project where each year, we ask students and the New Urban Arts community to engage in visual dialogue. Each year the prompt changes, but the players often remain the same.

In Winter 2009, alumni artist mentor and student, Kedrin Frias, organized the annual mail art exchange with a call for the participation of current and past students, artist mentors, board members, volunteers and staff, reconnecting with voices from different moments in our studio's history.

A letter was sent out along with a 3-inch by 3-inch wooden tile, asking participants to create a small self-portrait that demonstrates the effect that New Urban Arts has had on their life. Kedrin included a poem to be used as a prompt. Over 60 people responded, and these works were exhibited at New Urban Arts in Spring 2009.

Prompt

The Studio...

To try and do something you've never done before,
even if you may fail...

To make my voice heard, by using my hands to translate
my heart's words into a language your eyes
and ears can understand, by making art...

To use color where only black and white
are the accepted currency...

To listen to a friend, speak to a stranger,
and love them both...

To achieve more than community,
but to be part of a family...

To answer questions, and question the answers...

To find a new way to do it...

To live the words "Why Not?"
and not just say them...

To teach someone what I just learned
even if I am not a teacher...

To know that I am part of something bigger than me,
but that I am also a big part of something...

To not know what I am doing, and have that be ok...

That is what makes me a New Urban Artist...

Art is a verb... much like Love is a verb...
It's something you do!



Creativity has infinite power to transform even the humblest materials, and art can bring light to the darkness. (Both things New Urban Arts had to prove to me).

-Grace Dunford, alumni artist mentor



Here at New Urban Arts my art becomes what I've always wanted it to be: experimental, fun, open, playful, shared, and most importantly, collaborative. There is no "mine" or "yours" — everything is ours.

-Lane Taplin, artist mentor



To me, New Urban Arts is the phone booth to my Superman. For years, it has been the place I can go to shed the "day job uniform" and slip in to my real clothes. To identify with who I really am, and to no longer conform to the ways of this world. New Urban Arts is the place where I can unapologetically solve problems, and challenge myself and others to be detectives themselves. An artist is a detective of this world...

the time between the question and the answers is what we call ... "Art".

-Kedrin Alexander Frias, alumni student and artist mentor

I've been a part of New Urban Arts for almost 6 years now and have had the chance to play the role of both student and mentor. New Urban Arts is like a door left open with opportunities flowing out and I really appreciate all I have gained from the time I've spent here.

The mail art piece I made is a 3D image from layers of watercolor paper and glue. "I walked 40 miles through the snow and rain to get to school" haha that's what old people always tell me. Maybe they didn't actually have to walk 40 miles but I'm sure they had those times in life when nothing went right and everyday was a struggle. They had to push themselves and overcome whatever was in their way.



The piece I created is an image of me leaving my igloo home to begin my daily journey through snow covered hills to get to a better place where it is sunny and warm. With everyday comes new obstacles, you can either give up and live life knowing you passed up the chance to go further or you can push yourself beyond your limits and see where it takes you. You must decide the paths you take even when there is no clear path to follow.

-Michael Moretti, alumni student and artist mentor

SELF-DIRECTED INQUIRY PROJECTS:

MAIL TIME

I woke up one morning and on my way to New Urban Arts I started thinking about what I would be doing that day. I wanted to come up with a project that would relate to mail art and still add my own personal flare. That's when I got the idea to have sock puppets read some of the postcards we had gotten in the mail throughout the summer. I started right away making puppets from scraps of fabric, including Sheryl, the loud mouth puppet. I also had help from Andrew and Mathias, who created Tim, who is Sheryl's sidekick. That afternoon, we recorded over two hours of video footage and I used iMovie to edit it down to less than five minutes. Editing is the boring part.

The postcards featured in "Mail Time" are from Rhode Island poet Rick Benjamin. He came to the studio to share with us postcards he had found in antique shops. He showed us how personal postcards can be (and also how random) even though going through the postal system many people read these intimate messages. Rick left RI for Vermont and keeping us in mind, he sent us postcards similar to the ones he showed us. Most of them were skits about what he did that day.

Through making this project, we encountered a few set backs—many hot glue gun burns, and a few creative differences. But we also had a lot of fun just playing with puppets and annoying everyone around us.

Heather Vieira, 17



Mail Time, Heather Viera

PEN PAL QUILT

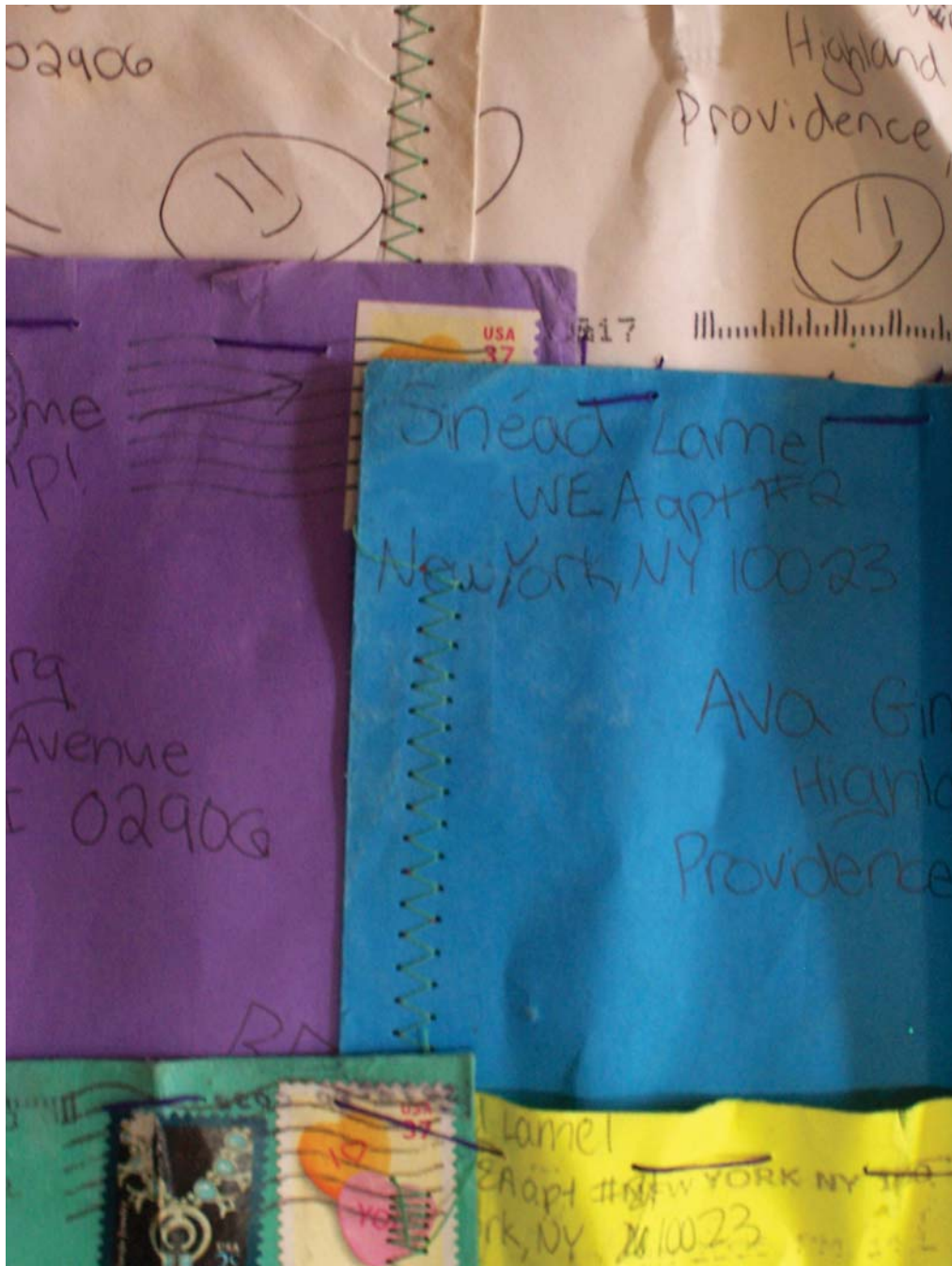
For my independent project, I approached creative correspondence differently than most people in the Art Inquiry program. From October 2003 through September 2007, my best friend Sinead and I wrote letters to each other so we could keep in touch when I moved to Providence. Now we talk on AIM, sometimes.

It was her idea to start writing letters in the first place. She got a stationary set for her birthday. You can tell when the envelopes start to change from being plain white to colorful. We usually talked to each other about school, family or any other updates. As we got older, the letters got longer. It was always a huge deal to me to get the letters. I would write a letter back right away usually, even if I didn't send it right away.

I saved all the envelopes and the letters, and I brought them in during the summer program. I sewed the envelopes together representing that they are all connected. I ended up sewing them together in chronological order and making it into a collage. In general I go about doing projects uniquely and attempt at not doing what everyone else is (yes, I am a non-conformist). I love making collages, this was my first time sewing (can you tell?) and I like trying new things. It's fun.

Reading the letters now, it seems like they are from such a long time ago. I keep trying to guess my responses when I read the questions in her letters. It feels like I am reading someone else's letters, like in a book.

Ava Ginsburg, 14



Pen Pal Quilt, Ava Ginsburg

DREAM WEAVER

Using scrap pieces of wood, screws and nails I created this box with the help of my mentor Ben. I wanted this box to hold the dreams of people at New Urban Arts. I asked people in the studio to send me their dreams on postcards. I received 8 responses. One of them is of a hotdog being chased by ketchup and mustard. Another one is a dream about underwear being at war with clothes.

I attached these responses to thin wire and placed them to the insides of the box. I intended them to pop out of the box when it opened. That was a failed attempt, but I was able to use the maze inside the box as a map to the Dream Cards, as I call them. I painted the inside of the box black first. I wanted to show darkness because dreaming can feel like stepping into the dark and walking blindly. On top of the black background, I painted a white maze to represent confusion. The path inside the box, the path of our dreams, is not a straight A-B path. It is a winding, misleading road to something wonderful.

Around my box there are many images created using Sumi Ink. Since dreams are random and not predictable, I asked many different people to draw images to make them look random and not connected. The cover to the box is the only place where I used color because dreams are often not in black and white. They are not always simple. This project was fun, hard, confusing, tedious, but it ended awesome. Terrific.

Mathias Vialva, 14



Dream Weaver, Mathias Vialva

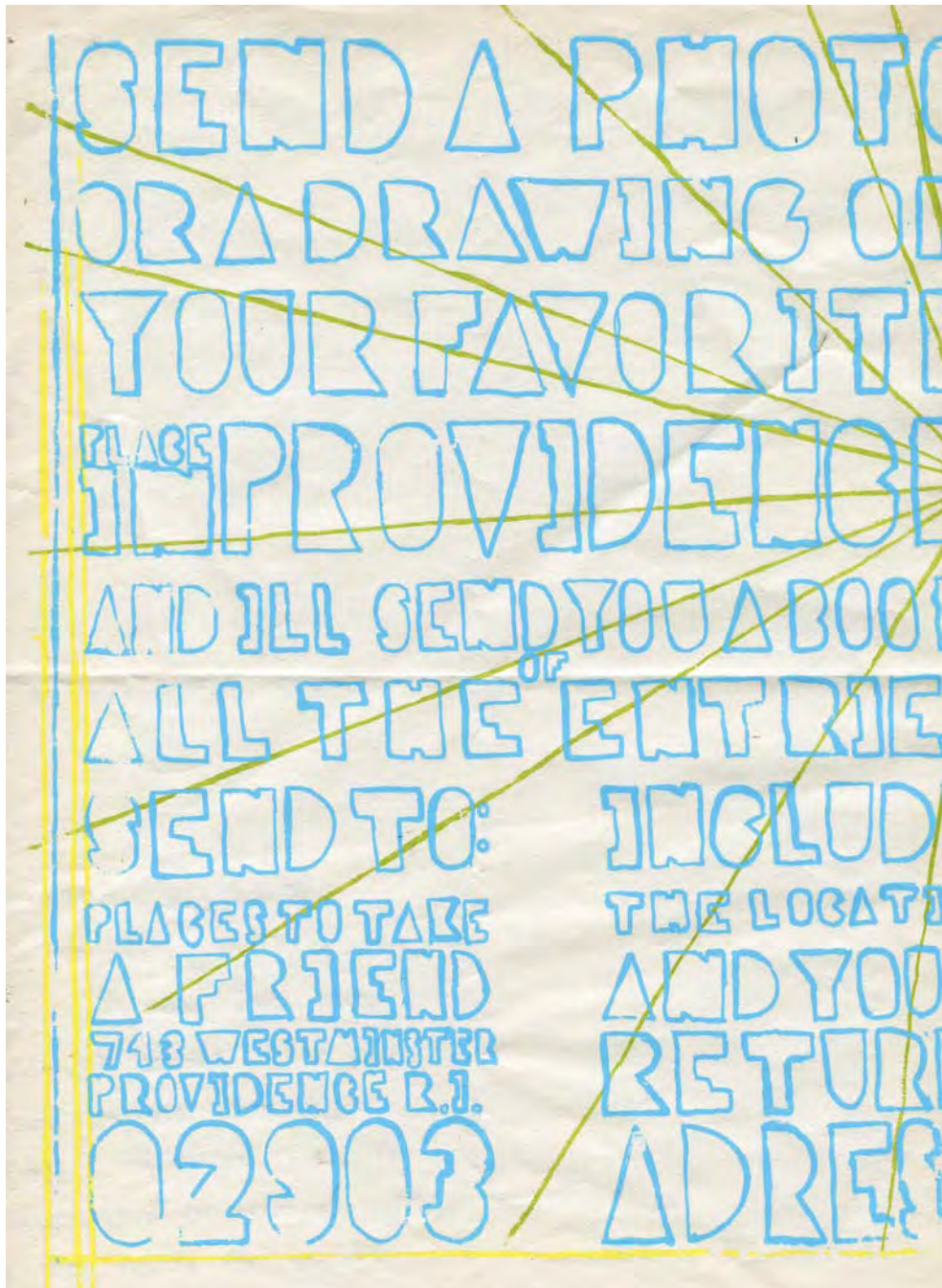
PLACES TO TAKE A FRIEND

I originally had the idea of creating a tour guide to Providence, but then transitioned to the idea of having other people submit their favorite spots around the city, and from there I planned to make a zine of the entries.

I designed and screen-printed a poster that asked people to send a photo or drawing of their favorite place in Providence. Senders were promised a book of the combined entries if they participated. The poster is all handmade: drafts were drawn in pencil, then traced onto transparencies and exposed onto a screen.

I posted them around the city in my favorite places (Project Open Door, White Electric, Nice Slice, As220, etc). I also asked friends and acquaintances to contribute as well, but sadly people forget and I didn't receive anything to work from, even long after the program ended. I am still interested in trying to find a way to get people involved in something like this, and I'm viewing it as an experiment that needs improvement instead of a failed project.

Sheldon Allen, 15



Places To Take A Friend, Sheldon Allen

TALKING WITH BACH . . . AND OTHER COMPOSERS

I really love music and play the violin. I've played many pieces and have practiced them over and over again, so much that I begin to create stories in my head and imagine what would be happening when the composer wrote it and their intentions. For example, in one of Seitz's pieces, a concerto, it seems as though he is writing the piece during a time of war and political conflict. Certain phrases in the music score sound like sentences that are expressing opposing viewpoints.

My way of creative correspondence is through the music that I play. I wanted to connect visual art to this. My project corresponds with classical composers and to the music itself. I used music I have played before to make interesting envelopes with sheet music and transparency sheets to protect it. This project helped me grow as an artist. I tried something COMPLETELY new!!

Shout outs to Vivaldi, Seitz, and Bach.

Sidney Argueta, 17



Talking With Bach... And Other Composers, Sidney Argueta

NO COMPLACENCY!

I have been playing Lacrosse for one year. I decided to incorporate this with my project because I wanted to send mail to someone or someones who aren't artists. I feel that receiving things back that are not so artistic will be more interesting.

I screen printed blank white envelopes with a Lacrosse logo. It says "championships" on it, indicating to the team, let's get to the championship. I made a transparency to print what my coach would always tell us when we were winning a game: "No complacency." She didn't want us to get cocky and give up just because we were on top of the game at that moment.

Shaonessy Santana, 16



No Complacency!, Shaonessy Santana

CLIPBOARD CORRESPONDENCE

0.9.8.7

For future references, and if my original copies of my work do not survive, I shall describe my work in grand detail. It is made of 2% Metal, 0.5% rubber, 40% paper, 5% ink, 20% wood, and um... the rest of what is left is 33% art. What do the concentration of all these materials make up? Well it is, paper, clipboards (obviously) and a pen of some sort. Now the reason I chose these materials was because of the fact they made the most sense, you wouldn't print anything on macaroni, would you?

I got the idea for such a project at a weekly event called the "idea generator", and the inspiration was mainly just getting signatures or initials, pretty much like bathrooms do, except cleaner.

Maybe it's just the human thought of trying to be forever, where the inspiration mainly came from. It really would not have bothered me if in the last version of this project I would have gotten only one or two willing anonymous signatures or initials, as long as I knew I wasn't there! Or at least unaware of the fact I wasn't there, (sleep walk, mind control, LSD, or schizophrenia, whatever). Really, anyone could sign this, anyone willing to of course, or just in the immediate area, whichever comes first.

Of course when I was creating this project one of the qualms in my mind, and of most concern was the paranoid thoughts someone may have in seeing something like this, would they want someone to have their signature? Which is why I decided to postpone the main revealing for this project until next year, 'course I will still try sneaking this into other events N.U.A has.

This small project isn't exactly something I have ever tried in my life, ever. Asking anyone for their signatures or initials, for a couple, (all, hm . . .) is something I have never tried, so this strange experiment is of course something new. That is pretty much it. Until then, just wait for clipboard version 1.0.1.0! >:(

Raziel Chavez, 15

Step



Please take your time to read these instructions. After said is done, proceed step two.

Step



Reread step one. Once, after that is done ignore step two.

Step



Please use an appropriate writing utensil, #2 Pencil, pen, colored pencil, fountain pen, laser pen, pen you found on the ground, sharp bone, this bloody limb you found, etc, etc.

Step



Inscribe your initials or signature some where on the paper; not this one, the other paper behind this one! E.g. B.G Bob Guy.

Step



Move aside, and get back to your life, please. :(

MINIBUSES AND HARDHEADEDNESS

Correspondence is much more than just talking to somebody or typing something back on IM. It's also the way you react to different situations within your life. The way you react to your situation is the way you correspond with the world. It's sort of like the butterfly effect, which is the idea that if you do one small thing it can change an entire situation.

Rick Benjamin owes me \$5.00. And maybe his lunch box. He asked us to write letters to the dead when we visited the North Burial Grounds. I refused to do it and I pointed out the fact that they are all dead and I do not write letters to dead people. He responded by challenging me to write a poem about my dad, who came up when we were sharing our love of VW minibuses.

So I wrote the poem about a week later. Me being obstinate, I didn't want to give it to him directly, so I decided to make him a part of it. I cut up the poem and wrote each line on the bottom of a polaroid photo and sent it to 18 different people.

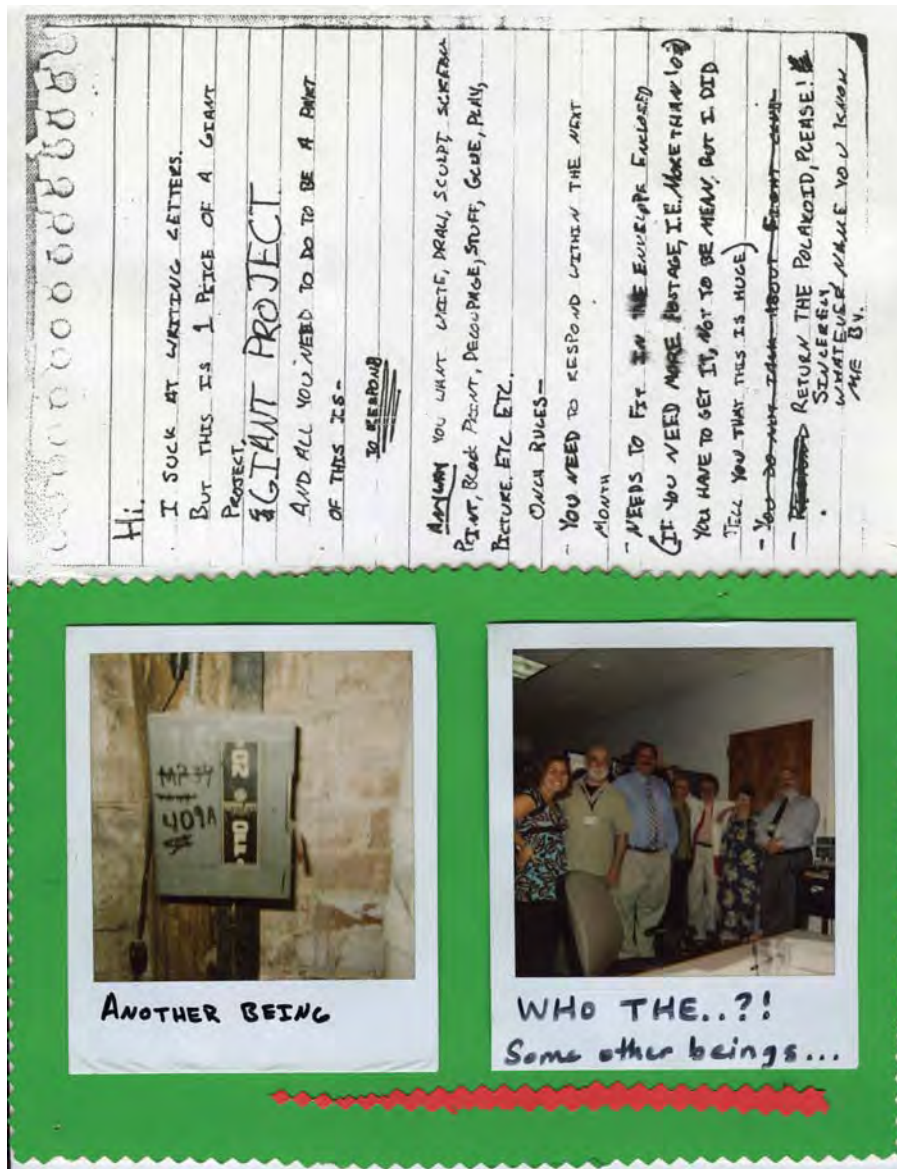
$18 = 1 + 8 = 9 / 3 = 3$ which is the magic number.

I asked people to respond in anyway they could to the photo and line of poetry. I included a SASE. I received 11 responses. What they received in the mail was only one part of a larger project, and with their responses, they not only corresponded with me, but with everybody else involved, whether or not they participated. By sending something back, they still indirectly corresponded with the people who didn't.

People don't seem to be able to see everything that is going on. They only see one problem at a time and want to know how to respond to it exclusively. By reacting to what is going on in your life, in a way you correspond with other people, and the universe.

Shout outs to Rick/Ben. You owe me five dollars. And those people who didn't respond?
Still not too late.

Carolina "CJ" Jimenez, 17



Minibuses and Hardheadedness, Carolina "CJ" Jimenez

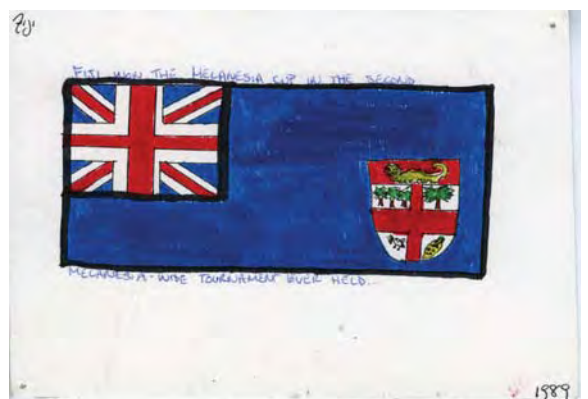
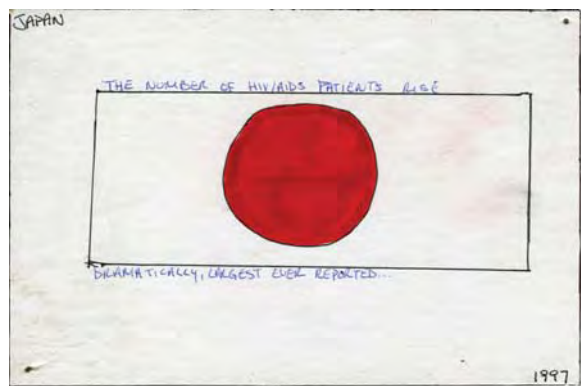
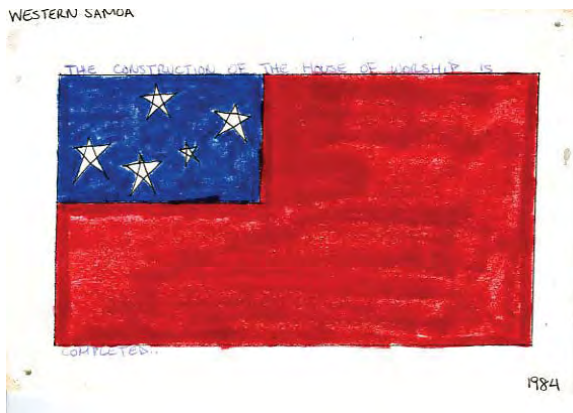
EvErY LeTtEr BuT X

'EvErY LeTtEr BuT X' was a project idea that came to me after three failed attempts. I guess you could call it the rebound project. My second attempt dealt with putting bottles with letters in them into the ocean, but then I thought of pollution—DRAT!

So.... my project deals with corresponding with 25 different countries at once, one from every letter of the alphabet except for 'x'. I went back 25 years from 2008, and got events that happened in each of those countries from those years. I plan to send them to random addresses in those countries and see what I get back from them. Either letters of how they felt, pictures they took of that day, or pictures they drew.

I might possibly get new pen pals . . . possibly.

Shakiah Faris, 15



EvErY LeTtEr BuT X, Shakiah Faris

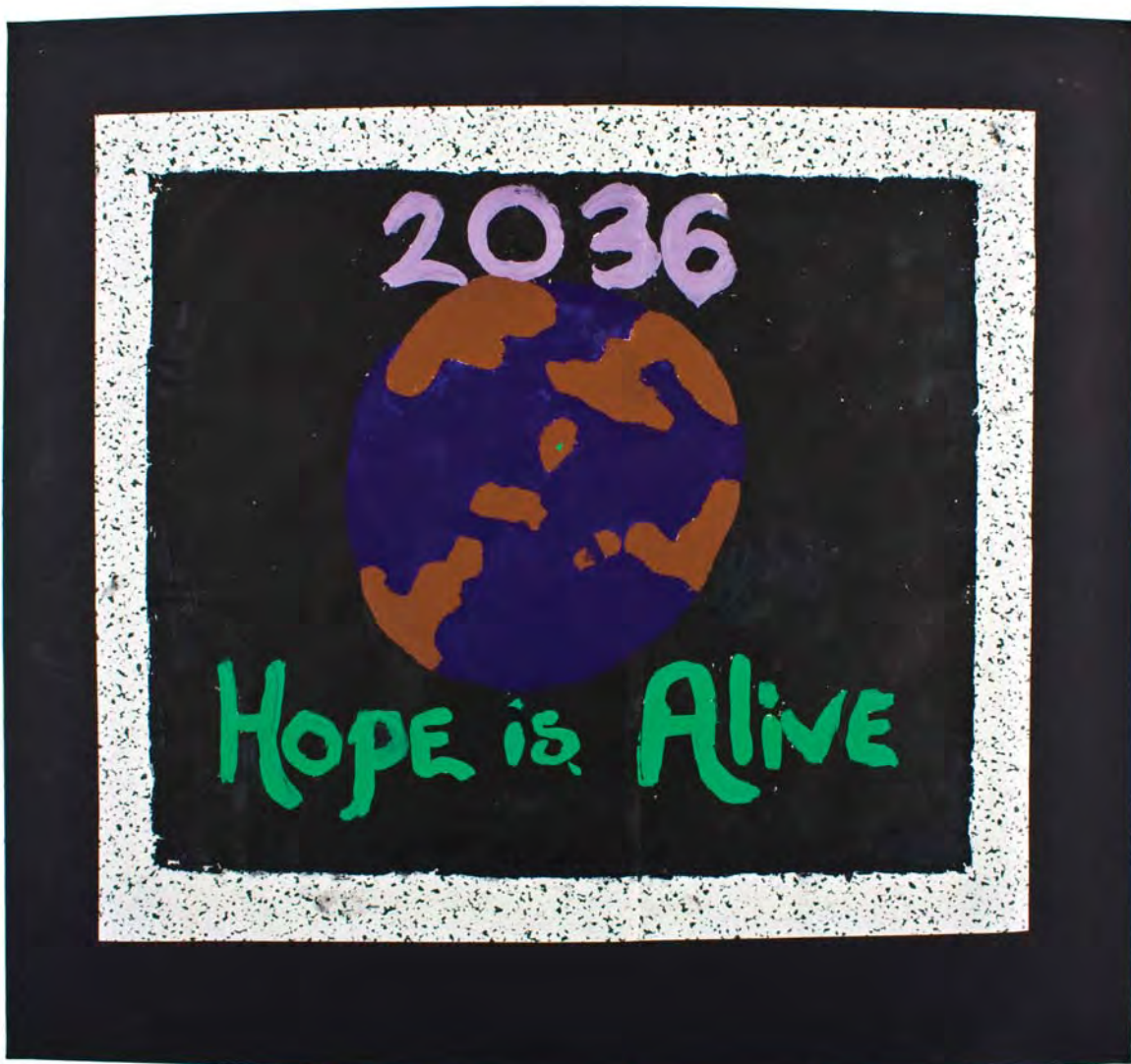
TITLE GOES HERE

I started this project a year ago because I wanted to do something that was related to what was going on in the world and all the bad stuff we were hearing about the war in Iraq. I never finished working on it because I'm the kind of person who starts something and usually forgets about it. It collected dust at the back of New Urban Arts storage closet. Over the summer, I wanted to make something that was going on in the world at the moment and then I remembered the old project and it inspired me to make this new one. They both have the same concept and ideas, but just different topics and art media.

This summer I learned how to screen print. It's confusing at first when you don't know what to do. But then after awhile I got the hang of it. I combined painting and silk screening because at times silk screen wasn't working! The presidential debate and candidates inspired me for this project, especially the communication between the presidential parties and the American people. The poster is supposed to show what happens when miscommunication occurs. It shows how over time little mistakes can cause big changes. We need the messages to be clear, but often they are not.

The year 2036 signifies the future and the causes of miscommunication worldwide. The sea is a purple color because of pollution and the earth is brown because it has become barren. The green stands for "hope springs."

Frances Adewusi, 15



Title Goes Here, Frances Adewusi

AN UNCONVENTIONAL CHAIN LETTER

I recycled old Polaroid film boxes, decorated them with fabric and soon they became homes for people's thoughts, dreams, memories, secrets and wishes. I wanted to correspond with people creatively in a way that would discuss their ideas and be both inspiring and thought provoking. Originally I had decided that the boxes would circulate through a group of people and eventually come back to me, like a chain letter, only with meaning.

I figured why be selfish, when I could share all of these ideas at a gallery show? These boxes have gone on a magical adventure. And now they are here for you to contribute to, and engage in creative correspondence and be a part of the show. Please note the envelopes and pages that are nailed to the wall. Fill out the pages and insert them into the corresponding envelopes.

Your responses will be eventually mailed in the boxes to a new group of people who will enjoy reading other people's anonymous mail. They will receive instructions on how to keep this mail art project going.

Kate Holden, 17



An Unconventional Chain Letter, Kate Holden

THE WONDROUS MISADVENTURES OF SAULO, KATE AND BEN-IN- DISGUISE

I made a video documenting my attempt to mail myself. I used a cardboard box, duct tape, a sharpie marker (to write my home address and the return address), a 42 cent stamp, a video camera and feet.

This is intellectual art. It's art that you think about. For me, art is something that you think up one day and you run with it. You just DO it. Whatever it may be isn't the art, it's the process of doing it—that's the art.

I chickened out twice during this project, first when I was half-way there and when I first arrived to the post office. People asked if I was being shipped to boarding school. One person even asked if I was a college student. In the end, I got Ben to swear, and I got him on the Government watch list.

To view the videos search for "scarzdaking" in youtube and enjoy "box adventure1" and "box adventure2."

Saulo Castillo, 16



The Wondrous Misadventures of Saulo, Saulo Castillo

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Online Sources for Mail Art Calls, Projects, Artists and Other Ideas Connected to Creative Correspondence:

Ray Johnson, Founding Father of Mail Art:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Johnson

Smithsonian National Postal Museum:

<http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu>

Defining mail art:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mail_art

Defining Naked Mail (sans envelopes):

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naked_mail

Postal Experiments by Jeff Van Bueren; San Francisco, California

<http://www.directcreative.com/postal-experiments.html>

PostSecret, by Frank Warren, where secrets are mailed anonymously on postcards:

<http://postsecret.blogspot.com>

Postcards From Your Momma, collection of maternal correspondence by Doree Shafir and Jessica Grose:

<http://www.postcardsfromyourmomma.com/>

The Illuminated Letter: A Lost Art Reclaimed by Eliza Metz:

<http://modernngypsy.com/green/alostart/ala.html>

300 Love Letters:

<http://www.sleeptrip.com/300loveletters/>

So There, blog publishes a new letter every day with an archive of over 2500 letters:

www.sothere.com

Future Me, write yourself a letter to be delivered at a later date:

<http://www.futureme.org/>

The Letter-Writing Project by Lee Mingwei, 1998:

http://www.wgbh.org/pages/bostonarts/2000/highlights_letters.html

ArtistStamps:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artistamps>

<http://www.terracandella.com/artistamps/index.html>

Instructions on making faux postage:

<http://www.volcanoarts.biz/muse/1999-09/penny/word.htm>

Mail Me Art by Darren Di Lieto:
<http://mailmeart.com/going-postal/>

Electronic Museum of Mail Art by Chuck Welch aka Crackerjack Kid:
<http://home.actlab.utexas.edu/emma/>

General Discussion on Mail Art:
<http://mailartdiscussion.blogspot.com/>

P22 Mail Art, correspondence between Daniel Farrell and Richard Kegler:
<http://www.p22.com/projects/mail.html>

Alphabet Booklets Project by Ruud Janssen, 2008:
<http://alphabetbooklets.blogspot.com/>

Interviews with Mail Artists by Ruud Janssen:
<http://mailinterviews.blogspot.com/>

Poetry Postcard Project by Matthew Shindell:
<http://poetrypostcardproject.com/>

1000 Journals Project:
<http://www.1000journals.com/>

Art in Your Pocket: Artist Trading Cards
<http://www.cedarseed.com/air/atc.html>

More on Artist Trading Cards:
<http://www.artist-trading-cards.ch/>

River Trout, an online library of letters:
www.Rivertrout.com

Mail Art Postcard Exhibition:
<http://digitalmailart.blogspot.com/>

Fat Red Ant's Mail Art & Artistamps:
<http://www.postmarkarts.com/>

Cameramail, disposable cameras sent through the mail by Kyle Van Horn, 2003:
<http://kvh.threebunnypress.com/projects/cameramail.html>

You are / I am Postcards in response to Kara Walker Exhibit at Walker Art Museum:
<http://blogs.walkerart.org/ecp/category/respond-to-kara-walker/>

NPR, This American Life, Other People's Mail:
http://www.thislife.org/Radio_Episode.aspx?episode=70

Books Related to Correspondence and Mail Art:

Artist Trading Card Workshop: Create, Collect, Swap by Bernie Berlin

Cards That Pop-Up, Flip & Slide by Michael Jacobs

Creative Correspondence: 13 Unique Card and Envelope Projects by Judy Jacobs

Envelopes: A Puzzling Journey Through the Royal Mail by Harriet Russell

Gift of a Letter by Alexandra Stoddard

Good Mail Day: A Primer for Making Eye-Popping Postal Art by Jennie Hinchcliff and Carolee Gilligan Wheeler

Lenore Tawney: Signs on the Wind: Postcard Collages by Holland Cotter, Lenore Tawney, and George Erml

Letters of the Century: America 1900-1999 by Lisa Grunwald and Stephen J. Adler

Mail Me Art: Going Postal with the World's Best Illustrators and Designers by Darren Di Lieto

More Than Words: Illustrated Letters From The Smithsonian's Archive of American Art by Liza Kirwin

Other People's Love Letters: 150 Letters You Were Never Meant to See by Bill Shapiro

Postal Seance: A Scientific Investigation into the Possibility of a Postlife Postal Existence by Henrik Drescher

PostSecret: Extraordinary Confessions from Ordinary Lives by Frank Warren

Ray Johnson: How Sad I Am Today... by Ray Johnson

The Envelope Mill by Haila Harvey

The Griffin & Sabine Trilogy by Nick Bantock

The Handcrafted Letter by Diane Maurer-Mathison

The Jolly Postman by Allan Ahlberg

Urgent 2nd Class: Creating Curious Collage, Dubious Documents, and Other Art from Ephemera by Nick Bantock

APPENDIX:

Appendix A: ARTICLE FROM THE COLLEGE HILL INDEPENDENT

This article is reprinted with permission from The College Hill Independent

September 18, 2008

DEAR PROVIDENCE: A LOVE LETTER WRIT LARGE AT NEW URBAN ARTS

by Kat Stoeffel

http://blogs.brown.edu/students/indy/2008/09/dear_providence_a_love_letter.html#more

In 1922 Emily Post wrote, "The art of general letter-writing in the present day is shrinking until the letter threatens to become a telegram, a telephone message, a post-card." I have to wonder how she, the final word in propriety, would describe what has now happened to the art of letter writing. "Shrinking" does not qualify the destruction wreaked by the text message, the Facebook wall post and the Twitter upon our correspondence skills. Character limits have stunted our communication, to be sure. And though brevity may be the soul of wit, thanks to PDAs and high-speed internet connections, promptness of response now trumps the thoughtfulness of a well-chosen word.



But unless one is in a space of technological deprivation, there are so many convenient modes of communication available that one needs a certain impetus to write a letter by hand and put it in the mailbox. As far as I can tell, there are two major ones: the emotional heft of a letter's content or the aesthetics of its physical qualities.

One letter from a pathetic ex- or a glimpse at PostSecret's confessionals shows us that some things are better said in writing, especially for those with a taste for the dramatic. But as posted mail becomes less of a practical necessity, it becomes more of an artistic endeavor. Letter writing may be a dying art form (in the way that flower arrangements or tea services are art forms) but in its more Dadaist manifestation, mail art, it is flourishing, especially among 30 young artists in Providence.

New Urban Arts, the youth art studio and mentorship program at 743 Westminster Street, dedicated its summer Art Inquiry program to exploring mail art, a journey which culminates in the show "Dear Providence" at the New Urban Arts gallery from October 10 to October 24.

Art Inquiry is an annual free five-week thematic workshop for high school students, which in the past has tackled topics like creative cartography and shrines. It was led this summer by Andrew Oesch and Ben Fino-Radin, two local artists who work as mentors at New Urban Arts. "Mail art encourages people to see the artistic opportunities in any mundane thing," Oesch told the Independent. Though the concept of correspondence arose easily, Oesch and Fino-Radin said, the application of the theme was not without debate.

The various artists-in-residence and directors involved in the class disagreed about whether the high school artists should focus on snail-mail exchanges (basically a novelty to the MySpace generation) or experiment with the new media of correspondence by writing Twitter poetry. Ultimately, they settled somewhere in the middle, deciding that the medium doesn't change the content. The student artists tried everything from envelope construction and decoration to using the Lepton interface, a RISD-designed video collaboration tool that builds a web of call and response videos, connected non-linearly.

All internet sources surveyed for this article point to Ray Johnson as the father of mail art. A Detroit native and friend of Cy Twombly and Andy Warhol, he founded the "New York Correspondance [sic] School" in 1962, after about a decade of sending collages stamped with "PLEASE ADD TO AND RETURN TO RAY JOHNSON" to other artists and acquaintances. Fluxus artists co-opted the idea of mail art as an egalitarian currency of artist-to-artist networks and with the advent of the internet, the number and size of mail artist networks has only grown.

According to Oesch, one of the first concepts he tried to hit home (and something of a credo for mail artists) was "senders receive." The students made postcards daily, sending them to Mayor Cicilline, strangers from the phonebook, and names from mail artist networks. Although mail art is often thought of in terms of creating international networks of artists, with only five weeks to send and receive, the Art Inquiry focused on corresponding with their own neighbors. One student sent letters to her lacrosse teammates and another walked around asking strangers to read a set of absurd instructions and then simply sign their name. The artists held a public workshop at Burnside Park near Kennedy Plaza, teaching passerby and loiterers how to make postcards and asking them to pen words of advice on them. In a serendipitous moment, they happened upon a staff retreat occurring simultaneously in the park. The employees took a break to write postcards with suggestions and encouragement for one of their coworkers, for whom it was the first day on the job.

Several professional artists affiliated with New Urban Arts added depth to the course by bringing in their own work to share with the student artists. Holly Ewald, a community artist in Pawtuxet Village, showed a book of mail art that has been sent between herself and another artist for twenty years. Rick Benjamin, described by Fino-Radin as a Providence "poet-activist-guru," sent postcards, written in the voices of different fictional characters, to the students all summer. One student used sock puppets to perform the messages in a video piece for her final project.

Although it was with a certain amount of glee that the artists experimented with what, physically, they could get in a mailbox or how they could manipulate junk mail response envelopes with prepaid postage, Oesch told the Independent, they also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of their own preferred forms of communication. One student made a screenprint of her MySpace top friends and another left Oesch a series of performative voicemails based on Queen's "Bicycle Race."

Both mentors agreed that the most satisfying moments of the project came when the students crossed over from "busy work," like folding magazine pages into envelopes, to more serious projects that used mail or the idea of correspondence "to construct meaning or reflect on their lives." A trip to the North Burial Ground to write letters to the dead, first deemed "creepy," ended up inspiring one student artist's final project. She paired polaroids with individual stanzas of a poem she wrote shortly after her father's death. She mailed them to various friends and family, asking only that they respond in some way. The responses will be collected in her piece at the show in October, the reunion of the fragments working as a metaphor for her own healing.

Amid all the postcards addressed to favorite Providence people and places, a dialogue developed between the students and the physical spaces they inhabit. The young artists grappled with some of the same ideas of psychogeography confronted by the Providence Initiative for Psychographic Studies (PIPS) in Margo Irvin's February 28 piece, "The Cartography of Memory" in this publication. Irvin wrote, "[PIPS participant Tim] Devin's project evokes a psychological landscape, exploring the way that the physical features of a city act as emotional cues." Like PIPS, the young artists at New Urban Arts were highly attuned to the way Providence affects them as they attempt to navigate it.

When writing to and about the city, many students featured Kennedy Plaza as the heart of their Providence. It is a place that many of them pass through daily on their way to school, and Oesch gleaned a sense of a "lawless public space" from their work, a place where "they have a certain degree of independence, but also a bit of fear." From rising seniors who will soon be leaving Providence for a campus far away, Oesch saw more of a retrospective take on Providence, a kind of "home is home but it makes me

weary" feeling, he said. Irvin further wrote, "But psychogeography is also about finding the productive link between the concrete and abstract in urban space and making positive changes in the social fabric of a city." The New Urban Arts students, too, attempted to effect change through their mail art. One student's postcard to Mayor Cicilline addressed the issue of RIPTA fare hikes: "Taking away my bus pass is like taking away my ice cream cone."

Furthermore, the artists are aware that the population of those who affect and are affected by Providence extends well beyond their studio. For that reason they invite everyone to correspond with Providence and them. As a part of their "Dear Providence" show, they are collecting letters to and about Providence in drop boxes at Blue State Coffee, Cable Car Cinema, White Electric Coffee and The Steelyard. Submissions will be included in the October exhibit.

When the New Urban Arts mentors stressed the importance of reception—the excitement of something secret and tangible and delivered just for you—in impressing the joy of mail art upon their student artists, I knew exactly what they meant. I remembered experiencing the intimacy of a sealed envelope as a girl at sleep-away camp, where computers and telephones were banned. Even though the bubble-lettered missives I was sending and receiving were of neither artistic nor literary greatness, they felt seriously important.

This summer, in a semi-self-enforced period of wilderness retreat not totally unlike sleep-away camp, I re-evaluated my relationship with the postal service. With no cell phone service and an unreliable internet connection, I thought it would be a fun time to write letters again. I struggled. Anything worth writing about had already been transmitted via e-mail or Facebook and it felt presumptuous to assume anyone who is not my mom would care about the ins and outs of my quotidian. I resigned to sending a few vintage postcards, just as Emily Post predicted I would, that were worth sending for their kitschy pictures alone. The space on the back of a postcard was one I felt comfortable filling—it is about the size of a text message or a Facebook wall post.

Thus it was with earnest curiosity that I asked Fino-Radin how Art Inquiry had affected his own views of correspondence. He described a slightly heightened sense of awareness, even when writing e-mails, "I think about the art of the letter more, addressing the person by name, including a few anecdotes first," as well as a common insecurity among those who still adhere to Emily Post's guidelines in a post-postal world—"and then I get these one line responses and I'm like, 'Am I a loser?'"

Yours Truly,
KAT STOEFFEL B'10

Appendix B: PUBLIC WORKSHOP TRAINING

1. DISCUSS

What makes a good teacher or mentor?

What was your most positive experience with a mentor/teacher? Most negative? Recall a time you felt listened to. Who was the 1st person you met at New Urban Arts? What were qualities that person showed?

Being Inclusive : What makes a supportive learning community? What role can you play in making others feel included? Often warm up games can set a welcoming tone that increases people's comfort level with one another.

Participation Expectations: Is everyone participating? You don't want your students to feel forced into doing something they are uncomfortable doing, but everyone must be expected to participate on some level. For example, during a writing activity, consider allowing students to read a line from their poem rather than the entire piece. Be sure to make this participation expectation clear at the start of the workshop.

Offering Feedback: Make time to offer your students feedback on their work. The first step is affirmation. Give the artist positive feedback about their work and moments that affected you. Try to be specific in your feedback, pointing out specific techniques or details that you notice. Next let the artist ask questions of you or their audience. Let them influence and guide the kind of feedback they are looking to receive.

2. DIVIDE

Separate into groups and pick your workshop location assignments out of a hat. You are welcome to trade with another group for a workshop time, location or setting that is more to your liking. All trades must be mutually agreed upon. Make name tags to wear during workshops. Develop workshop curriculum for the first workshop. Make a supply list.

Appendix C: PUBLIC WORKSHOP PLANNING OVERVIEW

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

The following is a structure projected for workshops 1 hour in length.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Warm-up Games | 10 minutes |
| 2. Introductions/Overview | 5 minutes |
| 3. Collaborative Writing or Drawing | 10 minutes |
| 4. Activity | 30 minutes |
| 5. Wrap Up/Clean Up | 5 minutes |

Questions to ask when developing a daily curriculum plan:

- Is there progression?
- Will my students be ready to do what I am asking of them?
- Is there transition for one thing to the next?
- Are we doing too much of the same thing? (ex: writing in silence)
- What directions will they need to understand how to do an activity?
- What supplies will I need to have ready and how much?
- What is my back up plan in case the plan flops because I finish early or the students don't receive the original idea like I had hoped they would?
- Am I ready to be flexible and redirect my plan to meet my students' needs?
- If one student doesn't want to do what I planned for the group, then what?
- How many people do I anticipate attending the workshop?
(Consider breaking up a big group into smaller groups.)
- Are we meeting inside or outside?
- Does everyone in my group have an individual role in leading the workshop?

Appendix D: PUBLIC WORKSHOP PLANNING TOOL - WARM UP GAMES

Circle Dash

In a circle, without making a sound, make eye contact with people and then switch places with them. The person in the middle tries to take the person's place in the circle before they switch. If they can't get to their new place in the circle in time, they are in the middle. You start in the middle to model participation. One rule, you can't change places with the person next to you.

Mind Reading

Pass around note cards. Each person writes down a random question. Collect the note cards. Later on, towards the end of the workshop when students have likely forgotten their original questions, redistribute the same note cards. Tell students not to read the questions. Instead have them put the card up to their forehead and guess what the question was. Then on the blank side, have them answer it. Go around the circle and have them read the answers and questions together. You'll find some answers are total irrelevant and hilarious while others are quite revealing.

Human Knot

Have a group stand very close together. Ask them to reach their arms so all hands are jumbled and intertwined. Ask them to grab one hand for each of their hands, but not the one of the person next to them. Now they are a human knot and must use teamwork to untangle themselves into one circle without letting go of their hands.

One Minute Interviews

Line up chairs in two lines facing each other. Everyone take a seat. Do a 60 second interview of the person across from you asking them about the 4F's. (Family, Friends, what they like to do for Fun, and some place they would like to go Far, far away.) After 60 seconds yell out switch, and everyone moves one seat over, each line must move in opposite directions from the other.

Mass Stand Up

Have the group sit in a circle, backs to the middle. Now, have everyone link elbows with the person sitting next to them. Then, try to stand up as a group.

Heads Up/Heads Down

Stand in a circle with your heads down. Yell heads up, and everyone looks up and stares at someone. If the person you are looking at is looking back at you, you're both out.

Appendix E: PUBLIC WORKSHOP PLANNING WORKSHEET

Workshop Site: _____

Time Allotted: _____

Participants: (age, group size) _____

TIME	ACTIVITY	SUPPLIES NEEDED	LEAD FACILITATOR	BACK UP

Appendix F: JOB DESCRIPTION, ARTIST SCHOLAR IN RESIDENT

The Summer Studio Scholar/Artist is an independent contractor that supports the Program Director, Artist Mentors and high school students at New Urban Arts, through contributing significant knowledge, understanding and curiosity to the Summer Art Inquiry program. Responsibilities include:

Contributing to workshop curriculum development and cultivating curriculum resources, working closely with the Program Director;

Leading an introductory workshop/artist talk for youth during the first week of the summer program, presenting the selected theme in a larger context as both human and creative practice that occurs around the world and throughout history;

Leading a group reflection during the final week of the program and a closing art critique on students' independent inquiry project created over the course of the summer;

Contributing artwork and wall text to the public gallery exhibition in October;

Contributing to the culminating publication through writing a foreword or sharing relevant resources to include in the appendix;

Joining program staff in the program's evaluation and assessment;

S/he strives to foster a rewarding learning environment that is stimulating, trusting, and student-driven, where the mission of New Urban Arts can thrive.

Appendix G: GUIDE TO WRITING AN ARTIST STATEMENT

WRITE YOUR NAME:

TITLE OF WORK:

DESCRIBE THE ART WORK YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT NOW:

WHAT MATERIALS DID YOU USE IN MAKING THE WORK?

WHY DID YOU PICK THESE MATERIALS?

WHERE DID THE IDEA COME FROM? WHAT INSPIRED YOU?

WHAT OR WHO IS BEING CORRESPONDED WITH IN THIS PIECE? OR HOW DOES IT RELATE TO OUR THEME OF CORRESPONDENCE AND MAIL ART?

WHAT WERE YOU TRYING TO SAY IN THIS PIECE?

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO ARTWORK YOU HAVE ALREADY MADE? OR, DID YOU TRY SOMETHING NEW?

SHOUT OUTS to who you'd like to thank, acknowledge or dedicate this piece.

POSTSCRIPT

Subject: update in database
From: Rebecca Volynsky
Date: Fri, 29 Aug 2008 21:46:13 -0700 (PDT)
To: sarah@newurbanarts.org

here is my mailing address:



Boston, MA 02215

here is a list of things you can mail me:

regular letters, love letters, envelopes, stamps, drawings/pictures of birds, collage materials, graph paper, tissue paper, recycled paper, paper clips, sparkles, cupcake recipes, art supplies, mixes (!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!), greeting cards, hanukkah cards, russian new year cards, regular new year cards, half-birthday cards, valentines day cards, newspaper/magazine clippings, old photographs, polaroids, post-it notes, ginger biscuits, peppermint tea, simple "hey, how are you?"s, epic stories, poems, art work, moustaches, and plenty other brilliant things

please and thank you! i will definitely write/send things back.

ps- what are your addresses?

Dear

Such a letter

t. I hope I shall have another opportunity to

as "Hoping to hear from you, I remain," or "I am,"

Sincerely yours,

Very truly yours,

"please reply"

Toowoomba
Warwick

Tamworth

Range

Lithgow

Part

Boulburn

Abala

5,160'