

Richmond Art Gallery

SCHOOL ART PROGRAM

TEACHER'S GUIDE



Margaret Dragu as Lady Justice. Photo Credit: Martin Lipman

November 16, 2013 – January 12, 2014

VERB WOMAN: the wall is in my head, a dance of forgetting

Margaret Dragu

MEMORY: International Mail Art Exhibition & Swap

Coordinated by Kathy Tycholis



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Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program - Teachers' Guide

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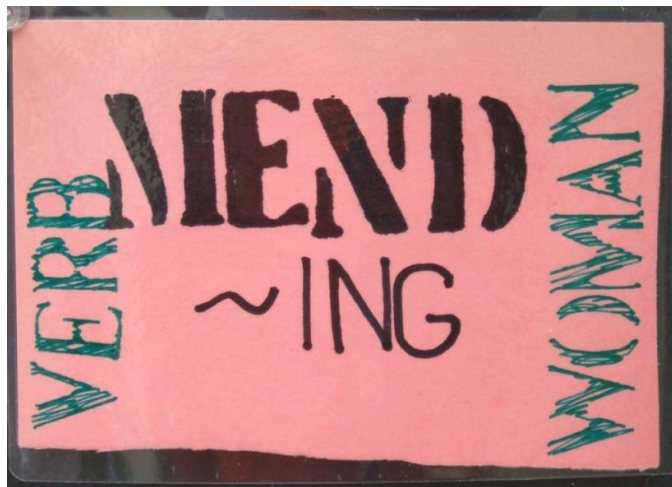
ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

VERB WOMAN: the wall is in my head, a dance of forgetting

VERB WOMAN: the wall is in my head, a dance of forgetting is the first gallery-based solo exhibition by Governor General Award winning artist and long-time Richmond resident, Margaret Dragu. This exhibition includes a new, 2-channel video work in addition to videos of her previous performance pieces, and Dragu will engage in several live performances in the gallery over the course of the exhibition.

Two major themes are explored in Dragu's 2-channel video: conflict and forgetting, both conscious and unconscious. One channel of the video displays footage from two significant sites of conflict, Berlin and Belfast. The artist travelled to both cities and interviewed citizens about their experiences living through conflict, and how elements of those conflicts are both commemorated and forgotten in the present day. For example, people lived with the physical barrier of the Berlin Wall for decades, which prevented citizens from both sides from interacting and curtailed their freedom of movement in the city. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, although it was a joyous occasion, it was difficult for the two sides to start to live together and reintegrate. Many citizens of Berlin use the expression "the wall is in my head" to explain the difficulty they felt adjusting to life after the wall came down, as though the wall still existed in their mind.

The second video channel explores forgetting, and how the process of forgetting can be both voluntary and involuntary. When her mother developed Alzheimer's Disease, Dragu witnessed the tragic loss of her mother's memories over time. Dragu did a series of performances of *VERB WOMAN: a dance of forgetting* from 2009-2011 which are inspired by and dedicated to her mother, and which address the involuntary loss of memory. The video documentation of these performances will be combined with footage Dragu filmed of a 90-year old storyteller, whose memory and recall are sharp and clear.



"Art-Aktion" verb card, Margaret Dragu

In addition to her video work, Margaret Dragu has a long history in performance art and dance. One major component of her work is the use of different props or improvisational techniques that introduce the element of chance into her performances. Once such prop is a deck of handmade cards with different verbs written on them. Whatever combination of cards are dealt from the deck dictate what actions she will perform as part of the performance. Many of the verbs are associated with domestic work traditionally performed by women, such as *MENDING*, *CLEANing*, and *WASHing*. The exhibition also features an online database of text, audio, and video that can be accessed by gallery visitors which gives some background on the development of this improvisational approach to choreography, music, theatre and performance art.

Dragu has also created multiple "personalities" that are like characters she plays during her performance art pieces. *Lady Justice*, *Verb Woman*, *Nuestra Senora del Pan*, and *Art Cinderella* are just a few of the personas that she has created. On certain days during the exhibition, gallery visitors will be able to see Dragu enact a performance art piece called *The Artist is Working*, in which she will interact with gallery visitors, and incorporate elements of chance and improvisation, so each performance will be fresh and filled with the unexpected.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Margaret Dragu is a multidisciplinary artist, whose work as a dancer, choreographer, performance artist and film maker has taken her into galleries, museums, theatres, nightclubs, libraries, universities, parks and parade routes throughout Canada, the USA and Western Europe. A feminist and social activist, Dragu's four decade-long practice has explored many issues, including gender, class, labor, representation, and memory. She continues to engage community in her performance work and also in her role as personal trainer and fitness instructor. In 2012 Dragu received the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts.

Margaret Dragu on Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/user3164646>

Features in Canadian Art about Margaret Dragu:

<http://www.canadianart.ca/features/2013/03/04/many-faces-of-margaret-dragu/>

<http://www.canadianart.ca/features/2013/05/17/margaret-dragu-performance-art/>

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

MEMORY: International Mail Art Exhibition

Mail Art (aka Postal or Correspondence Art) is a worldwide cultural movement that involves sending visual art, music, sound art, or poetry through the international postal system. Mail Art grew as an expressive art form in the early 1950's, and its current form is believed to have started



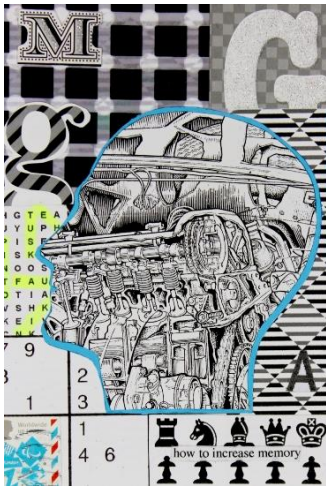
Mail Art by Ray Johnson

by New York artist Ray Johnson, known as the "Father of Mail Art". Johnson had created a large collection of collages, and began mailing them to other artists, poets, musicians and friends. Some pieces included instructions to add to the collage or artwork and return to him, or to forward to another recipient. The idea caught on, and in the early 1960's, Johnson's *New York Correspondance School* formed, which was a communication network for artists to collaborate through the mail, and to participate in mail art activities.

What sets the Mail Art network apart from any traditional artistic movement, school or group is its complete openness and disregard for the rules of the official "art system" and the commercialism of the art market. Mail Art generally operates within a spirit of "anything goes", and anybody can participate and exchange free artworks. While Mail Art encompasses a wide variety of ideas, mediums, and approaches, one common theme is artistic experimentation combined with humour, spontaneity, and social activism. The idea of focusing on art as a process rather than an object for sale is of prime importance.



Mail Art by Hülya Küpçüoğlu, Erenköy
Istanbul, Turkey



For many Mail Artists, the process of exchanging ideas and the sense of belonging to a global community that is able to maintain a peaceful collaboration beyond differences of language, religion and ideology, is valued above the aesthetic merits of the artworks that are swapped or created together. It is what differentiates the Mail Art network from the world of commercial picture postcards and of simply "mailed art".



As the Richmond Art Gallery's 2nd Mail Art Exhibition, the 2013 edition is our largest group exhibition ever. Over 650 artists from over 45 countries working in a variety of art media have contributed artworks, mailing in 4" x 6" works based on the theme of "memory". This broad theme may include individual memories, collective memory, a favourite memory, memory loss, memorization, in memorium, and any other interpretations the artist could discover. All submissions received are exhibited, and will also be a part of an online gallery at www.richmondartgallery.org/mail-art-2013. At the end of the exhibition, all the artworks will be traded and sent back to each recipient as part of the exchange.

Images: Top Left to Right: Mail art by Carol Shabatowsky, Richmond, BC Canada, *Memory Games*; Miranda Vissers, Eindhoven, Netherlands, *Sept 2011*; Paul Summerfield, www.ageofwonder.org Canberra, Australia.

Below: Mitsuko Brooks, Ridgewood, NY, USA, 2013

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Discussion: What is performance art?

When we visit an art gallery, we see the finished results of the artistic process, such as a painting or a sculpture. But we don't usually get to see the artists themselves. Artists started to question whether art had to be an object, or the definition of art could be expanded to include actions or events, where an artist performs before a live audience. Artists began experimenting with performing as a way of expressing creative ideas. Performance Art was created as a new genre of art distinct from theatre, as the performances are unscripted, and often involve improvisation and chance elements. Some artists even involve the audience, and interact with people directly as part of the performance.

Characteristics of Performance Art

- The actions of the artist is the artwork
- Performance Art is live.
- Performance Art has no rules or guidelines.
- It is experimental.
- Because it exists only "in the moment" it is sometimes documented with photographs or video.
- It can be interactive with the audience.

Margaret Dragu has been a performance artist for almost three decades, and has created many "characters" that she acts out in her performances. Some of her performances have included scrubbing the steps of the Ontario legislature dressed in a housecoat and apron, and baking bread to give to the hungry every day as her character *Nuestra Senora del Pan (Our Lady of Bread)*. She sees her performances as "controlled improvisations" and describes performance art this way:

"Performance is live. Alive. Embodied. It requires the artist to be present in all senses of the word 'present.' To forge a sacred trust with the audience (the community/the gathered). The performance artist is the vessel—the witch, the shaman—creating solo or group actions that lean towards transformation for themselves and others." – Margaret Dragu.

Want to Know More?

Article on Performance Art at The Art Story:

<http://www.theartstory.org/movement-performance-art.htm>

An entertaining video introduction to performance art (not suitable for classroom):

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/unlock-art#open286633>

AFTER YOUR VISIT

Mail Art Classroom Projects

Mail art can either be a piece of art that is mailed in a separate envelope, or the envelope itself is the artwork. Mail art, because of its open nature, can include practically any art medium or theme you choose for a class project, though primarily Mail Artists use the medium of collage, drawing, and stamping. The most important part is that the artwork, whatever it is, gets mailed!

Design an “Artistamp”

Many Mail artists create their own stamps, called Artistamps. They have used photos, drawings, and collage to alter or create their own version of existing stamps, and to invent entirely new stamps, sometimes even inventing a fictional country or organization that the stamps are from. They also carve their own stamps out of erasers or other soft materials and print them with ink from an inkpad. Many examples of these can be found here: <http://artolympix.com/artistamps>

Students can create a stamp by carving an eraser or material such as Speedball Speedy-Carve rubber, or by cutting out designs from foam sheets (can be purchased at the dollar store) and gluing them onto cardboard or foam core pieces. Alternatively, students can create a stamp design through drawing or collage, and then the stamps can be photocopied onto sticker paper for students to use and trade!

Make your own Envelope

Instead of having students use a store-bought envelope when making mail art, they can instead start by making their own envelope. There are many envelope templates available online of different sizes and styles which can be downloaded, or take an envelope apart and use that as a template. Students can make their own envelopes by tracing the template onto textured papers, recycled papers, old maps, newspapers, pages from old encyclopedias, old drawings, etc. and incorporate the imagery or text from their created envelope in their mail art.

Students could also be challenged to design their own mailing “container”. What different or unique containers, pouches, packages, or sleeves can they create? What materials could be used? Can you knit an envelope? Use tin foil? A hollowed-out egg? Many Mail artists see the postal system as a “collaborator” in the making of their art, in the sense that their piece of artwork will be changed or altered as a result of being mailed. The piece might be destroyed, folded, stamped, dirtied, or damaged. Students can try to mail their “containers” and see which ones actually get delivered, and what happens to them through the process of mailing.

Participate as a class in a Mail Art Exhibition or Exchange

There are many calls for submissions for mail art around the world, each usually having a theme or central concept. Submitted work is exhibited in a gallery, and often included in an online gallery as well. There are many websites that list available mail art calls, with information on submission guidelines and deadlines (see websites listed below).

Alternatively, your class or school could start its own Mail Art Exchange. You could contact other teachers in your area and set up an exchange between schools, or try reaching out to another part of Canada or the world!

Mail Art Websites

RAG Online Mail Art Exhibition	http://www.richmondartgallery.org/mail-art-2013.php
Mail Art and Artistamps	http://www.mailartists.com/index.html
Mail Art Calls	http://www.zyarts.com/zybooks/mailartpage.html
Teachers for Mail Art	http://teachersformailart.blogspot.com/
International Union of Mail Artists	http://www.iuoma.org/index.html
Mail Artists Index	http://mailartists.wordpress.com/
KidsArt: Mail Art for Kids	http://www.kidsart.com/Gallery/mailartgallery.html
Mail Art Sites	http://www.dragonflydream.com/mailartsites.html

Books

Taback, Simms. *Postcards from Camp*. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2011.

Hinchcliff, Jennie & Wheeler, Carolee. *Good Mail Day: A Primer for Making Eye-popping Postal Art*. Quarry Books, 2009.

Posey, Sandra Mizumoto. *Rubber Soul: Rubber Stamps and Correspondence Art*. University Press of Mississippi, 1996.

Di Lieto, Darren. *Mail Me Art : Going Postal with the World's Best Illustrators and Designers*. F+W Media, 2009.

Stofflet, Mary & Crane, Michael. *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity*. Contemporary Arts Press, 1984.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Exhibition Opening Reception

Verb Woman: the wall is in my head, a dance of forgetting

Memory: International Mail Art Exhibition and Swap

Opening Reception: November 16, 2013 from 3:00-5:00pm

Come celebrate the opening of the gallery's new exhibitions and celebrate the launch of Margaret Dragu's latest video artwork.

Collage Party

Featuring a Performance Aktion with Margaret Dragu

Thursday November 21, 6:30pm to 8:30pm

Richmond Art Gallery

Social event featuring hands-on collage making, screening of artworks created by all 2013 *Collage Night* participants, and guest artist Margaret Dragu will be in attendance to "perform" with us!

Admission by donation. Ages 16+

Film Screening:

Sphinxes Without Secrets: Women Performance Artists Speak Out

Thursday, Nov 28, 7:00-9:00pm,

Richmond Cultural Centre Performance Hall

Conversation with Margaret Dragu to follow

\$5 Admission / RAG Members free

Rated PG, Ages 16+.

GALLERY PROGRAMS

Family Sunday

Drop-in 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Free

Families are invited to participate in various exhibition-related art projects and activities on the fourth Sunday of each month. Stories, music, art...activities vary from month to month! It's free, thanks to the RBC Foundation.

Upcoming dates: Nov 24 • Jan 26

Morning Tea

Drop-in 10:30 – 11:30 am, Free

Join us for a *Morning Tea with the Curator*. These events are a space for community members to share ideas about each exhibition over tea and baked treats. Everyone is welcome to ponder provocative subjects and to join in the group discussion. Light refreshments provided.

Upcoming dates: Nov 27

Lightning Tours

12:05-12:20 pm, Free

Short on time and culture? Drop into a free Lightning Tour of the current exhibition for a quick zap. Tours are with the Art Gallery Curator or Education Coordinator, for all ages.

Upcoming dates: Dec 4

Pick up a Pencil! Drop-in Drawing for Adults

Drop-in 6:00 – 9:00pm, Free

Draw inspiration from original works of art! Join local artists in the gallery for informal sketching fun. Instruction provided every thirty minutes. Come and go as you like between each session. Some materials are provided, but feel free to bring your own sketchbook and drawing materials. For ages 16+

Upcoming dates: Dec 5 • Jan 2