

# Richmond Art Gallery SCHOOL ART PROGRAM TEACHERS' GUIDE



Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmens, *24 Differences and 1,225 Variations (detail)*, 2011, wood, paint

**November 18 2011 – January 15, 2012**

*The lights constellating one's internal sky*

Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmens

*International Mail Art Exhibition*

Coordinated by Kathy Tycholis



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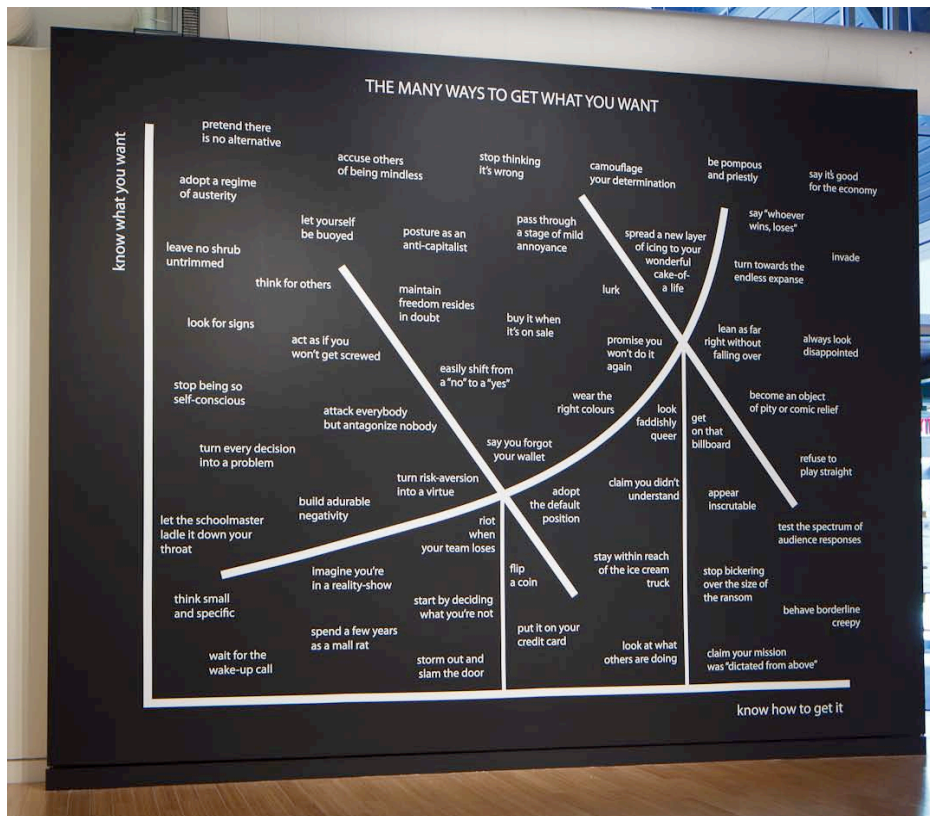
*Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program - Teachers' Guide*

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# THE EXHIBITION: WHAT YOU WILL SEE

## *The lights constellating one's internal sky*

*The lights constellating one's internal sky* presents a series of new and recent artworks by artists Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens. The work explores the way in which economists use **graphs**, **charts**, and **diagrams** to show information, and how the language of **science** and **mathematics** are used to quantify something as intangible as human experience. Their work examines our global economy and consumer culture, and encourages us to question our assumptions about them.



Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens, *The Many Ways to Get What You Want* (2011) paint, vinyl

**Humour** is used as a tool to encourage us to question the authority of economic graphs and charts, especially in works such as *The Many Ways to Get What You Want*. Plotting the qualities "Know what you want" against "Know how to get it" yields amusing results such as "say you forgot your wallet" and "say it's good for the economy". Yet under the humour, there is a grain of truth. When corporations lay off workers while simultaneously giving executives large bonuses, is this truly "good for the economy" or just a means to "get what you want"?



Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmens, *24 Differences and 1,225 Variations*, 2011, wood, paint

*24 Differences and 1,225 Variations* presents us with an array of menu choices commonly seen in Chinese restaurants worldwide, but especially those found in North America. Will you choose Red Curry or Ginger? Shrimp or Duck? With so many choices in today's world, sometimes it becomes very hard to decide what it is that we truly want. But that "choice" can actually be an illusion, as the title of the piece suggests. The infinite diversity of authentic Chinese cuisine has been narrowed to a selection of easily recognizable dishes and flavours which can be found at most restaurants. This artwork highlights the paradox of consumer culture, which is that it appears to increase choice while in actuality narrowing it.

Like many **contemporary** artists today, Ibghy and Lemmens are interested in exploring ideas through their artwork, as well as engaging with **issues** that are happening in the world today. The global economic crisis and the #occupy protest movements have drawn attention to the shortcomings of the capitalist model, and to the human costs of globalization. *The lights constellating one's internal sky* encourages us to question consumerism and the capitalist model, and to ask ourselves if the economy is a reflection of our needs and desires, or whether it is a force behind creating desire.

## International Mail Art Exhibition

### What is Mail Art?

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. It is art that moves through the mail system as its medium, based on the principles of barter and equal one-to-one collaboration.



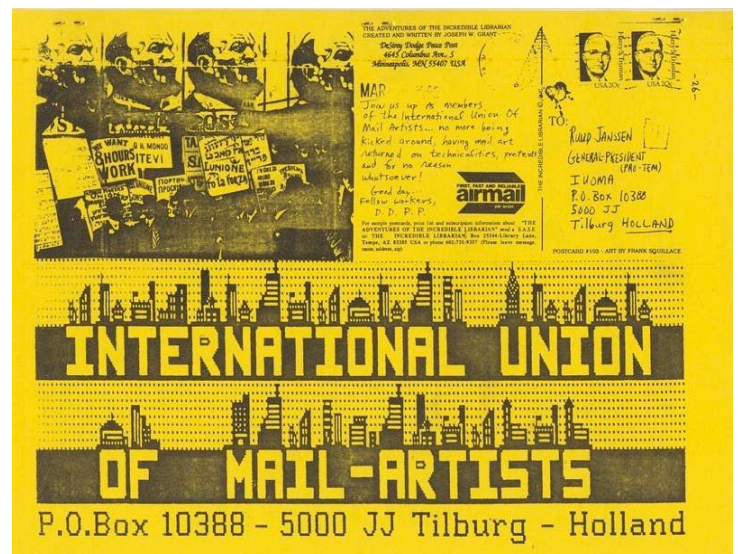
While there is no definitive time when this art form began, it is believed to have started in the 1940s with New York artist Ray Johnson, and rose in popularity throughout the 1970s. It began with a small piece of collage created by Johnson, which was posted to his fellow artists. Each artwork then was transformed or added to by the receiver and mailed back to the sender. From this idea Johnson's *New York Correspondence School*



formed, a communication network through the mail between artists without having to meet each other in person. This group of artists began a thriving alternative culture, calling itself "The Eternal Network", which spread to centres throughout Europe, Asia, and the US.

Mail Art by Ray Johnson, "the father or granddaddy of Mail Art"

Recent years have witnessed Mail Art moving to more of an online presence. Mail Artists' websites, blogs, and social networking groups are used to display the documentation of Mail Art projects online. Mail Art continues to transform itself with the times yet remains as a free non-commercial art form open to anyone.



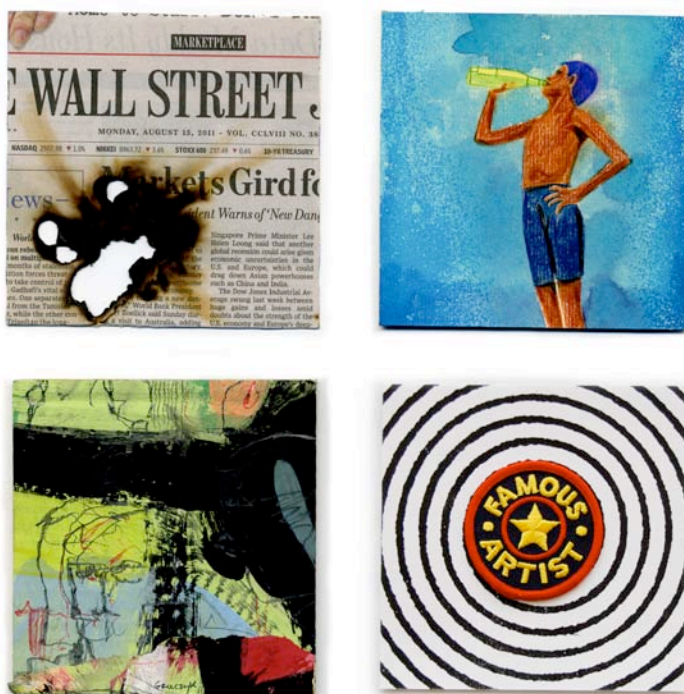
International Union of Mail Artists information card by Ruud Jansen, one of the largest online Mail Artist communities

## The Richmond Art Gallery's *International Mail Art Exhibition*

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. 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".

The exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery includes local, national and international artists. Anyone was welcome to enter the exhibition by submitting up to three works responding to the theme of 'economy' that measure 5" x 5". All submissions received are exhibited, and will also be a part of an online gallery for one year at our website [www.richmondartgallery.org](http://www.richmondartgallery.org). At the end of the exhibition, all the artworks will be traded and sent back to each recipient as part of the exchange.



Mail art (left to right): Jacob Muldowney (USA), M. Pavan Kumar (India), Michal Graczyk (Poland), Ed Varney (Canada)

# PRE-VISIT DISCUSSION

## Economy & Exchange

The themes of **Economy** and **Exchange** underlie both *The lights constellating one's internal sky* and the *International Mail Art Exhibition*. While Ibgby and Lemmens look at global economic systems, Mail artists create their own economic system through personal exchanges via the postal system.

Economy is defined as all human activities that have to do with the making, distributing, and consuming of goods and services. A simple way of looking at the idea of an economy is to see it as the exchange of things of value, or that people want. I give you an ice cream cone which you want, you give me money, which I want. Discuss the idea of economy with your students.

- ***What is an Economy?***
- ***What are some examples of goods? of services?***
- ***What are some of the things we do in our everyday lives that are part of the economy?***

We have many ways of exchanging goods and services. We can share them, we can buy and sell them with money, we can trade or barter for them, and we can give them away for free. Discuss with students examples of these different methods of exchange, and ask them to think of examples of each from their own lives. What is good about each method of exchange? Compare and contrast different methods, and discuss how different groups and cultures have used them in the past.



Mail art: *Less is More*, and *More is More*, Valerie Arntzen

# IN THE GALLERY: WHAT YOU WILL DO

## Gallery Tour

As students are led through the exhibition, we will discuss the artist and the themes and concepts behind their works. Looking at both *The lights constellating one's internal sky* and the *International Mail Art Exhibition* we will discuss the themes of economy and the art making process, and the ways in which the artists have responded to them.

The tour will focus on:

- Introducing students to the materials and techniques the artists used.
- Encouraging students to think about subject matter and inspiration for creating art, and to connect art with current issues and ideas.
- Encouraging the development of visual literacy skills through perceiving and responding to artwork
- Introducing the idea of collaboration and artistic exchange of ideas

## Exhibition-based Art Workshops

### Preschool –Kindergarten: Mail Art Postcards

Students will try a variety of mixed media techniques, from watercolour painting, to stamping and collage, to create small artworks that can be exchanged in person or through the mail.

### Primary - Intermediate Grades: Mail Art Postcard Prints

Students will learn how to make a relief print by carving original designs onto a soft, styrofoam plate with a pencil. The designs are then printed by rolling ink on the plates with a brayer, and pressing the inked design onto coloured paper. Students will create a series of post-card sized prints, which can be exchanged in class, or be mailed to family, friends, or to another young artist!

***The students' work will need time to dry, and will be ready to be picked up the day after the workshop.***



# POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

## Design an “Artistamp”

Many Mail artists create their own stamps, called artistamps. They have used photos, drawings, and collage to create their own version of existing stamps, and to invent entirely new stamps, sometimes even inventing a fictional country 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>

Have students design and create their own artistamps for their mail art postcards, or for a topic you are covering in class. You could create a stamp from a country or culture you are studying, or create stamps featuring “famous” dinosaurs, insects, or animals, instead of famous people. Photocopy the stamps on sticker paper, and let students trade!

## Collaborative Creature Drawings

Many artists today work together and collaborate on art, either in person, like Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, or remotely through the mail or email, like mail artists. This project is an opportunity for your students to experience creating an artwork together.

**Suggested Materials:** bamboo brushes and watercolour paint, coloured markers and extra fine sharpie pens, a stack of coloured card stock sheets (4 x 4" square). Using three different drawing tools allows you to see that each drawing is made by three different contributors.

### Procedure:

- 1) Each person takes a very wet brush, loaded up with one or more colours, to create a single random mark on each of the cards.
- 2) Vary the kinds of marks you make (thick and thin, swirly and straight) using one continuous stroke.
- 3) Once the paint is dry choose one of the drawings you didn't do and use a coloured marker to turn the random mark into a creature. Remember: you're not finishing the drawing, this is only the second step in a three-step process.
- 4) Once you've turned the random mark into a creature, put this drawing down and either continue drawing with the marker on other random marks (that you didn't do) to represent other creatures, or begin the final step in this process.
- 5) The last step in this process is to use the ultra fine marker to embellish and complete any of the drawings you haven't already worked on.

Taken from: <http://www.vancouverdrawdown.com/creatures-gallery.html>



# GLOSSARY

<b>Artist Collective</b>	Two or more artists working together to produce artworks.
<b>Contemporary Art</b>	Artwork that is produced in this current time, generally considered to be artworks made from 1970 to the present. Contemporary art is a very broad term, including artworks made in almost any medium and incorporating many different themes and ideas.
<b>Collage</b>	Collage was originally a French word, derived from the word “ <i>coller</i> ”, meaning “to paste”. Collages are made by gluing elements such as papers, photos, or cloth to a flat surface, creating a new picture or design.
<b>Mail Art</b>	Art which uses the postal system as a medium, sometimes also referred to as Correspondence Art or Postal Art. The term can refer to an individual artwork, the medium through which it is sent, or an artistic genre. Mail artists exchange items through the mail such as illustrated letters, self-published books or zines, hand-made postcards, artist trading cards, three-dimensional objects, and/or decorated envelopes.
<b>Medium</b>	The material or technique used by the artist to make an artwork. For example, paint is the medium used in a painting.
<b>Mixed Media</b>	A two-dimensional art technique that uses more than one medium, for example, a pastel and watercolour drawing.
<b>Relief Printmaking</b>	Printing from a raised surface. Relief printing plates are made from flat sheets that are carved into (such as wood, styrofoam, or linoleum), or that have objects glued onto them. Ink is rolled onto the surface of the plate with a brayer transferring ink to the raised surface only. Paper is placed on top of the inked plate and the image is transferred through rubbing by hand or through a printing press.

# RESOURCES

## Websites

Richard Ibgby & Marilou Lemmens	<a href="http://www.ibghylemmens.com">http://www.ibghylemmens.com</a>
Economy for kids	<a href="http://www.moneyinstructor.com/elementary.asp">http://www.moneyinstructor.com/elementary.asp</a>
Mail Art and Artistamps	<a href="http://www.mailartists.com/index.html">http://www.mailartists.com/index.html</a>
Mail Art Calls	<a href="http://www.zyarts.com/zybooks/mailartpage.html">http://www.zyarts.com/zybooks/mailartpage.html</a>
Mail Art Olympix	<a href="http://artolympix.com">http://artolympix.com</a>
Teachers for Mail Art	<a href="http://teachersformailart.blogspot.com">http://teachersformailart.blogspot.com</a>
International Union of Mail Artists	<a href="http://www.iuoma.org/index.html">http://www.iuoma.org/index.html</a>
Mail Artists Index	<a href="http://mailartists.wordpress.com">http://mailartists.wordpress.com</a>
KidsArt: Mail Art for Kids	<a href="http://www.kidsart.com/Gallery/mailartgallery.html">http://www.kidsart.com/Gallery/mailartgallery.html</a>
Mail Art Sites	<a href="http://www.dragonflydream.com/mailartsites.html">http://www.dragonflydream.com/mailartsites.html</a>

## 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

### ***Sunday Art Group – Let's Make Stuff!***

**Sundays: November 13, December 11, January 14**

**1 – 4 pm**

**Free for Gallery Members or \$5 Drop-in**

For artists, crafters, hobbyists, entrepreneurs and people who just like to make stuff. If you love to make things, if you constantly have a project going on in a back room, or cluttering up a kitchen counter, if you want to try a new art technique and just want a space to create and share ideas, join us! *Let's Make Stuff!* offers a relaxed, social approach to learning and improving on one's artistic technique or to kick start that project you've been procrastinating on. Bring your new or continuing projects to work on alongside your fellow artists, along with all of your materials and get to work! We meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of every month.

Please RSVP to [ktycholis@richmond.ca](mailto:ktycholis@richmond.ca)

### ***Pick up a Pencil – Drop-in Drawing***

**Wednesday, November 23, 2:00-5:00pm**

**Free Drop-in**

Join us for free drawing in the Gallery. Facilitated by local artist Tony Yin Tak Chu, draw from the Mail Art Exhibition or just socialize with others in the Gallery as you draw.

### ***Family Sunday***

**November 27, 1:00 – 4:00 pm , Free**

It's fun, fabulous and free, thanks to RBC Foundation. Join us in the Gallery for a family art activity that relates to the current exhibition.

### **Free Film Screening**

***How to Draw a Bunny (The Ray Johnson Story)***

**Saturday, December 3, 2:30 – 4:00 pm**

Join us for this documentary of Ray Johnson's life. Ray Johnson was one of the founders of Mail Art and considered to be "the most famous unknown artist". Working in the New York art scene during the 60s and 70s, this film features cameos by many well-known artists of the era. Rated PG, content not suitable for those under 16.

To be followed by Door Prizes, to celebrate the Mail Art Exhibition!