

ART EXHIBITION

The Mail Art Stories Project: Mail Art in the Time of Covid-19

An international celebration of mail, art, and the written word.

February 22, 2024: For immediate release

119 pieces of mail art from 11 countries, sent during the height of Covid-19 will be on display in Peterborough, Ontario from March 1st- 23rd, 2024.

On Friday March 1st, Erica Richmond of *Open Sky Stories* in Peterborough, Ontario will launch *The Mail Art Stories Project: Mail Art in the Time of Covid-19 Exhibition*.

In April 2020, Shannon Fitzgerald of Hillsborough, North Carolina, and Richmond joined together and asked the world to share their stories of life within the Covid-19 pandemic. The catch? Each story was to be created as pieces of art on the outside of envelopes with the suggested addition of three words or phrases and sent through the mail.

Before long, Erica and Shannon's mailboxes became vessels of heartache, celebration & much desired connection. In total there were 119 submissions from 52 individuals coming from 11 different countries. Each piece of mail offers a glimpse into a real-life experience. There are submissions from pen pals (one from Sri Lanka and one from Spain) who met during Covid-19 and chose to participate together. There are submissions from a young boy and his Nana who were missing each other terribly. One family chose to create pieces together.

Once the project deadline arrived, Shannon and Erica were met with their next challenge – what to do with all the mail they collected.

“The response was far greater than either of us had anticipated and we each had shoe boxes filled with mail. Our first instinct was to host an art exhibit but at the time, it didn't feel socially responsible to do so since the Covid numbers were still quite high. Shannon and I are both self-published authors and we decided to create a coffee table book filled with the mail art and stories.” Richmond

The book was published in April 2022 and greeted with rave reviews. In March 2023, *The Mail Art Stories Project Exhibition* debuted at the *Thomas Steven's Gallery* in Hillsborough, NC. The event was a huge success and plans began to bring the exhibit to Peterborough.

A year later, the exhibition has arrived! Visitors will be able to go back through time as they explore all 119 pieces of mail art. There will be posters throughout the exhibit which highlight the responses received from participants to questions such as: what do you miss most about pre-pandemic living, what has changed for you while living through a pandemic, do you have any advice or words of wisdom for surviving a global pandemic, and have you experienced any silver lining moments during the pandemic?

“I am astounded that so much peace and healing could help my heart, just by creating a piece of Mail Art on a whim. The pandemic seemed so huge and overwhelming...I never thought I could have a way to begin to come to terms with all the loss and suffering. I never thought peace could come from that endeavor. It felt so risky. Just like removing my mask and being out in the world again. A certain vulnerability. I never expected joy and connection. My deepest thanks to Shannon and Erica for offering this opportunity to connect and heal.” Participant response.

Postcards will be available for visitors to encourage them to send a piece of mail.

Exhibition Details:

Location: Watson & Lou, 383 Water Street, Peterborough

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An international celebration of mail, art, and the written word.

Launch: Friday March 1st 6pm-10pm

*The exhibition will remain in place until March 23rd. Visitors are welcome during store hours. (Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm)

The Mail Art Stories Project is available for purchase from any bookstore, ISBN-10: 0578395339 and directly from the authors: openskystories.com or boldmovesstudio.com.

For more information, please contact:

Erica Richmond: erica@openskystories.com, 705.761.7735, and visit: openskystories.com/mail-art-stories/

Book Testimonials:

"An Important Connection During Covid - What a novel way to document such an extraordinary period. It captures our need to stay connected during this lonely, scary time that kept us so isolated yet brought the world together in shared uncertainty. This book can serve as a historical marker of a time that future generations will remember. It is definitely worth the purchase." GR

"Be inspired and write a letter!! - For this project, 52 people around the world made post cards to share a little part of their lives during the pandemic. All their artistic cards were compiled into a book. It is intriguing to see all the different creations and have a glimpse into these people's feelings (much like mine) during a difficult time in the world. If you enjoy Mail Art, writing letters, sending postcards or simply enjoy different forms of art...you'll want to have a copy of this book." Renee

"A powerful and poignant collection of Mail Art from around the world! - This is living history ~ a combination of art and everyday voices captured in a time like no other. The editors have created a beautiful, empowering book speaking to the life and death challenges of our dear world. They give voice to young and old from all over the globe. This is a compelling vision of collective wisdom, healing, and connection through the humble medium of Mail Art. It is revolutionary in its simplicity and in its elegant equality. This profound book helps me to cherish the beauty of our human condition." TR

Testimonial of The Mail Art Stories Project Exhibition in North Carolina:

"My family and I visited The Mail Art Stories Project co-produced by Shannon Moore Fitzgerald and Erica Richmond and held at the Tom Stevens Gallery in Hillsborough, North Carolina, in February 2023. The exhibition gave us a way to celebrate togetherness with others in our community and offered important reminders of steps we took to connect with friends, family, and strangers during the pandemic. Seeing the drawings, penmanship, ideas of people around the world brought them closer. This was a memorable exhibition that would be exciting to see held in Watson & Lou for the Peterborough community as well."

- Katie Bowler Young, author and community arts organizer
Orange County, North Carolina, USA