

Illegal Art: a Solo Exhibition

On view from Aug 11 - Oct 13, 2023

Cultivate, an arts organization based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is pleased to share a participatory art solo exhibition of the New York Art Collective Illegal Art.

Illegal Art is a collective of artists founded in the summer of 2001, that seeks to create participatory-based public art that inspires self-reflection, thought, and human connection. The group has gained worldwide recognition through their installations, projects, and exhibitions. Through their work, Illegal Art aims to challenge traditional notions of art as a commodity that exists solely within the confines of galleries and museums. Instead, they aim to create art that is accessible to all, inviting viewers to engage with their work and participate in the creation of new meaning.

Illegal Art's approach to public art is characterized by its simplicity and encouragement of participation. Each piece is presented or distributed in a way that is easily accessible to viewers, who are invited to actively engage with the artwork. By utilizing simple and familiar objects or actions, the group aims to create works that are relatable and approachable, encouraging viewers to reflect on their own experiences and connect with others.

The collective's projects have been installed throughout the United States, South America, Europe, and the Middle East. One of their most notable projects, Suggestion Box, was published by Chronicle Books in August 2005 and has traveled to three continents, activated by individuals and groups in their local communities, collecting suggestions from tens of thousands of people in numerous languages. The group's work has also been featured in various media outlets, including National Public Radio, The New York Times, and The Guardian, among others.

Illegal Art has also presented and installed their work at various institutions, including the University of New Hampshire at Durham, The New School University in New York City, and the Minerva School in Berlin, Germany, to name a few. They have been awarded residences at Vermont Studio Center, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Webb School of Knoxville, and others.

The work exhibited at Cultivate gallery, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, will share the works TO DO, Wash Away Your Fear, and What Color Are You?

TO DO was featured on The New York Times OP-ED page over the 2007 Labor Day weekend to illustrate those things left undone at summer's end. Illegal Art has presented this project and other works at the College Art Association's annual conference and numerous campuses throughout the United States. It is described by the group as the following: "From the refrigerator to the computer screen, the purse to the bathroom mirror: to-dos, commands, reminders, mantras and more have graced these ubiquitous three inch squares around the world. Illegal Art took them to the street to create three installations that were assembled with up to 6,500 individual Post-its for the passerby to jot, scribble and draw their pressing, and not so pressing tasks and pearls of wisdom."

Wash Away Your Fears prompts the public to grasp the figurative phrase of washing away their fears, and makes it a literal, cathartic action by simply writing them down with chalk on the sidewalk, and then washing them away with a purging bucket of water and a broom. *Wash Away Your Fears* was first debuted in Provincetown, MA on August 6, 2020 and has since been installed at the Tenement Museum, New York, NY on October 31, 2020, City of Providence, RI on October 4, 2020, City of Ithaca, NY on August 19, 2021, Englewood, FL on May 20-23, 2022.

What Color Are You? provides individuals the opportunity to share the color that they feel represents essentially who they are. No matter where they are from or where they are going, participants will define who they are and how they want to be seen with a simple square of color of their creation. Participants are provided a 4" x 4" square canvas on which they can paint one color that they feel represents who they are and pin it to a pre-existing grid for both participants and passersby alike to admire the diversity of personal expression. *What Color Are You?* was part of Passport, an New Yorker Promotions event sponsored by Delta Airlines, in Lower Manhattan at the Manny Cantor Center on Saturday, November 8th, 2014, The San Diego Art Fair in August, 2017 and was installed as a part of the Back to the Ballot event at Art Share LA, organized by the magazine *By Way of Us* in October, 2018.

Illegal Art's work represents a significant contribution to the field of contemporary art, as it challenges traditional notions of art as a commodity and creates works that are accessible and relatable to all. Through their participatory-based approach, the group fosters self-reflection, thought, and human connection, inspiring viewers to engage with their work and participate in the creation of new meaning. The success of their work can be attributed to their ability to connect with audiences on a personal level and create works that are both approachable and thought-provoking.

For press inquiries or more information, please contact Mallory Shotwell at hello@cultivategrandrapids.org