Between you and me
As a founder of an arts organization, a curator, a teacher, and a director of an art school and artists’ residency, I have long considered how arts organizations are hosts. My work in the field has been guided by some nebulous precepts on what it means to welcome guests, considering that these cultural places (museums, art centers, galleries, artist residencies, and classrooms) are temporary for visitors, even if they return and with regularity. That they do so from different points of entry and formality is one of the interesting puzzles about throwing this party—everyone’s level of investment is at a different intensity, and everyone’s needs, in order to feel truly welcome, are significantly different.

Culture is a vast and unruly concept. It is defined by the Oxford dictionaries as the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. The collective nature of this attention is important. How do places for cultural engagement feel welcome to everyone?

Artists have long acted as intermediaries within communities—their art frequently doing the work of translation, processing current events, or augmenting perception. Between You and Me explores the ways artists consider relationships in their work: being neighborly and performing acts of radical hospitality, mentorship, service, and friendship. In other words: care. How do artists and arts organizations care about the communities they are a part of?

For the artists in this exhibition, the work (and poetics) of establishing connection is the foundation of their art. Each is committed to correspondence in the long term. Between You and Me highlights significant projects that demonstrate that commitment and a range of ways artists practice care, hospitality, and generosity within communities that echo the work done by arts and cultural organizations. In line with the Arts Center’s past exhibitions and collection, which feature artist-built environments and artist world-building, Between You and Me presents a small selection of practices that testify to the ways artists create space for and between people, even
if temporarily. An “environment” is also an intentional atmosphere, the character of where and how people connect.

Chloë Bass’s The Book of Everyday Instruction is an eight-chapter investigation into one-on-one social interaction. Unfolding in multiple cities, in public, in her studio, and within cultural organizations, Bass’s project focuses on the nuance between self and other in close correspondence. Five years ago, Benjamin Todd Wills began writing letters to incarcerated citizens who never or rarely received mail. Eventually, he received a paper airplane from one of them. This plane, which so beautifully symbolized freedom, impelled Wills to ask other correspondents to mail him an airplane. He ultimately amassed around five hundred planes that visually connect viewers to neighbors currently serving time.

John Preus’s “stoops” are part of a hybrid sculpture and design practice that combines reuse, community collaboration, and poetics in furniture making. These works intentionally evoke sites and occasions for dialogue. Christine Wong Yap has made exploring the process and conditions that beget belonging central to her work, developing a range of tools, games, and documents that guide participants toward recognition and acknowledgement of their course toward affiliation and fellowship.

General Sisters, founded by Dana Bishop-Root and Ginger Brooks Takahashi in North Braddock, Pennsylvania, began with the acquisition of a building for use as a general store in the neighborhood where they lived. Their foundational question—“How do we build a neighborhood grocery store, as neighbors?”—laid the groundwork for a collaboration in which they learn and develop practices that nourish a neighborhood conditioned by systemic racial, economic, and environmental oppression. To illustrate economic histories, Sara Clugage hosts dinner parties that draw on the culinary styles from different periods of art history, teasing out the interconnectedness of culture, labor, and wealth while guests hear short performative lectures and play trivia.

Nestled in the show is another “museum” curated by the Portland, Oregon-based Harriet Tubman Center for Expanded Curatorial Practice, coordinated by artists Lisa Jarrett and Harrell Fletcher. Students at the Harriet Tubman
Middle School learn about curatorial practice and art criticism across cultural fields, eventually applying their skills as a curatorial team working both in their school and at large. Fellows for this project are Bea, Elliot, Esperanza, Harrell, Joyce, Lisa, Nora, and Syncier. For this exhibition, they worked with Portland’s Public Annex, which serves residents with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Run by artists, agriculturists, and activists, Public Annex seeks to create a truly integrated society. Its arts programs help artists with developmental disabilities pursue their practice alongside artists without disabilities. The student curators chose to showcase the work of Public Annex artist Lawrence Oliver. Oliver is a multidisciplinary artist whose work ranges from sculptural machines to drawings and objects inspired by nature, YouTube videos, cartoons, and video games.

All these practices foreground the many ways artists think about, and with, their communities to make things that host, support, nourish, connect, and care for those around them. In a gallery laid out as an interconnected community of spaces, we begin to see artists not as people on the margins, illustrating modern life, or commenting on current events, but as citizens and neighbors integrated into our communities and integral to crafting a rich and complex civic life.

For Further Exploration

The artists featured in Between You and Me each engage in research to inform their projects. Simultaneously, the research process allows artists to connect with others exploring similar subject matter both within and outside the visual-arts realm.

Here, at our invitation, each artist shares a list of readings that relate to their practices. This research material is included in a reading area in the gallery. The reading list acts as a bridge fostering further connection with the artists. It also offers an alternative avenue for engaging, beyond the gallery setting, with the ideas explored in Between You and Me.

From Chloë Bass


From Sara Clugage


From Lisa Jarrett and Harrell Fletcher


From General Sisters


From John Preus


Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Translated by A. A. Brill, n.d.


**From Benjamin Todd Wills**


From Christine Wong Yap


The artists in *Between You and Me* consider their engagement with communities, both at their respective homes and here in Sheboygan, to be works of art unto themselves. Accordingly, these artists will work with our community to explore ideas of hospitality, sustainability, education, and resilience over the course of the exhibition. As the year progresses, elements from many of these programs will be on display in the gallery. We encourage you to experience these artworks by participating and working directly with these artists.

Check for programming updates at jmkac.org/cares

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