



**#MuseumFromHome with  
the Elmhurst Art Museum**



ART &  
*the Everyday*



# *Welcome*

In this guide, we'll explore artwork from exhibitions at the Elmhurst Art Museum that used everyday materials as inspiration. You'll recognize some familiar items from your own home that were used in these artworks. This type of artwork is often referred to as **Ephemeral**.

Michelle Grabner, *Untitled (egg carton)*, 2017, black iron and glass, 12 x 12 x 3 in.  
Courtesy of the Artist and James Cohan, New York.

# What is *Ephemera*?

**Ephemera** is a collection of material that is not meant to be retained and preserved. It is something deliberately designed to be temporary, minor transient documents of everyday life. A newspaper, for example, is designed to be read in a single day or a poster is for a single event. The word **Ephemera** comes from the greek word *epi* and *hemera* meaning 'on day'. You probably already have a collection of ephemera in your home today. Do you have a collection of magazines? Invitations and cards on display? Menus from your favorite restaurants?



*Happier Hours* curated by Jose Lerma, various artists, 2019, Installation view. **All works made on napkins.**



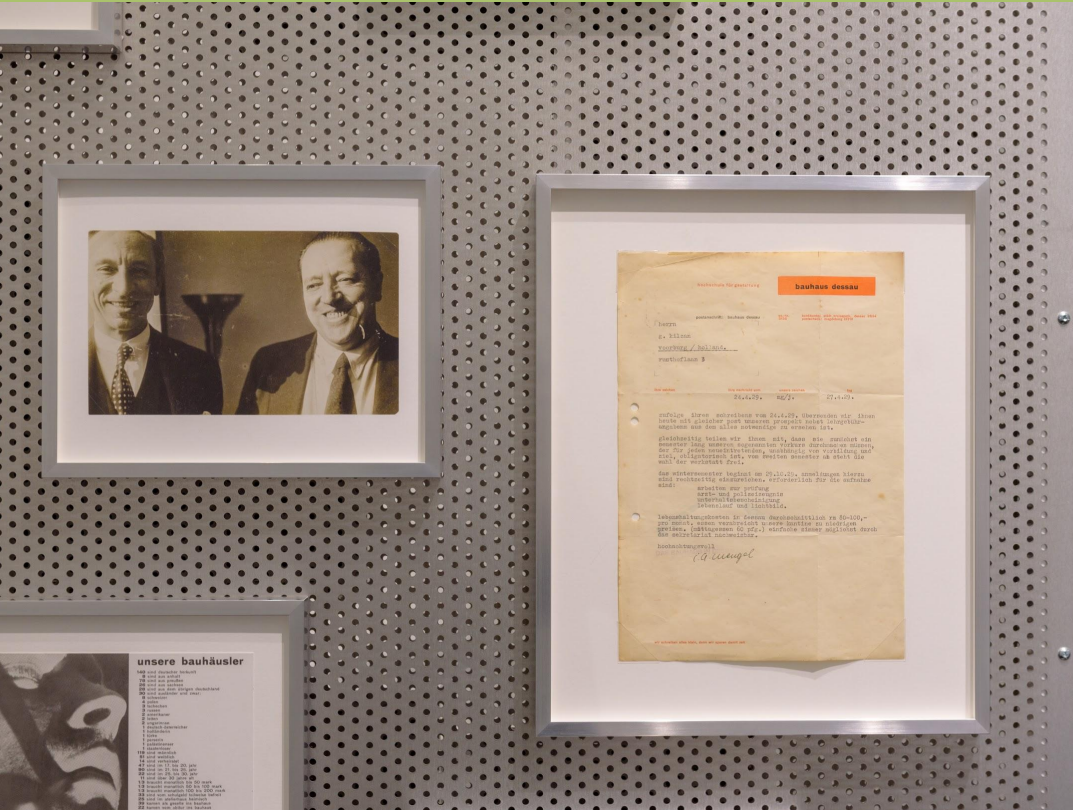
## Why is *Ephemera* so important ?

Ephemera can become important and significant on many levels. The first is personal. We often keep mementos of important events and people in our lives such as wedding invitations, baby curls, or even postcards from a friend. These items represent a moment in time, sparking memories and feelings through the possession of that item.

# Ephemera as a historical document

Secondly, we keep items of historical importance, a record of what happened during our lifetime. Often in art we have ephemeral items associated with an artist or art movement. A letter written from members of the Bauhaus, and photos of their illustrious instructors (including Director Mies van der Rohe) help us understand the personal relationships with this important historical moment.

Another example might include a small sketch by Picasso on a napkin originally may have been a kind gesture to a family or friend, but now provides an extensive illustrative history of the beloved artist.



Installation *The Whole World A Bauhaus*, Elmhurst Art Museum, Spring 2020.  
Photographed by Steven Koch.



***I actually enjoy the wait***, 2017, powder coated steel, snowdrop bulbs, winter. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON, Chicago.

## *Ephemera* as art

And lastly, ephemera as art. Not all artists use paint on canvas or chisel to marble to create their masterpieces. Some artists will use what is convenient, yet unconventional. Artists can take familiar, commonplace items, adjust an aspect of their appearance or use, and elevate them to another meaning.

There are many forms of ephemeral art, from sculpture to performance, used in galleries, stages or even outside of museum walls. Some only occurs once, like a happening, and cannot be embodied in any lasting object to be shown in a museum or gallery. Others can be collected by a museum and exhibited in a gallery.

For example, in 2017 Alex Chitty installed *I actually enjoy the wait* outside of the McCormick House. The snowdrop bulbs she planted produce flowers every Spring.

# What is *Ephemeral Art?*

Ephemeral art first came to prominence in the 1960s with the [Fluxus group](#), when artists like Joseph Beuys were interested in creating works of art that existed outside the gallery and museum structure and had no financial worth. Happenings, performances and sound sculptures were all part of ephemeral art, as were flyers and cheap mass-produced items that carried subversive messages out into the world.

*Let's look at some recent examples of Ephemeral Art that have been exhibited at the Elmhurst Art Museum, much like this egg carton memorialized in iron by Michelle Grabner.*



Michelle Grabner, *Untitled (egg carton)*, 2017, black iron and glass, 4 x 12 x 3 in.  
Courtesy of the Artist and James Cohan, New York.



# Margaret Wharton

Margaret Wharton, a long time Chicago-based artist, deconstructed and reimagined everyday objects to create whimsical and thought-provoking works of art. As can be seen in her studio photograph below, Wharton often used chairs as her media. According to historian and curator Lynne Warren, "She sliced them apart — she must have been a whiz with a band saw — and she would find within the chair so many other things." The work on the far left, is from the recent Elmhurst Art Museum exhibition, *What Came After: Figurative Painting in Chicago 1978-1998*, Fall 2019.

If you look closely, you can see the elements of a chair: the seat, the arms, and the spindles constructed to create an abstract figure.

Far Left: *General Nonsense*, 1981, mixed media. Private Collection, Courtesy of Jean Albano Gallery.

Left: Margaret Wharton in her studio, circa 1975, photographed by Sandra Jorgensen. Courtesy of Elmhurst Collection Art Collection.



# Michelle Grabner



*Untitled (Heavy Pan)*, 2017, brass  
Courtesy of the Artist and Green Gallery, Milwaukee.

Artist Michelle Grabner explored many aspects of the home in the 2018 group show in the McCormick House entitled *IN THIS HOUSE*. In this exhibition, Grabner exhibited a group of cast metal works that initially appear to be made of egg crates and aluminum trays. But upon closer inspection, we find that the disposable crates and trays have been remade and memorialized in metal.

Grabner explores familiar everyday items, alters them slightly and elevates them to new artistic works. In an interview for the exhibition, Grabner stated, “The cast bronze, brass, and iron works are an attempt to monumentalize and make enduring the textiles and domestic materials that I have been using as the sources for my paintings. It evolved out of thinking through the ethical obligations of collecting all this material and asking myself what do I do with it after it has offered up its patterns.”

# Alex Chitty

In 2017, artist Alex Chitty designed a site-specific exhibition in the McCormick House. The show *They will bloom without you* is a reference to Chitty's observations of flowers, and how their daily bloom takes place independent of an audience. The exhibition incorporated I-beam floor sculptures that included a purposeful bodge--an inelegant, but practical fix.

For instance, one sculpture intentionally lacks an element at its base, but the insertion of a metal pitcher resting on a sponge allows the sculpture to stand upright. Each part does not operate independently. Rather, the narrative of Chitty's creation is suddenly and unexpectedly changed, as it now includes a relationship to an unrelated but recognizable item stripped of its original function. The work's dual state then carries new meaning forward.



Alex Chitty, *they will bloom without you (pitcher)*, 2017, steel i-beams, objects, fasteners, cast brass. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Robert Chase Heishman

# Jim Hodges

The right image is a detail of the installation work, *Diary of Flowers (Carolyn)*, made by the artist Jim Hodges in 1992. Hodges sensitively drew flowers (also ephemeral in nature) on different napkin sizes, styles, and colors. This early series is a touchstone in the artist's career, and excellent example of how he infuses beauty and sentimentality. They are delicate and ephemeral, resisting the idea of lasting forever.

This work is part of the Elmhurst Art Museum's permanent collection, and inspired a 2019 group exhibition by another 60 artists who similarly drew on napkins.

(detail) Jim Hodges, *A Diary of Flowers (Carolyn)*, 1992  
Gift of Carole and Dick Cline. Elmhurst Art Museum Collection.





Jim Hodges, *A Diary of Flowers (Carolyn)*, 1992  
Gift of Carole and Dick Cline. Elmhurst Art Museum Collection.



*Happier Hours* curated by José Lerma, various artists, 2019,  
Installation view. **All works made on napkins.**

# José Lerma

A curated exhibition by José Lerma was inspired by the installation of napkins *Diary of Flowers (Carolyn)* by Jim Hodges. Lerma asked over 60 artists to similarly make works on napkins. This included a geographically diverse group of artists at various stages of their careers.

He said, “Because napkins are by design relatively small in size, I knew I wanted a large selection of works to have a satisfying visual impact. No themes or materials were imposed.” Lerma was interested in how some artists take advantage of the napkin's immediacy by creating fragmentary, quick sketches or "drunk" doodles—while others subvert the ephemeral material's traditional role as an idea generator by presenting fully formed finished works.



*Happier Hours* curated by José Lerma, various artists, 2019, Installation view. **All works made on napkins.**



# Vik Muniz

Although Vik Muniz combines sculpture, painting and photography to create truly unique images, he is ultimately interested in documenting an ephemeral moment. Muniz uses a wide variety of materials such as sugar, dust, thread, wrapped candies, children's toys and, as in the left image, chocolate syrup to create a temporary sculpture or painting. These ephemeral works, frequently based on well-known sources, are then photographed and the originals are allowed to disintegrate or are dismantled. The witty and uncanny translations result in strange visual puzzles. They can be seen as clones of their original sources, as virtuoso pieces of drawing, and unique photographic visions.

Vik Muniz, *Individuals*, 1998, cibachrome, ed. 3/3, 60" x 48", (photograph of chocolate syrup)



# Eleanor King Hookham



A familiar name in Elmhurst, Eleanor King Hookham is credited with founding the Elmhurst Art Museum. She was also a prolific artist, exhibiting work in New York and Paris. While Hookham worked with common art supplies like watercolor and acrylic paints, she also created a series of prints to copy her original coffee and ink drawings, which were not made with archival materials and would not last long. An example on the right *Old Watertower, Chicago*, highlights the iconic Chicago landmark.

Left: Eleanor King Hookham overseeing the move of McCormick House, 1997, Elmhurst, IL. Photo by Patrick Ryan/Press Publications

Right: *Old Watertower, Chicago*, 1975, Ink and coffee, Collection of the Elmhurst Art Museum.



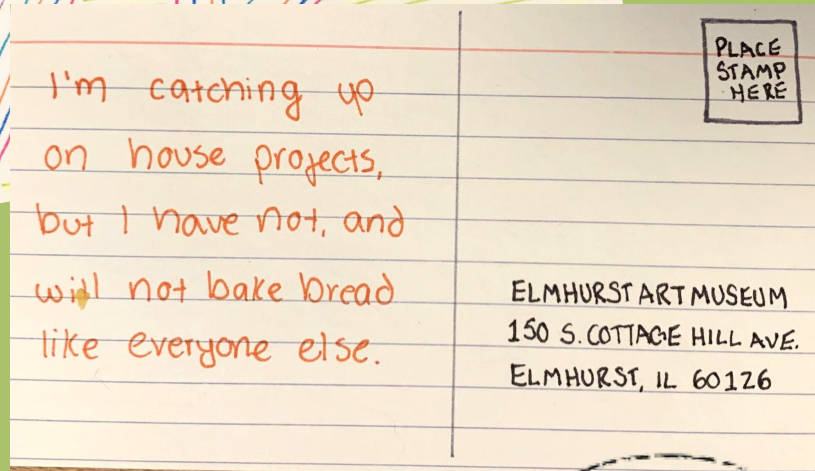


Enjoy this  
week's  
**AT-HOME**  
**ACTIVITY**

Tag us on social media with you creations!  
**#elmhurstmuseum #museumfromhome**  
**#EAMathome**

# Art in the Post

You are invited to anonymously contribute to a collaborative community art project by submitting a postcard that shares something related to what your life is like during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tell us how you are passing the time, write a poem, or even share a recipe! We'll share everyone's creations shortly after the museum reopens.



Mail to the museum or  
use the drop at the  
museum's education  
center entrance doors.

*\*no return address required.*

[CLICK HERE](#)  
for more on this  
Community  
Project

## MUSEUM STORE

### *Item of the Week*



*I Work from Home* is a survey monograph on American painter Michelle Grabner (born 1962), presenting over 100 works from the past 20 years. The chosen works range from paintings of textile patterns appropriated from household fabrics to her abstract, metalpoint pieces.

[Online Museum Store](#)



## More on the Elmhurst Art Museum Exhibitions

[What Came After: Figurative Painting in Chicago 1978-1998 exhibition page](#) This page also features an exhibition brochure for further reading

[With a Capital P: Selections by Six Painters exhibition page](#)  
This page also features an exhibition brochure for further reading

[IN THIS HOUSE exhibition page](#)  
This page also features an exhibition brochure for further reading

[Alex Chitty: They will bloom without you exhibition page](#)  
This page also features an exhibition brochure for further reading

[The Human Touch: Selections from the RBC Wealth Management Art Collection exhibition page](#)



# Learn more about the artists featured in this guide

Alex Chitty  
Michelle Grabner  
Jim Hodges  
Eleanor King Hookham

José Lerma  
Vik Muniz  
Margaret Wharton

A close-up photograph of a silver egg carton. Two eggs are visible: one is bright orange and the other is green. The carton has several other empty compartments, some with faint embossed patterns.

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