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Exhibit takes on U.S. mail, 2020 election. 'We love the post office,' says Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh

CHARLES RUNNELLS | Fort Myers News-Press



Art from the "Postcards for Democracy" exhibit at Rauschenberg Gallery

Postcard art pieces planned for the "Postcards for Democracy" exhibit. All-new postcards will be shown at least twice during the show's run at FSW.

Want to be in an art exhibit at Fort Myers' [Rauschenberg Gallery](#)? All you need is a stamp, a postcard and a little creativity.

That's the beauty of the new ["Postcards For Democracy" exhibit](#), says renowned artist/musician [Beatie Wolfe](#).

It's an exhibit inspired by the post office and democracy. But it's also a *democratic* exhibit: Anyone can

take part, no matter who they are or where they live.

You don't even have to be an artist.

"We just wanted this to be as open and inclusive as possible," Wolfe says, "and just have everyone and anyone that wanted to send a card. And whatever that card ended up being was great."



"US Mail" by Denise Woodward, one of many postcard-art works featured in the "Postcards for Democracy" exhibit.

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Wolfe created the art project with singer/composer [Mark Mothersbaugh](#) of art-rock legends [Devo](#).

The idea was to champion the U.S. Postal Service and its essential role during the 2020 presidential election. Both Beatie and Mothersbaugh are longtime fans of the postal service, and the friends love to collect stamps and send letters (and often art) through the mail.

“It kind of inspired us,” Mothersbaugh says. “I think we were impressed when our government started talking about eliminating the post office — which was something we just thought was an integral part of our democracy and something that was very important to keep alive.”

The project started as a “collective art demonstration” supporting the U.S. Postal Service, mail-in voting and the right to vote. But it eventually grew into much more than that.

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Artists/musicians Mark Mothersbaugh of Devo and Beatie Wolfe co-created the new "Postcards for Democracy" exhibit.

ROSS HARRIS

People from all over the world submitted postcards decorated with all sorts of topics: The 2020 election, of course. And the post office. And Trump. And Postmaster General Louis DeJoy. But also Black Lives Matter. Human kindness. Racism. Feminism. QAnon. Science. The environment.

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And there were other, less political topics, too: A one-eyed alien holding its arms out for a hug. The leg lamp from “A Christmas Story.” A monkey astronaut declaring “I don’t wanna go to space!” A sun rising over the planet Earth. And lots of Devo-themed art, including the band’s famous “energy dome” hats and their slogan, “Are we not men? We are Devo!”

More submissions are arriving every day, Mothersbaugh says.

“We love the post office and we love what it’s about,” he says. “And it (the art project) just happened to

coincide with what was happening at the time in the country.

“But, you know, there’s still things coming in today. We have new cards sitting on the table today. And they’re not talking about the election. They’re talking about other things. ... They’re about other aspects of human existence.”



The “Postcards For Democracy” exhibit features decorated postcards from people around the world, including this one by Dan Opalenik.

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That’s why gallery director Jade Dellinger plans to change up the postcards in the world-premiere exhibit. At least twice during the show’s three-month run, he’ll take down all the old postcards from their narrow shelves and replace them with an entirely new batch.

Dellinger expects that people who visit the gallery might be inspired to go home and create some art of their own, in fact. And those postcards might pop up later in the exhibit.

“It’s very much an ongoing thing,” he says, “and we’re encouraging people to participate.”

Wolfe and Mothersbaugh say they’ve gotten sacks full of postcards for the exhibit, but they have no idea how many they’ve collected. Thousands, they guess.

“It’s a bunch!” Mothersbaugh says. “Sorry, neither of us wanted to count.”

Now about 1,000 of those postcards are being shown at Rauschenberg Gallery (Dellinger hasn’t counted those either).

Wolfe says she’s impressed with the creativity on display. The postcards cover a wide spectrum of the human experience and touch on some of the issues and feelings we’ve all had over the last year.

“It’s almost like this physical time capsule, a time portal in some ways, to what’s been going on,” she says. “I think it’s so wonderful that it’s being preserved in physical form in a very much digital age.

“You look at those cards, and you see so many different facets of our collective human experience and identity, and I think that’s what’s really powerful about it. It feels very much like it represents what we’ve been going through.”



Ron Logan's "Help Your Neighbor," one of many postcard-art works featured in the "Postcards for Democracy" exhibit.

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Mothersbaugh and Wolfe say they wanted to do what they could to help something they love: The U.S. Postal Service.

“We just wanted to bring an awareness,” Mothersbaugh says. “We weren’t hearing anybody speaking up for the post office, so we said, ‘Well dang it, we’re gonna do it!’ Because we had many reasons to be thankful.”

Dellinger loves the idea of making the postal service participants in the exhibit, as well.

“You’re kinda challenging the postal service,” he says. “At the same time, you’re sort of entertaining and being grateful toward them by allowing them to be art handlers.”

The project started last year, but the Fort Myers show will be the first time the postcards have been shown in an art exhibit. The world premiere sprang from Dellinger’s long relationship with Mothersbaugh and Devo, the 2021 Rock n’ Roll Hall of Fame nominees best known for their 1980 hit "Whip It."

Dellinger wrote the band’s 2003 biography, “We Are Devo,” and he also worked with Mothersbaugh on a Tampa museum exhibit of his work. They’d been talking about doing something for Rauschenberg Gallery, too, and then “Postcards for Democracy” happened.

Dellinger says he’s impressed with the mountains of postcards that poured in after Beatie and Mothersbaugh announced the project last year.

“They were getting thousands of postcards coming in the mail, and some people doing things daily and sending it to them,” Dellinger says. “And many people going to great effort and doing really clever, really beautiful, really wonderful artworks.

“Sometimes it was a simple message, but many times it was a real labor of love that was trusted to the USPS letter carriers. And of course, everyone loved that idea.”

The exhibit includes three authentic USPS stamp machines near the gallery entrance. For \$1 in quarters, visitors can buy an art stamp featuring the exhibit logo and a drawing of Wolfe and Mothersbaugh.

Then there’s the music Mothersbaugh contributed to the show: Seven hours of stream-of-consciousness organ music playing on a loop in the gallery.

Mothersbaugh — who has a thriving career as a composer for TV, film and video games — wrote and performed the song on an old home organ. He titled it “The Most Powerful Healing Music in the World.”

The exhibit, he jokes, will do more than just entertain and enlighten visitors. “You can go in and not only see all these cards, but you can come out healthier at the other end. ... I had the first clue when I had a cut on my finger. And while I was playing the music, I watched it heal.”

Mothersbaugh and Wolfe have no plans to stop the art project anytime soon. They’re continuing to accept postcards and might eventually show the exhibit elsewhere.

They hope it helps their beloved post office and spreads their mutual love of mail — something Wolfe says helped her immensely during the pandemic.

“Mail during lockdown, it was really the one thing that was keeping me sane,” she says. “I was just writing tons of letters and mailing art to people.”

And a lot of people, it seems, love mail and the post office as much as they do.

“We had no idea that it would get such an overwhelming response,” Wolfe says. “I think a big part of the whole project is just the joy of mail.

“I think so many people have remembered how wonderful it is to make something and send it. ... It’s so much more than just being a means to an end. It brings all this kind of joy.”

The exhibit opened May 17, but it’s not too late to send your artwork through the U.S. Postal Service. In fact, Dellinger hopes that happens.

“It’s really a project that can truly be open-ended,” he says. “It’s really about continuing to participate in this ongoing kind of conversation that’s happening.”

To take part in the exhibit, make a postcard and mail it to 8760 Sunset Blvd., CA 90069-2206. For more information, visit postartfordemocracy.com.

Connect with this reporter: Email crunnells@gannett.com or connect on social media at Charles Runnells (Facebook), [@charlesrunnells](https://twitter.com/charlesrunnells) (Twitter) and [@crunnells1](https://www.instagram.com/crunnells1) (Instagram).

If you go

What: “Postcards For Democracy”

When: Now through Aug. 8

Where: Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway S.W., Building L, south Fort Myers.

Admission: Free

COVID rules: Masks and social distancing required

Info: 489-9313 or rauschenberggallery.com