



Rocket Grants 2011-2012

Funded Projects, supplementary information: * Denotes lead artist, whose contact address is provided.

Discrete Curiosities: Elizabeth Lovett* & Yair Keshet elovett@post.harvard.edu These artists are mathematicians, fabricators, and designers inhabiting a grey zone between art and the production of cultural artifacts. In this project they want to create opportunities for artists to recontextualise their work. They will build a mathematically derived display system that will act as a postmodern Cabinet of Wonders. This display will travel to public spaces around Kansas City that attract different sectors of the general public, and that encourage an atmosphere of social integration. Each exhibit will juxtapose the work of regional (and a few national) artists together with that of scientists and other researchers, and will be curated based on three thematic groupings, or "sets". Keshet and Lovett are interested in provoking the curiosity of the general public, but also wish to create an opportunity for discourse between artists as they see their work resonate in unexpected relationship with other objects. All three "sets" will have a website presence where the artist will be able to provide a longer description, supporting images, contact information, and links to personal websites.

Lovett: "The cabinet of curiosity project stems from an instinctive cultural urge to collect artifacts and curate them in different categories as a means of proving and codifying a specific worldview. The initial premise is based on the 16c. Wunderkammer, whose contents displayed a microcosm of their owners' personal world; containing art, craft, natural artifacts, and fancies of the imagination. While many of the ideas embodied in these early cabinets have found established institutional homes in current society (art museums, natural history museum, encyclopedias, and zoological gardens), one purpose of the cabinets is not regularly observed in today's cultural traditions and institutions.

The act of curating a cabinet of curiosity is to test the relationship between objects whose categorical boundaries have not yet been defined.

It is this element of the traditional cabinet that we are in the act of reviving."

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You Live Here Too: Julia Vering: juliavering@hotmail.com. This will be a multimedia performance utilizing video, stop-motion animation, an original score, and local senior citizens as actors and oral historians. The project will push the boundaries of

storytelling through experimentation.

You Live Here Too will be filmed and performed in local nursing homes, senior centers and the library, breaking down generational boundaries through symbolic and literal sharing of space. Scripts will be provided to actors, but they will also be encouraged to improvise and to infuse their own personal histories into the story. The project will engage a marginalized community that is often cut off from contemporary art, in the comfort of their own homes and recreational sites. It will serve as a model for therapeutic recreation with seniors.

The story begins as a young mannequin, played by the artist, sits down in her living room at home to watch a self-help video purchased at a thrift store. The video features a data entry specialist who asks the mannequin questions regarding her purchases for the day, her childhood, her virtues and her character, culminating in a discussion of what it means to be human.

You Live Here Too examines the ways in which we construct identities and meaning through storytelling, congregated living and age-segregated recreation. Blurring truth and fiction through an absurd framework, participants will be given the opportunity to both become someone else, in the way that drama allows, and also reveal their true character through the sharing of personal histories. The project will culminate in a cohesive story that blends identities while showcasing images of aging women.

Vering: "I continue to be driven to make art and to advocate for and work with those marginalized by diminished physical and mental capacity of our society. This piece seeks to be a more cogent, ambitious and public merging of my professional helping role and aesthetic vision."

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Plug Projects: Nicole Mauser*, Amy Kligman, Misha Kilgman, Cory Imig & Caleb Taylor: nicolemauser@gmail.com This project is a curatorial collaboration by five Kansas City artists who share the mission of bringing fresh perspectives and conversations to the local art community through a new, collective artist-run space. Their goal is to energize artists and the public at large by exhibiting challenging new work, initiating critical dialogue, and expanding connections of artists in Kansas City as part of a wider, national network of artists.

These artists have secured a location in the West Bottoms district of Kansas City. The space is currently undergoing renovations and will house both a 350 square foot exhibition space and their individual artists' studios. They will be sharing responsibilities through a collaborative organizational model.

Exhibitions will feature nationally recognized artists from outside of Kansas City and

also give exposure to less visible regional talent. They will feature artists who are pushing the boundaries in various disciplines, and focus on solo and small-scale group exhibitions of up to three artists per show.

In addition to the five shows that PLUG will curate annually, the project space hopes to host one exhibition curated by another artist-run space, one exhibition curated by an art publication, or one “artists choose artists” invitational exhibition.

They will also hold a “Critique Night Series” led by local critic Blair Schulman, along with a small rotating panel of established writers, curators and artists from the community. Artists will be invited to present and engage in open critical dialogue about their work.

The *Plug Projects* website will be a curatorial extension of the project space, extending the conversation beyond the gallery walls. It will include a newsfeed, archive of artists and programming, and a curatorial blog. The blog will feature other artists whose work relates to the work on view, critical writing and resources that relate to the themes of the exhibitions, and host international guest curators who will create online satellite exhibitions.

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NV in KC: Judith Levy: judithglevy@gmail.com. Levy will work with videographers, actors, non-actors, artists and musicians in Lawrence and Kansas City to create a faux documentary that examines difficult subject matter with wit and humanity. This project will consist of an initial 20- to 30-minute video episode, followed by five additional 15-minute episodes, featuring a story that humorously explores envy as a motivating force in a regional arts community.

Levy: “I want to make this series, because envy is a feeling that most artists experience and suffer with silently. Envy is a usually a taboo subject, and it often causes artists to feel alienated from their peers or experience self-doubt and shame. I’m on a mission to create a project that will help artists allow themselves to accept their own feelings of envy along with all the other feelings they have about living their lives as artists. This is a serious matter, like most of the subjects I investigate, so I will treat it respectfully. However like my other work, I will make it inviting, entertaining and humorous, so that it engages viewers in a dialogue that opens up the subject to new and different conversations.”

The project is not meant to be therapeutic, as in therapy or counseling. Like other conceptually motivated art, Levy wants to provoke thoughtfulness about challenging subject matter that includes contemporary and historical perspectives. The subject matter concerns Kansas City’s artists and public and private art institutions, and touches on the historical exploration of power and hierarchy.

The story involves the friends and colleagues of an artist who is obsessively creating very large, hierarchical wall maps in her studio, placing local artists, galleries and museums in various tiers. She calls the work *The Big Picture*. Throughout the series the artist is the “pilgrim”, who, like Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, is on a journey towards “salvation”. She engages in various and misguided endeavors while trying to understand her own situation. Each segment will be carefully crafted to create dramatic action, content and humor that move the story forward towards a resolution.

The first episode will have simultaneous showings on a dedicated Facebook page, on a dedicated Vimeo site, on Youtube, and at a showing at the Tivoli theater in Kansas City. The interactive aspect of the Facebook page will provide a forum for comments about the issues and themes raised in the project.

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Playing Gender: Asma Kazmi: asma@asmakazmi.com The artist will create a performance/public event in Kansas City connected with current work that engages a subaltern section of modern Indian society—cross-dressed biological men, eunuchs, or hermaphrodites, who are known traditionally as hijras. The performance will consist of documentary and reconstructed audio/visual material, live performances, workshops and programmed discussions on issues of gender construction, sexuality and ritual.

She has gathered extensive footage revealing the contradictory world of the hijra community and her own self-conscious insertion into this environment - as both an outsider and an insider. She will draw from this wealth of audio/visual material to create a transdisciplinary event that celebrates the precarious fabrication of gender artifice and exaggeration. Kazmi will recruit/train local drag queens from Kansas City to appear with her for live performances, and the associated discussions will bring new faces and perspectives (scholars, drag queens, artists, community members) to issues as varied as contemporary art production, social engagement, gender politics and ritual. A website will archive the documentary and constructed materials and also be a place for discussions.

The hijras have an incessant, vibrant presence at a number of major traffic intersections in urban India. They can also be seen in drag, gathered for marriages and birth celebrations, singing and dancing to drums and claps. In spite of the hijras’ tumultuous visibility in the public realm, they remain a marginalized group, tolerated only in the specific roles of beggars, ritual performers, or homosexual prostitutes.

In the summer of 2009, Kazmi spent two months in New Delhi, working with four hijras, all clients of the Sahara House, an NGO that provides rehabilitation and advocacy for hijras with HIV/AIDS. She spent a few weeks building relationships and cultivating trust and the final month performing with the hijra community in staged settings and public

spaces. She learned their way of dancing, which is a burlesque of female dance moves borrowed from Bollywood films. The relationship culminated in a performance event that challenged Kazmi's voice as an artist and her own identity as a heterosexual female.

Kazmi: "I approach my art practice from the position that exposing oneself to a liminal space (a space in-between the familiar and the unfamiliar) is an aesthetic process, since it deconstructs habitual categories of apprehension, heightens one's awareness of simultaneous realities, and places one in a position to reconstruct experience. My interest in exploring spaces suspended between binary oppositions is based on my personal experience of continuous relocation: much of my adult life has been shaped by my achievements and losses as an immigrant to the United States, as a person shifting between multiple languages, ethnicities, and identities."

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Dark Matter presents "Ascent": Daniel Eichenbaum*, Bob Riddle, Cheryl Melfi, Richard Johnson, Rebecca Ashe: danieleichenbaum@yahoo.com "Ascent" will use proven components and local expertise to design and build a small device carrying several cameras to the edge of space. The project will recruit local high school students interested in aerospace engineering to assist in the design and construction of the device, and the process will be documented on the project's website. A project blog will discuss the technologies and physics at work. The public will be able to follow the creation of the device, view its launch, and track its flight online in real time, allowing the entire community to become "armchair astronauts" and experience the flight from the comfort of their own home. The heart of "Ascent" is community involvement, creating a space where the science and arts communities work together.

Dark Matter will then present an hour-long performance at Union Station's Gottlieb Planetarium. During the performance, original electroacoustic music by Daniel Eichenbaum and Richard Johnson, performed live by flutist Rebecca Ashe and clarinetist Cheryl Melfi, will interact with the projected imagery on the Planetarium dome. The result will be a truly immersive environment for the audience that gives them the experience of a flight over Kansas City. Along the journey, astronomer Bob Riddle will offer narration discussing the project and comparing it to humankind's history of reaching for the stars, from ancient balloons to the twentieth-century space race.

Proof of concept was demonstrated in October 2010 when Kansas City amateur astronomers Fred Bruenjes and Jen Winter launched an eight-foot weather balloon and off-the-shelf camera and radio transmitter, that climbed over 100,000 feet above Kansas City. They captured images not only of Kansas City, but of the edge of the Earth's atmosphere. Bruenjes and Winter successfully tracked the device using its

broadcasted GPS coordinates and were able to plot, in real time, its position on Google Maps.

Dark Matter will use a high-definition video camera and high-resolution digital camera to record images and video during flight, allowing them to fill the entire fifty-foot Gottlieb Planetarium dome with movies and images. Bruenjes and Winter will help with the design, testing, and construction of the device. In addition, MakeKC and the HMS Beagle science store have volunteered workshop space and additional technical expertise along with help recruiting local high school students.

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The Story of Chickens: A Revolution: Amber Hansen: 1aehansen@gmail.com *The Story of Chickens* will debut in March 2012 with a ceremonial ribbon cutting for a chicken coop on wheels, and the installation of 5 heritage chickens. During the event, community members will be invited to share personal stories about their relationships with animals and to discuss the project.

During the opening reception, Revolution Mama Chicken House, located in Lawrence, KS, will display a variety of rare heritage chicken breeds, many of which are on the brink of becoming extinct. Information presented in the form of posters and plaques will explain how contemporary methods of raising and breeding chickens are causing these rare breeds to disappear.

The coop will be a nomadic sculpture that will relocate every 4 days. It will be created with the technical assistance of Cotter Mitchel and will be designed to be both functional and beautiful. A public message board in the form of a chalkboard will be mounted on it, to update and inform viewers about the birds and the project.

The chickens will inhabit the coop for one month. During this time many members of the community will become engaged through story telling, proximity, and caring for the birds. The project aims to create a daily interaction with animals on a communal level. Volunteers and community members alike will become guardians of the chickens and they will have the opportunity to build a relationship with the birds. In return the chickens will provide eggs and will live a social and comfortable life.

At the end of the month, the chickens will be removed from the coop and butchered in a humane way. The public will be invited, and encouraged to witness this phase of the life cycle that is often hidden from our perception. Such slaughter takes place on a mass scale every day, but each generation becomes further removed from this reality.

Participants will then be invited to a potluck that will take place a couple of days later, when the birds will be prepared for consumption by a professional chef. The meal will

take place at the Percolator, an alternative community-run space in downtown Lawrence.

The Chicken Story will make visible a group of animals that have become objectified through a lack of familiarity. By building a relationship with the birds, the project will transform the contemporary view of chickens as merely “livestock” to the beautiful and unique creatures they are, while promoting alternative and healthy processes of caring for them. It will also make visible local groups who are already making efforts to do so.

The public will be notified of the coop’s location via the Lawrence Journal World, so that they can watch its location as it moves throughout town, and GRIT magazine has shown interest in covering the event and blogging about the project.

Hansen: “Interacting with animals allows us a more complete understanding of humanity; it reminds us of our relationship with the natural world, and our responsibility in caring for it.”

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Community Projection Week: Daniel Parks: quixoticfusion.daniel@gmail.com The presentation of this project will occur over the course of one week. Each night, Parks will facilitate the creation of a unique projection art piece on the outside of a different community center or secondary school across the Kansas City Metro.

There will be two sections to the projection content at each performance. The first section will feature video that is inspired by the local community members, who will provide material for a professional video artist to work with. Alternatively, Parks will work with an amateur video artist from the community to help them create brief, high quality content to be projection mapped onto a building in their neighborhood.

The second section of projection content will be created in real-time by active participants. A range of simple and intuitive interactive tools will be provided to the audience so they can create a unique and living canvas on their building. This will include devices like the Xbox Kinect, video cameras, Wiimotes, Ipad, etc. used as control input devices, which will serve as a social medium to be explored for the majority of the night’s event. Parks has extensive experience working with this technology through his work with the Quixotic Fusion performance group.

The overall goals of the projection content are to be specific to the community and specific to the architecture of the provided building. The community may also add other performance elements to each evening as they desire, such as live music or dance performance. This will allow each performance to be unique to a specific community, and will create an experience that they can take ownership in.

The motivation for this project is to provide the opportunity to local communities to have their own unique experience with large-scale projection entertainments that they would not ordinarily be able to access. Another aim is to create an event for community members to come together in celebration of the institutions that serve public needs for that area.

All communities in the KC Metro will be eligible to apply to host these events. The final locations will be chosen to represent the greatest range of diversity in socio-economic status and geographical location. The physical nature of the building should also be suitable for a projection and/or performance area. Community applications will be evaluated based on a strong commitment by community leaders to create a successful event, and their willingness to use local outreach to create interest in the activity.

Each event will be free to the public.

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Resistant History: Caitlin Horsman: horsmonc@gmail.com This project aims to reframe political reform as a local activity by collecting stories of progressive change in the Kansas City area and making them available via the web to educators, citizens and artists. *Resistant History* will map sites of change in the history of our region through the creation of a group of films, a collection of documentation, and a series of downloadable neighborhood “tours” that engage the viewer in the urban environment. It will counterbalance a cultural focus on national elections and politics, by reminding its participants and audiences that our greatest political power may be local and personal.

For the initial content for the website, Horsmon will produce a documentary on activist teacher Corinthian Nutter, the Merriam Kansas Walker school boycott and the resulting integration of the Kansas schools in 1948, five years before the landmark Brown v. Board Supreme Court case. This change in the education system happened through the activism of a group of black parents and teachers in response to the local school district building a new elementary school for whites only. In protest, the parents of black students filed a lawsuit against the school district and organized a walkout, in collaboration with the teachers at the school who continued to instruct the students in local homes. The case resulting from the lawsuit eventually was heard by the Kansas Supreme Court. Teacher Corinthian Nutter testified before the court and later said: “I felt it was the right thing to do and that is what I did.” The final outcome was a ruling in favor of the students’ right to attend the new modern school.

Horsmon will also work with a documentary filmmaking class at UMKC to create a series of short documentaries that tell the stories of how progressive change was, or is, accomplished locally. These will be published on a website along with documentation of the background research for the films. Horsmon and the students will also create a series of “video tours” of areas of the city with histories of activism, made for mobile

devices so that they can be easily downloaded and immerse participants in the landscape of history. Using Google Maps, they will create an interactive map of the city populated with links to the sites of activist history. Class activities will be documented on a blog, and later Horsmon will create study guides connecting the films' content to larger questions of American and world history. These will be available for local educators to download.

Once the website is completed, there will be a series of launch events that connect the content to the communities from which the stories are derived. Community members will be invited to add to the stories discovered through this process, building a complexly layered map of how our local issues impact and relate to important contemporary issues and debates, and perhaps even enriching thinking about the meaning of citizenship.

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Field Trip Publishing: Eric Dobbins* & Kelly Clark: i.am.eric.dobbins@gmail.com This project aims to inspire emerging Kansas City area artists to consider experimenting with new art making practices, collaboration, and marketing. Additionally, it will engage new art audiences by producing affordable art multiples and maintaining a dynamic, active online presence, and initiate active distribution in a way that will bolster the region's art market and provide further financial support to local artists.

Over the course of the year, *Field Trip Publishing* will actively pursue 8 collaborative projects with emerging artists from the Kansas City Metro area. The results of each collaboration will be a union of each artist's conceptual motivations and the *Field Trip* team's conceptual and technical direction. Artists will be asked to work outside of their traditional media and methods as they collaborate with the team to conceive, design, produce, distribute and market expertly crafted, limited-edition work in a wide variety of art making practices. Examples of these works could include: prints and other paper goods, sticker sets, badges and pins, tote bags, tee shirts and wearables, housewares, 'zines and booklets, plush items, and more. The fruit of each collaboration will be exhibited in a final showcase and workshop to be held at the artist-run Wonder Fair space in Lawrence, Kansas, as well as at a venue in Kansas City.

Eric Dobbins and Kelly John Clark have been a part of the do-it-yourself handmade renaissance in the Kansas City region, and *Field Trip Publishing* is inspired by a passion for artistic collaboration and a devotion to the creation of unique, affordable, high quality art objects.

Additionally, *Field Trip* aims to address the contemporary studio practice model of 'artist-as-promoter/merchandise', as exemplified by a bevy of modern day art stars including Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami, Damien Hirst, and Nick Cave. The premium now placed on merchandising, promotion, and production has given rise to the need for

artists to supplement their own studio output with studio staff and sophisticated production techniques. *Field Trip Publishing* hopes to enable local, emerging talents to experiment with merchandising and manufacturing by serving as design, marketing and manufacturing collaborators.