



THE OUTSIDER

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MESSAGE FROM THE COLLECTIVE

Welcome to the second issue of The Outsider, the bimonthly newsletter of the Connection Salon Artists Collective. We aim to create something lively, useful, and a little different—especially for artists working beyond the usual art-world spotlight.

Outsider art is both a practice and a movement. It includes artists—sometimes formally trained—who create despite systemic barriers or limited institutional recognition, even though their impact on contemporary art has been profound and too often overlooked.

In every issue we'll spotlight an artist and an organization aligned with our mission to promote and empower underrepresented creators. You'll also find a literary corner plus news about exhibitions, events, and workshops.

We'd love your feedback, tips on what to include in future editions and links to upcoming events.

THE ARTIST - SEEMA SHAH

What brought you to the arts, and how would you describe your practice and your works?

I found my way to the arts gradually and without intention. During a particularly difficult period in my twenties, everything that had been holding me together up until that point began to unravel. I started journaling (and sought mental health support) for the first time in my life. Personal writing was a means to express my feelings and make sense of my experience; I had no idea it would eventually lead me to the arts. As the pages accumulated, I saw the potential to craft raw material in my journals into creative nonfiction stories. Writing became my focus until a worsening of chronic fatigue syndrome in 2013. Searching for an alternate creative outlet, I began making tiny collages from bed. I've been a collage artist ever since. I'm drawn to the medium because it allows me to access and express deeper aspects of myself. The spontaneous associations and unexpected juxtapositions that surface during the process tap into subconscious and embodied "knowing." This knowing is often conveyed through metaphor and symbolic imagery, translating what is beyond words and capturing a felt sense. I work intuitively and try not to force anything with my creative process. Sometimes I incorporate text, sometimes the work feels more powerful without it. Some collages are made with just paper, some are mixed media. I like to collage on a variety of surfaces, including vintage book covers. Whatever choices I make, the narratives I piece together are dark and questioning, and at times also tinged with humour.



What Quicksand



Untitled

What advice would you have for other outsiders from your experience?

- 1) Think about what artistic success means to you – Reflecting on what you hope to achieve with your art and who you want to be as an artist can serve as the foundation for how to approach your creative work and practice.
- 2) Be authentic in the creative choices you make – Try not to let external factors (e.g., the market, viewer feedback, sales, comparison with other artists, etc.) influence your creative process. Making decisions based on these factors can limit artistic exploration and growth, and steer you away from creating art that is the most authentic and truly unique to you.
- 3) Be intentional in how you share your work with the world – Share what you genuinely feel is your best work. Search for opportunities that you find exciting, personally meaningful, and feel like a good fit. This approach helps solidify your identity as an artist. Avoid making decisions based solely on what will maximize your exposure and/or look good on your resume. If you commit to an opportunity that doesn't excite you, you may close yourself off to an opportunity that does.
- 4) Filter advice through the lens of your own experience – We all have different life circumstances, creative rhythms, and personal definitions of success. What is helpful for one person may not be for another. Much can be gained by learning from other artists, but don't just follow advice without thinking about it how it relates to your experience.

BUILDING THE NETWORK - OUTSIDERS AND OTHERS

Tell us about yourself, how you came to do the work that you're presently engaged in, and briefly about the organization.

My name is Yuri Arajs and I am the Artistic Director and Curator at Outsiders and Others which is a nonprofit organization focused on bringing nontraditional artists to the forefront. These artists generally include self-taught individuals, outsiders, or people living with a disability. The gallery has a new exhibition every month, presents artist talks, workshops and special events.

I have worked in the arts sector and been a practicing artists for over 30 years now. When I was in my 20's I started working at Interact Center for the Visual and Performing arts in Minneapolis, USA. Interact is a center for artists living disabilities that is run by practicing artists of all abilities. I worked in the art studio assisting artists and later created a gallery for their artwork and became the Gallery and Visual Art Studio Director. This was the place that opened my eyes to alternative modes of creativity and put me on a path that focused on working with non traditional artists.

Since then I have had the opportunity to work at many arts organizations, galleries, and have worked with 100's of artists. It's been an amazing journey so far.

In addition, I am the Gallery Director at The Cultch and I am the art installer at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre and The Annex.



Untitled by Jack Procter

What advice or suggestions would you give to underrepresented artists?

1. Keep making your artwork and make that your priority. The creative process is where the magic happens and the more you explore the more you learn about yourself and your work.
2. Be realistic about your expectations. Being an artist is being a business and it comes with a huge amount of work and responsibilities.
3. Ask for the help you need it. Artists always help artists and we are lucky that it is that way.
4. Don't compare yourself to any other artist. Your artwork is always unique to you as is your experience and your journey. That is what makes your artwork unique to you.
5. When applying for an exhibition or call for artists, send in and complete everything they ask you to in the way they ask you to, and nothing more. They have a reason why they ask what they do even if it doesn't make sense to you. And don't send in additional information they didn't ask you for.
6. Be positive. There are so many artists and only so many opportunities for them. Don't get frustrated when you don't get into an exhibition because it happens to most of the people who apply. Just apply for the next show and keep going.



Untitled by Steve Cvinar

LITERARY CORNER - GACHET WRITERS GROUP

Founded in April 2024 by longtime Gallery Gachet member Bruce Ray, the Gallery Gachet Writers Group focuses on the art of writing. We are a democratically run group that shares stories, provides feedback, and engages in writing exercises, including automatic writing. Members share their views on literature and art, celebrating diverse perspectives and styles. We aim to promote self-direction and open dialogue about mental health and the problem of stigma in a safe, inclusive environment. The group meets every Friday morning from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm at The Recovery Cafe, located at 620 Clark Drive. All are welcome to join.

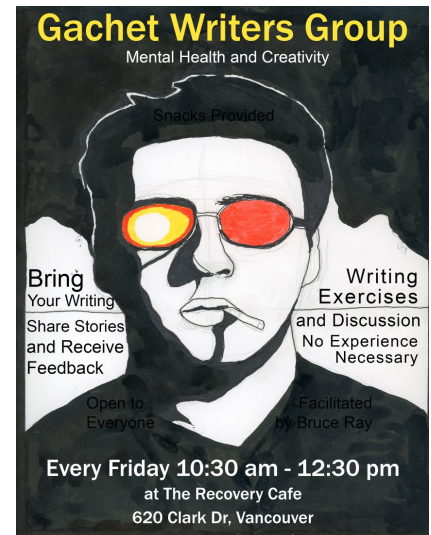
The Nature of Dreams by Bruce Ray

Dream Reality

It is said that 'things of a similar quality affect each other.' Some dreams are sticky and other dreams are smooth. The soul is a magnet that only attracts things that are of a particular nature. Nightmares are things that release negative energies. Dreams about a journey are about life. Dreams about water refer to the Source. It is a tragedy that people don't know their dreams. We must be able to see our reflection in the dark mirror. We must be able to feed from the forbidden fruit. These visions remain inside us long after they've been experienced. Some become part of our spirits and grow like transplanted flowers. Others are quickly forgotten as we wake up in the dawn. Though we don't know it -dreams are as real as waking life -everywhere we go there are images. They hide before us in the moment -these symbols of great meaning. If we recognize them -we have what is called an "epiphany." This surprising flash of insight is taken as the realization that we are in fact in the middle of a dream -and we say to ourselves; 'I am dreaming.' All souls of thought yearn to see the sacred vision -and in this way they are distracted from practical necessities. A poet says: "This world is not good enough for me." He begins his conversation with God -and is caught in the irony of self-direction. All of this causes us to be alienated from this reality we were born into. Dreams are dangerous -but so is life and all of it's choices. If I have true faith I can understand the deeper inclination. I see by the reflected light of my inward sight all the things that I've made with my mind. Soon I learn to read the book of time and to comprehend the metaphors. In this way I provoke answers. It's a curse to be obvious and a blessing to be subtle.

"Happiness and contentment, equability of mind and meaningfulness of life – these can be experienced only by the individual and not by a State, which, on the one hand, is nothing but a convention agreed to by independent individuals, and on the other, continually threatens to paralyze and suppress the individual."

— C.G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*



COMMUNITY NEWS

In this section we want to share news, relevant information and projects from our community that resonate with our goal. We hope they will be of interest to you and invite you to send us events that we can post.

Upcoming Events with Connection Salon at the Gathering Place Community Centre:

Art Talks in Plain English

Florence-Ariel Tremblay

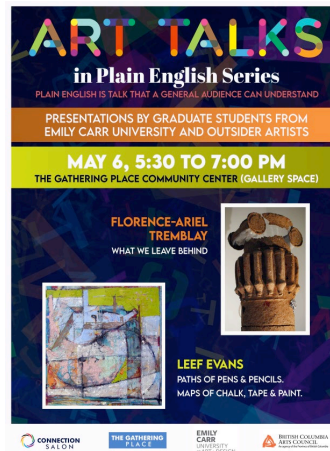
- What We Leave Behind

Leef Evans

- Paths of Pens & Pencils.

- Maps of Chalk, Tape & Paint.

May 6 5:30-7:00pm



Gallery Exhibition

The Art of Overcoming

May 8 - June 21

Meet the Artist

Performance by Poet Kevin Spent

May 14 5:30-7:00pm

Other News

Voice of Hope

Saturday, May 23, 2026 1 to 3 pm

At the Eastside Cultural Centre aka The Cultch
1895 Venables, Vancouver, BC

There will be performances and a panel discussion.

This event is free and sponsored by the BC Schizophrenia Society.

It's also viewable on zoom. Please RSVP at bcss.org/voicesofhope



Gallery Gachet Writers Group

Gallery Gachet Writers Group will be participating in this year's DTES Writers Festival where we will be launching our chapbook, *Write Like a Deer*, a collection of experimental fiction curated by 2026 Gallery Gachet Writer-in-Residence Suparna Choudhury.

Carnegie Writers Group

The Downtown Eastside holds a powerful tradition of storytelling—one rooted in activism, resilience, and the amplification of voices too often left unheard. We warmly invite you to join us at the DTES Writers Festival. Come to listen and engage, to learn and share, and to grow together. With over 30 workshops and events, free of charge, mainly taking place at Carnegie Community Centre, and other neighbourhood locations, like RayCam, Oppenheimer Park, and VPL Strathcona. Keep an eye out for a full festival guide, coming soon!!

If you want to know more about us or are interested in joining the collective, please email us at connectionsalon9@gmail.com.

For feedback, ideas, and news, please include "Newsletter" in the subject line.

