

Home Sick at the Trolley Barn



The exhibition *Home Sick*, currently on view at the Trolley Barn through April 1, is a collaboration between multiple Poughkeepsie arts organizations and is the pilot program of The Art Effect's Youth Curatorial Program. The project came about through conversations between Bart Thurber, The Anne Hendricks Bass Director of The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center and Nicole Fenichel-Hewitt, Executive Director of the Art Effect, who share a vision to support the arts in Poughkeepsie. They invited their staff to brainstorm collaborative ways to strengthen The Art Effect's programming and engage the community with high-caliber arts experiences, while also creating rich educational opportunities. The discussion led to the creation of a new program that would involve a professional curator to guide youth in organizing an exhibition. Mary-Kay Lombino, Deputy Director and the Emily Hargroves Fisher '57 and Richard B. Fisher Curator at The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center was invited to share her experience as a guest juror of The Art Effect's first youth-led exhibition.

Bart Thurber and the Loeb Art Center are keen to cultivate and strengthen relationships with external partners like The Art Effect, and the Trolley Barn gallery seemed like a natural fit for the inaugural exhibition. Thurber commented: "As a new community-based organization aimed at empowering Poughkeepsie's youth through engagement with the arts we immediately recognized the opportunity for potential collaboration." The Art Effect was founded in 2018 as a result of the merger of the two Poughkeepsie nonprofits Spark Media Project and Mill Street Loft. Their mission is to empower young people to develop their creative voice to shape their future and bring about positive social change.

Teachers in The Art Effect's existing programs invited students to express interest, and four youth were invited to participate. The curator Mary-Kay Lombino and the youth were responsible for planning, curating, installing, and programming an international juried exhibition. They worked together to develop a theme and a call for submissions. The youth participants drew on their own experience to come up with *Home Sick* as a way to capture how the concept of being "home sick" can take on multiple meanings during a global pandemic. The show was open to artists internationally as a conscious decision to include diverse art and voices that would engage and inspire the community. As Nicole Fenichel-Hewitt of The Art Effect pointed out, "the call struck a chord, attracting over 600 submissions by artists from across the globe."



Remarking on the process, Lombino explained that she and the youth curators reviewed the submitted artwork online and took notes on their impressions. They met in person three times, with the first meeting at The Loeb Art Center. Lombino walked around the galleries with the youth and talked about curating and ways of looking at and thinking about art. During the second meeting they projected all the images, discussed them, and made the final selections. Next, they met in the Trolley Barn gallery to decide on the layout of the exhibition. Due to COVID-19 they met in large open spaces where they were able to keep their distance but still work together.

Lombino and the youth reviewed 600-plus submissions and selected 72 artists to include in the exhibition, a time-consuming process. They shared their opinions and made joint decisions based on the quality of the work and how well it fit in with the theme. *Home Sick* features a wide range of mediums, including film, painting, photography, prints, multi-media works, ceramics, sculpture, textiles, and soft sculpture installation. The selected artwork was created by artists near and far, from Poughkeepsie to Istanbul.



Lombino's favorite part of the project was the process. "I got to know the students and got to hear their opinions about the art. It was a true collaboration which made the process more engaging and fun for me." She learned from the students as her



collaborators brought their own experiences to the table. The different ways artists responded to the *Home Sick* theme and to the circumstances of 2020 was also instructive for Lombino. “Everyone’s experience is personal and unique,” she commented, “but the art submitted was a reminder that, in some ways, the pandemic is a collective experience that we all are going through [and] ... that art can be a source of inspiration and connection in difficult times.”

The *Home Sick* jurying process allowed the youth in the program to engage in a global artistic network and to see how their own interests are reflected on by artists from around the world. The Art Effect plans to build upon *Home Sick* and the pilot Youth Curatorial Program to present additional youth-led exhibitions in the Trolley Barn throughout 2021.

Fenichel-Hewitt remarked that “this unique

mix of approaches to presenting art will become a permanent piece of The Art Effect’s portfolio of programs designed to strengthen our community and showcase the positive impacts of arts and arts education.” The Youth Curatorial Program also potentially opens up career pathways for students in museum and gallery administration. The Art Effect will continue to develop the Trolley Barn gallery and programming, and they plan to create a Youth Arts Empowerment Zone (YAEZ)—a youth arts district along Main Street in Poughkeepsie, with The Art Effect at the Trolley Barn as the anchor arts institution.

Loeb Art Center Director Bart Thurber is optimistic that the collaboration between Poughkeepsie’s arts organizations will continue. He commented: “We are hopeful that the success of this effort will lead to more partnerships with The Art Effect, since—although we have different missions—we believe that we share the common goal of serving the Poughkeepsie community and especially its youth by building capacity to make meaningful connections—intellectual, creative, emotional—through the visual arts across time, place, and cultures.”

Home Sick is on view from February 25 to April 1, 2021.