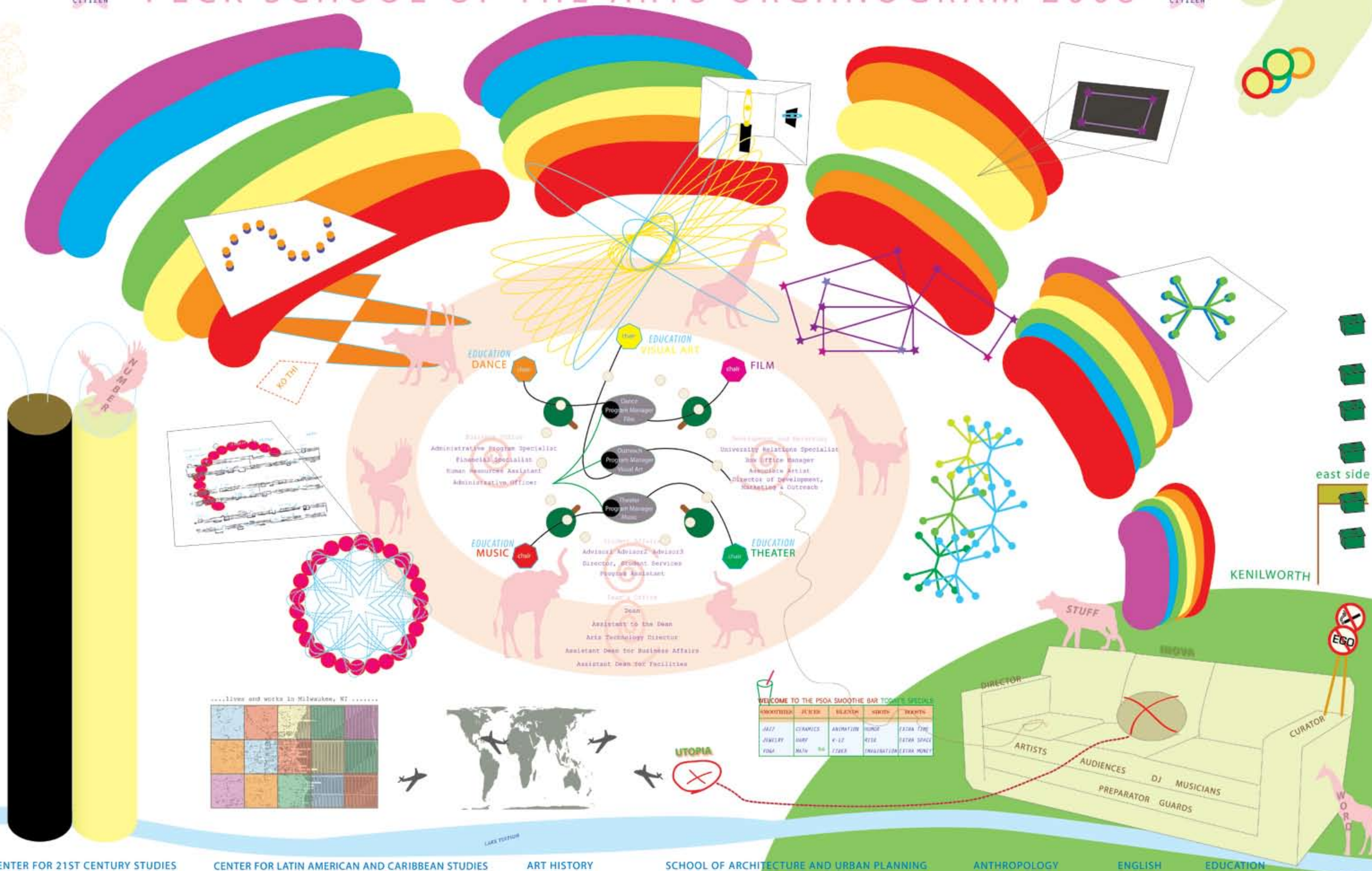


MILWAUKEE LGBT FILM/VIDEO FESTIVAL MATA YMCA NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE DANCEWORKS MILWAUKEE CHORAL ARTISTS UNRULY MUSIC  
MILWAUKEE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA SKYLIGHT OPERA THEATRE HAL LEONARD PUBLISHING COMPANY DREAMTIME MILWAUKEE SHAKESPEARE  
LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER WOODLAND PATTERN BOOK CENTER WALKER'S POINT CENTER FOR THE ARTS AIDS RESOURCE CENTER OF WISCONSIN  
FLORENTINE OPERA COMPANY BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS GREEN GALLERY MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM MILWAUKEE YOGA CENTER WILD SPACE DANCE CO





Picture of a Picture

All institutions are subject to spring cleaning. On a visit to the UWM Golda Meier Library to research this essay on Adelheid Mers's *Peck School of the Arts Organogram 2008* project, I noticed a “free” shelf in the lobby, where books discarded from the collection were being given away. For free! For keeps! A 1971 title, *Elements of Industrial Systems Engineering*, fairly leapt off the shelves into my hands (preoccupied as I was with Mers's diagramming of human social systems). This fortuitous finding offered a way into the essay, a circumstance Mers herself might appreciate, given her generous acceptance of similar coincidences in the research stages of her art work.

Mers came to prominence in Chicago as a sculptor working with light and audience interaction, investigating two of the primary materials of art experience. Her recent diagram work continues in this vein, though her project now encapsulates the support structures of art—audiences, institutions, donors—with their particular social economies. So it seems a natural evolution for Mers to turn to the art school as a means of further elucidating her project, which combines social research with a steadily analytical approach that never disdains intuitive whimsy.<sup>1</sup> Inova and its home institution within the university, the Peck School of the Arts (PSOA), invited Mers to bring her diagramming practice to the school, in part to help the PSOA reflect on itself during a time of transition.<sup>2</sup>

What exactly is the PSOA *Organogram*? It does not analyze a problem or propose a solution. It does not describe any particular person within the school's population, but presents positions within the departmental structure and loosely diagrams their interrelationships. The piece, in its rawest intent, is a spur—not merely to recognize the interdependent relationships within a human-built structure (anyone working within this structure can't help but bump up against these interdependencies every day), but to recognize that each person shapes each position as they go, in some balance of static dependence on the prior model and dynamic change brought on by situational inspiration and need.<sup>6</sup>

The *Organogram* is not a scientific document, nor is it an illustration. As in any well-made portrait, it is a somewhat fantastical picture dependent on the interchange between artist and subject, a reflection of the tension between the subject's desire to be portrayed a certain way and the artist's aspiration to draw out the essence beyond either the subject or maker's particular vision. Mers responds to what the subjects give in physical presence, attitude, and their own slices of the informational puzzle, and then synthesizes this bevy of available information with her own viewpoints and the notional picture that emerges in her head as she begins to shape the diagram. In the case

of the *PSOA Organogram*, the subject is not only *in* a shifting moment but *is* a shifting moment. The piece exposes the fallacy of organizational stability: any successful organization undergoes constant adjustments to adapt to changing conditions. In capturing this dynamic picture, Mers sees herself as a storyteller.

I was unfamiliar with the word “organogram” before Mers's work, but it is not invented for this purpose. It is in common usage among human resource and human systems specialists.<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia distinguishes the organogram from the “organizational chart” by the use of names instead of designations or titles, which gives us a clue to where Mers is headed with her project. Names, rather than titles, are of course a more personal way to describe an organization; they suggest that the real individual is valued above the abstract position.

Though Mers uses titles in her PSOA *Organogram*, other examples like the *Hyde Park Center Organogram 2006* present the art center's constituent members first as color-coded silhouette profiles (red for public, brown for funders, etc.) and as correspondingly-colorful flower bursts exploding outwards from the abstractly-rendered organizational structure. It may at first seem ironic or simplistic for Mers to have turned to title designations for individuals in the PSOA, but in this decision another fallacy is exposed. The idea of an “individual” within a corporate structure is misleading: there are no wholly independent beings within such a system. Mers's conception of the artist as interdependent being within a flowing set of influences and supports mirrors Picabia's drawing of the Dada movement as a living idea with many contributors. “Interindividual” is perhaps a better word, or the phrase “I am because you are,” according to the ancient concept, *ubuntu*.<sup>8</sup>

Organizational structures that depend too much on the notion of individuality might not fulfill their purpose as well as those that place the activity of the whole above the contribution of the singular person. Though the quality of “individuality” is essential to teaching and learning in an academic environment, selfishness within the group structure can adversely affect the purpose of the whole. In Mers's diagram, the student body is not directly pictured, but is present in the other, less explanatory forms: the rainbow of irregular lozenges that simultaneously describe departmental independence (individual color) and unity (joined in the common image of the spectrum); and in the strange animal-hybrids that illustrate the interdisciplinary approaches so prevalent in contemporary art practice chafing at their departmental leashes. Her use of the rainbow is no accident: Mers fearlessly introduces utopic thinking in her process, encouraging her provisional group to envision their ideal art school. Why not? Though utopias are impossible as realizations, they can provide signposts and goals. While Mers effectively shows the difficulties of remodeling academic structures to accommodate the evolving art landscape, she nudges the institution towards getting out of its own way, towards adopting some of these exploratory creatures. If ever there were a positive definition of the word “chimera,” this would be it.

Mers landed on campus not as invader or colonizer or impinger, but as a hybrid form of researcher herself: analysand, therapist, instigator. She leaves behind a portrait of a human organization at a particularly uncertain moment in time: transitioning between leaders, between on-campus and more publicly-accessible off-campus sites and activities, and in budgetary circumstances where resources are dwindling and optimism waits on the horizon.

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This is where *Elements of Industrial Systems Engineering* comes back into play. Following the edicts of happenstance, I opened to a random page and (of course) found what is probably the single question in the book most relevant to the subject: “What are the factors that determine sociological structures, and at what points and in what ways can systems designers impinge on these matters?”<sup>9</sup> A portrait is certainly commissioned, on some level, for the subject to contemplate how it is viewed by another. With her *PSOA Organogram* exhibition, Mers champions hybridity in formal approaches, interdisciplinary academics, and self-empowered change. Whether any changes or alterations occur within the PSOA structure is up to the school and its constituents, and now it has another viewpoint to measure itself against.

I'm told by UWM instructional design librarian Kristin Woodward that my copy of *Elements of Industrial Systems Engineering* met its fate primarily because the library is tidying its shelves prior to remodeling. Mine was a second copy; another copy is still in circulation. This one met its fate because it had been checked out only three times since it was acquired (most likely in 1974), compared to the other copy's nine checkouts. And maybe because A.J. Lindemann name-stamped the poor book all over the place. Public libraries are not supposed to be about private ownership, but if I were to diagram the life of this book, I'd put A.J.'s name on the free buttons.

Nicholas Frank, Curator

Notes

1. Mers has diagrammed an art gallery, art museum, art center and an arts administration master's thesis, among other subjects. See the artist's website, adelheidmers.com, for more on the scope of her project.
2. Transition from longtime dean to interim dean, and new permanent dean hired during the exhibition; also modifications and realignments within and between departments to accommodate the need for teaching of multidisciplinary practices like video installation, musical theater and conceptual metalsmithy.
3. The video was shot and edited by Chris Whittaker, a graduate student in the Department of Film.
4. [http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/s15427625tcq1304\\_5.pdf](http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/s15427625tcq1304_5.pdf).
5. Miwon Kwon, “The (Un)sitings of Community,” in *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge: MIT Press (2004), p. 154. Mers's work can be understood as combining Kwon's notions of community-based art as a “descriptive practice,” and “collective artistic praxis” as a “projective enterprise.” A related example of an artist working with “provisional” depiction is Althea Thauberger. Like a choreographer, Thauberger “puts on” a project with an existing social group of willing participants, who through all stages shape the project in terms of direction, form and content.
6. This probably serves as a workable definition of the teacher--and it must always be remembered that as a unit, the PSOA is a teacher, not merely a goal-derived production system, whereby students enter degreeless and leave degreed—not that the teacher is always aware of how learning is realized.
7. One website concerned with proper British-English usage places its coinage at c. 1952 (<http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-org1.htm>), as a truncation of “organizational diagram.”
8. From *BBC News Magazine* online, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/5388182.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/5388182.stm), in the reporter Sean Coughlan's definition. Also Archbishop Desmond Tutu is quoted, “Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language ... It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours.’”
9. Whitson Blair, *Elements of Industrial Systems Engineering*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall (1971), p. 169.

Artist Statement

What you see on the reverse of this poster, and also on exhibit at Inova/Kenilworth in a much larger incarnation, is a snapshot of the Peck School of the Arts, a roughly month-long exposure I took this February by conducting an online survey, inserting a questionnaire into the online segment of a seminar, studying the PSOA website, and meeting with students, staff, faculty, donors and alumni during four day-long visits. I want to thank everyone who participated, allowing me to reflect you back to you. You can probably recognize your contributions. I call this kind of a snapshot an organogram, a map of an organization.

The organograms I make are always site-specific, created for the organization that will exhibit them. I make every effort to create organograms that are not dry and hierarchical, like their business world counterparts, but poetic maps that show how members of an organization feel about it, and what their projections for the future are. I want this to be a useful picture. Outside of art worlds, useful pictures exist in abundance. They are teaching aides, way-finding designs, road maps and corporate charts. They visualize landscapes, strategies, metaphors, data, concepts, or other information. As visual aides they serve communication, but they are also tools of analysis, employed to create new knowledge.

As I am borrowing and stealing from this wide array of visual languages, I do intend to create opportunities for new knowledge to be created, in the conversations that have led to this map, and in the conversations that it will spark.

I also want to thank Nicholas Frank and Polly Morris, for inviting me, for encouraging this project, and for arranging for everything that was needed to accomplish it.

About Adelheid Mers

Adelheid Mers is a visual artist who lives and works in Chicago, where she makes diagrams after texts and organograms, maps of organizations. She is an associate professor in the Arts Administration and Policy Program of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has served on the editorial board of *WhiteWalls* since 1995 and on the curatorial board of ThreeWalls Solo since 2007. adelheidmers.org

Institute of Visual Arts

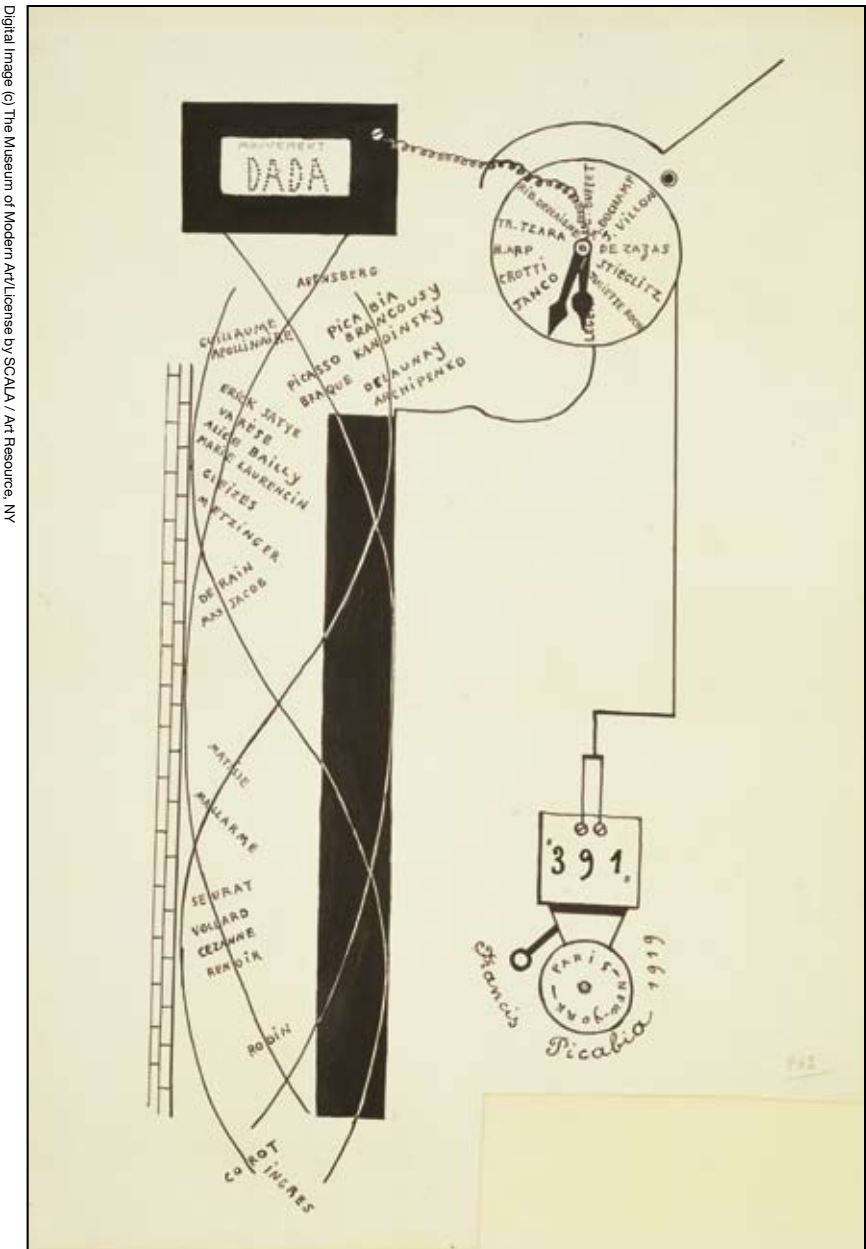
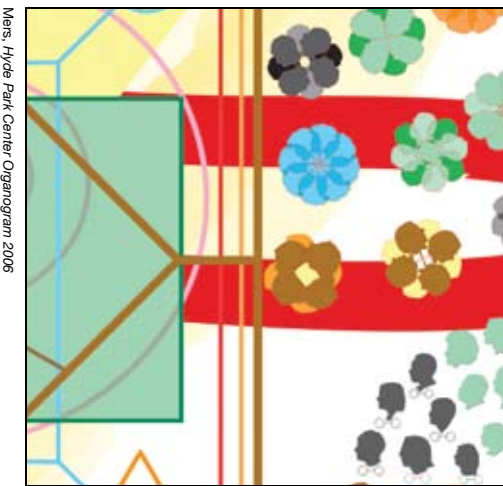
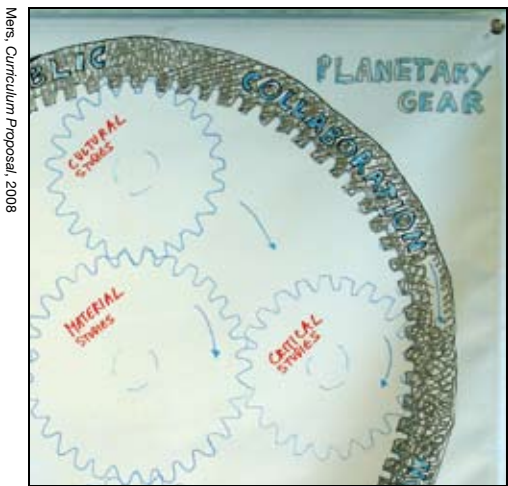
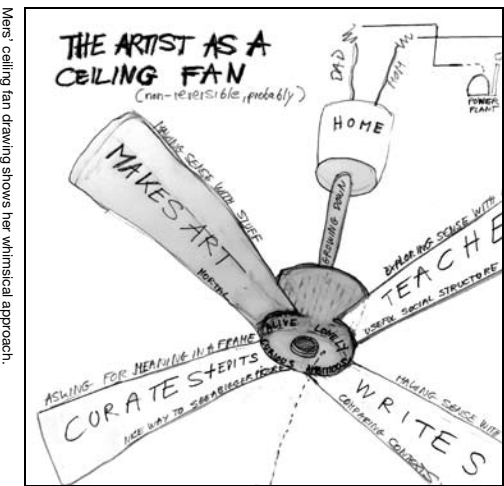
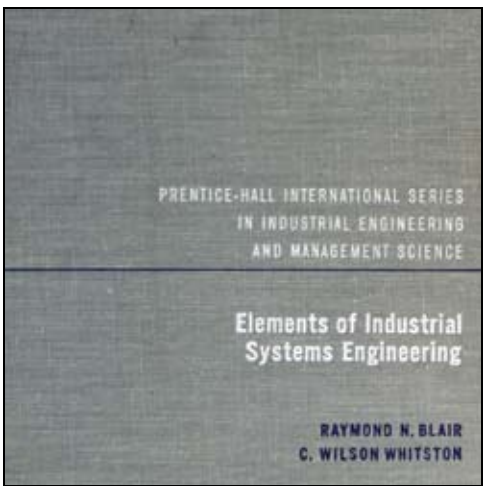
Since 1996, the Institute of Visual Arts (Inova) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Peck School of the Arts has established an international reputation as a contemporary art research center. It is comprised of three gallery spaces in the Peck School of the Arts: Inova/Kenilworth, Inova/Arts Center and Inova/Zelazo (the Mary L. Nohl Galleries).

The mission of the Institute of Visual Arts is to engage the general and university publics with contemporary art from around the world through exhibitions and programs. Inova is recognized for the high quality of its programs and for the opportunity it offers artists to experiment in the creation of new work.

Bruce Knackert, Director of Galleries  
Nicholas Frank, Curator

Credits  
Editor: Polly Morris  
Design: Craig Kroeger

Peck School of the Arts  
Scott Emmons, Interim Dean



Picabia, Francis (1879-1953) © ARS, NY  
Dada Movement. 1919. Pen and ink on paper, 20 1/8 x 14 1/4". Purchase. (285.1937) The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.