

# ARTISAN TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS IN MAIL ART



## Introduction

CRAFTS IS A POPULAR ACTIVITY THAT IS AT LEAST AS A TERM, KNOWN TO ALL PEOPLE. Mail art, on the other hand, is not that easy to explain, or find a definition for, that easily. We do know that the artist Ray Johnson who can be associated with the Fluxus art movement –founded the ‘New York Correspondence School of Art’ in 1962 and is thus seen as the founder of the mail art movement that developed in the 1960's and 1970's. Its aim was to create the opportunity for a direct exchange of art, ideas and information among artists in different countries without interference from art dealers or galleries. Crafts can also, in some sense, be considered as a home-made, outsider art form, wishing to keep distance from the formal art scene. Correspondence art is an elusive art form, more variegated by nature than, say, painting. Where a painting involves paint and a support surface, correspondence art and crafts, can appear as any one of dozens of media transmitted through the mail.

Craft is deeply rooted in all cultures around the globe, and lends its influences across borders. From its multi-sourced inception, mail art is a network language that embraces the importance of multiculturalism. It is an open, democratic form by which multiple, shared identities exist and flourish together. Mail artists often fight for social justice and create projects honoring cultural diversity. Mail artists celebrate equal authority, and build interrelationships between gender, ethnicity, and class; all essential objectives in the tumultuous era we live in. Mail art is often an invisible endeavor that reaps no profits for its advocates. Nevertheless, there is a relentless, creative quest in mail art that has endured for over fifty years, a thirst for tolerance, reciprocity, and uncensored creative exchange around the world.

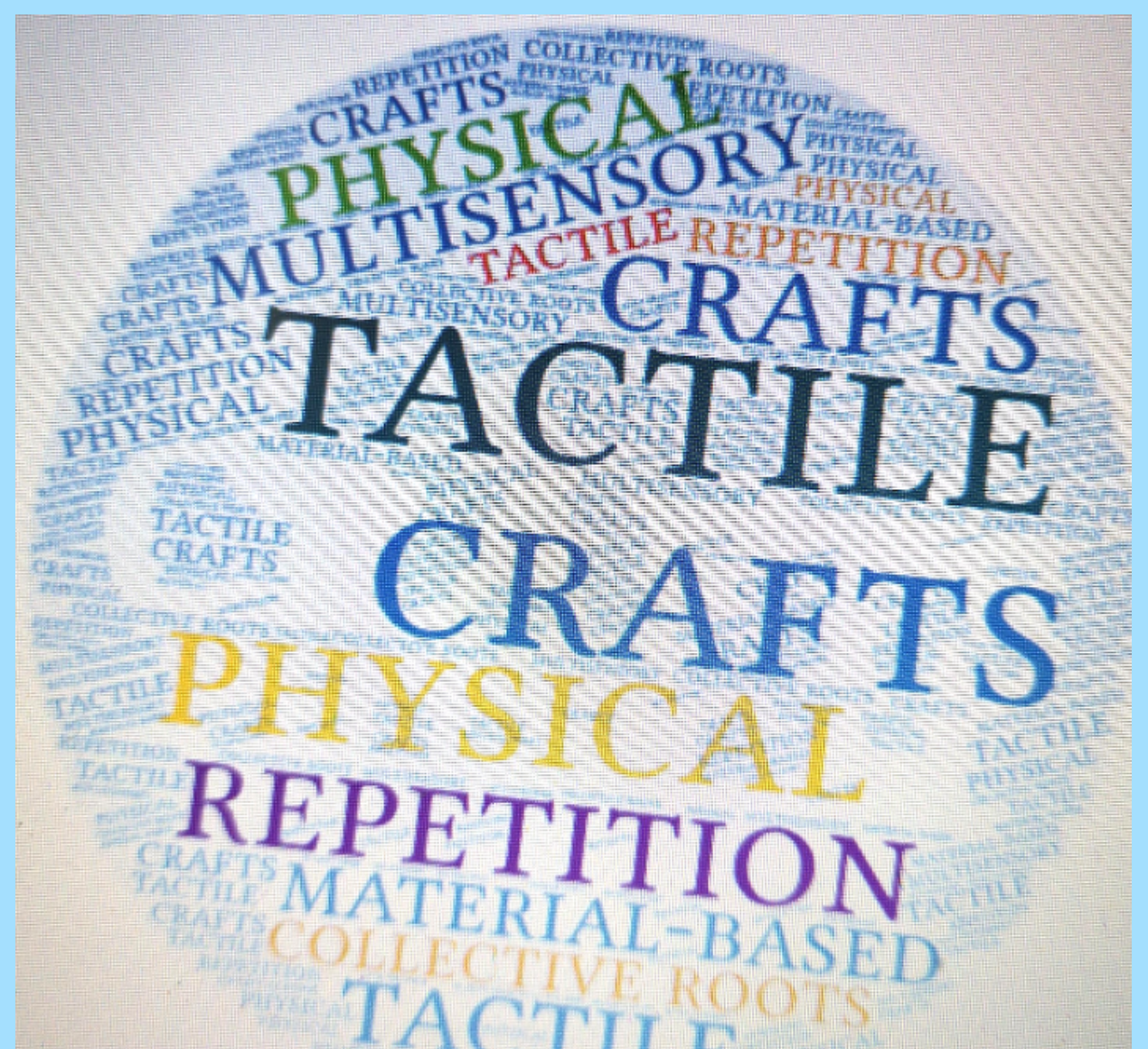
One example of the use of crafts as art media is seen in the art catalog based on John Heartfield's satirical ironic photomontage "German Natural History. Metamorphoses" (1934), a detail in the "the death's-head moth", patterns with different mediums post production; pastis; craftwork; handiwork; craftsmanship; participative acts; robotics; critical vehicles; public art; mail art; graffiti; speech acts. ([https://www.academia.edu/51001373/Cipo\\_vehicles\\_mail\\_art\\_stencil\\_embroideries](https://www.academia.edu/51001373/Cipo_vehicles_mail_art_stencil_embroideries))

ARTISAN TECHNIQUES ARE CHARACTERISTICALLY HAND MAKING TECHNIQUES.

They involve coordination of senses, physical activity, gathering of materials and tools and planning beforehand. Artisanal workflow includes tactile, physical, cognitive and emotional aspects, that are emphasized by the often repetitive nature of the workflow. Multisensory experiences based on the use of natural and/or living materials evoke memories, ideas and conversation that can open up new ways and needs of communication. In case the creators/participants are able to walk in nature, the preparation of the work can be just as refreshing as they collect and feel all leaves, branches, flowers, cones etc that they gather from the woods and meadows. gathering connects people to the past, as we all come from the background of farming, which is a collective work done in close connection with nature.

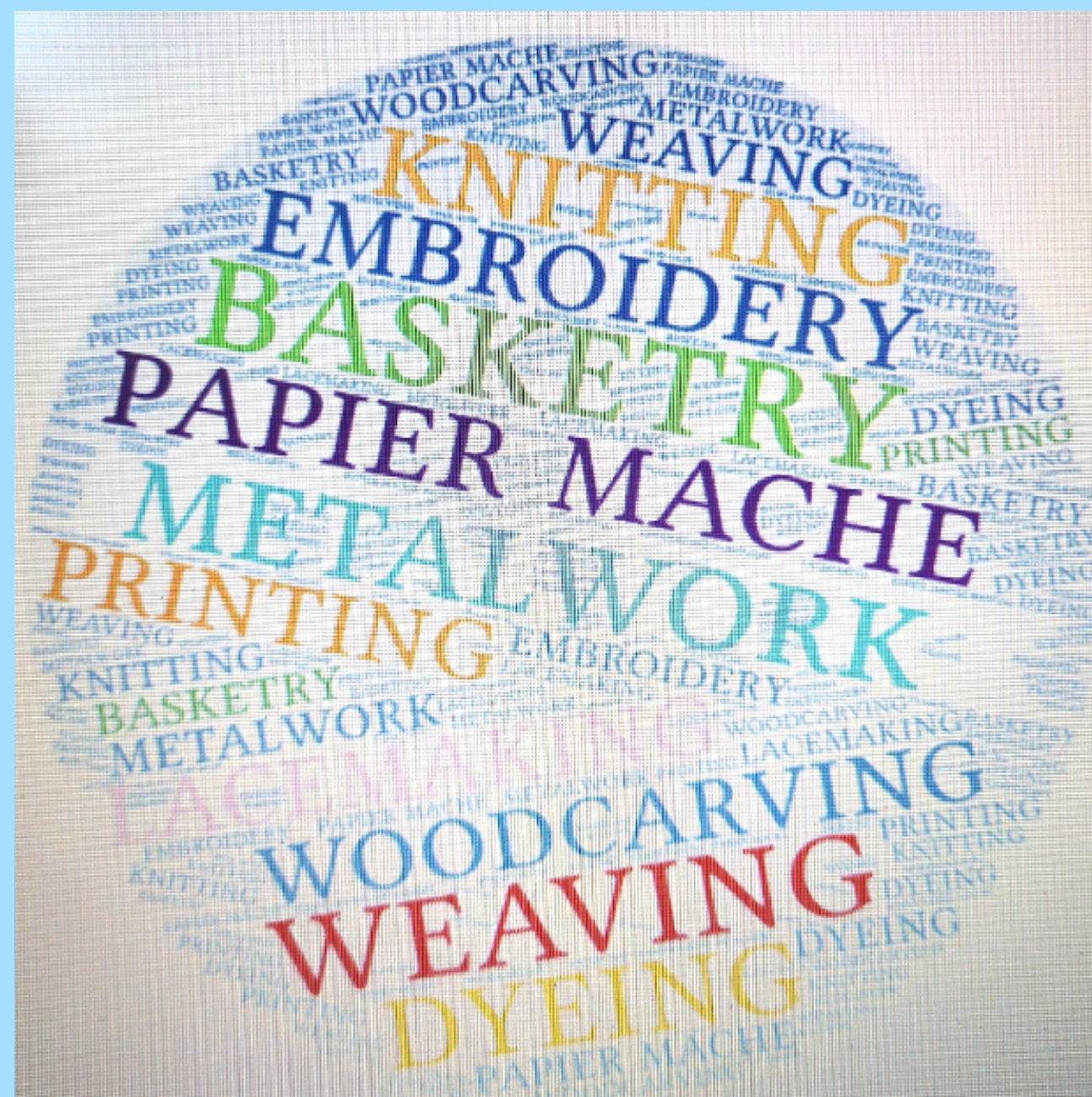
### Crafts and making are:

- tactile
- physical
- repetitive
- multisensory
- material-based
- have collective roots in, for example, farming



## Examples of usable techniques for mail art workshops and short activity moments with seniors onsite

- metalwork: wire, reliefs on soft metals like aluminum plates
- mixed media
- paper mache
- woodcarving
- basketry
- weaving
- embroidery
- lacemaking, braiding, macrame
- knitting
- printing
- dyeing, botanical dyes
- ceramics



Print making and carving are used to produce a special form of mail art, artistamps.

The term artistamp (a portmanteau of the words "artist" and "stamp") or artist's stamp refers to a postage stamp-like art form used to depict or commemorate any subject its creator chooses. Artistamps are a form of Cinderella stamps in that they are not valid for postage, but they differ from forgeries or bogus illegal stamps in that typically the creator has no intent to defraud postal authorities or stamp collectors.

Online crafts workshops are doable also, and in the end of this module we'll present an example of an embroidery workshop arranged by textile artisan Leena Illukka in cooperation with the Finnish Crafts Museum.

## Adapting into the role of a crafts & mail art trainer

Adapting into the role of a trainer may be scary if you are an adult trainer with no expertise on crafts. It may help if you remember that the scale of the work is small and needs only a restricted space. The work can also include friendly materials, everyday techniques, focus on handmade well-being, be in familiar forms and suit for the visually impaired. Crafting is not the only thing that can be in the focus; but multisensory materials, collecting natural materials or just remembering long making processes can bring along the atmosphere of making.

Reflect on these aspects of making before the workshop session:

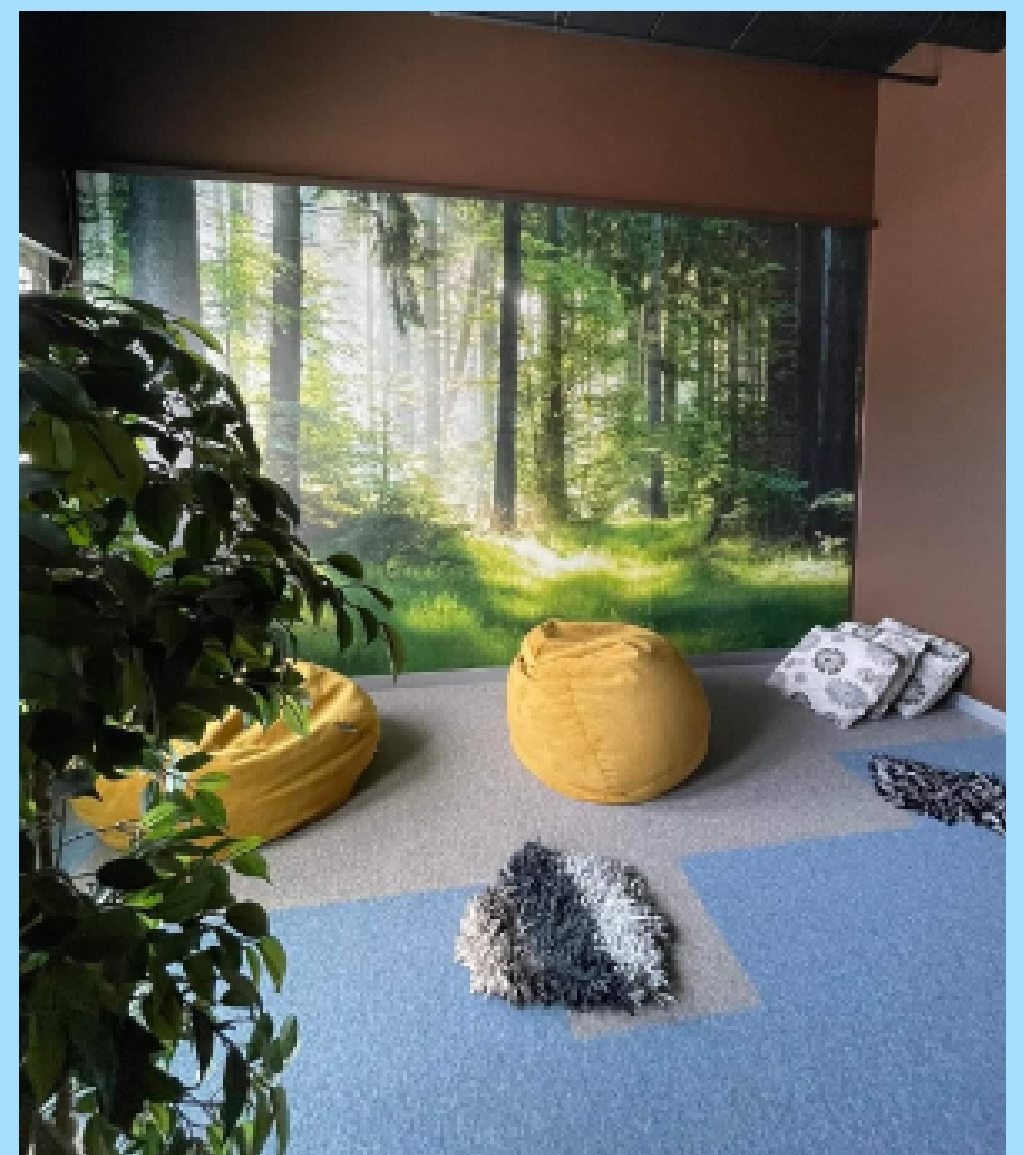
- 1 Approach\_respect for skills and materials in general; gifts of nature and traditions no matter how small or unproductive atm.
- 2 Experiential methods; choose various smells, surface, temperatures, weight, colours.
- 3 Returning in time to explore and find valuable human activities that bring up good feelings. Take your time; long processes
- 4 Contemplating one's own aging and growth. Let the sensory work affect you as well. Enjoy!



**Modus Association trainers Behnaz Fazelian and Anni Jokinen in an enjoyable workshop in Thessaloniki 2022.**

## Step-by-step crafts mail art workshop

Inspiration to choose a multisensory workshop came from an excursion to the Finnish Autism Foundation's sensory room. The nature-based sensory room is designed for day activities of clients with autism spectrum. The sensory room unit in Kotka, Finland, has had a strikingly calming effect on autistic people. The room has been designed and made, in part, by the users in cooperation with social worker Kati Kervinen. .



# MULTISENSORY CARD WORKSHOP



**TIME FRAME:** 90 minutes with two 10 minutes breaks

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:** 5 per trainer

**ENVIRONMENT:** airy, warm, well lit, accessible, resistant to clutter and paint, with running water. If made outdoors, steady seating possibilities need to be arranged for participants to rest and work.

**CREATIONS:** Mail art can include items that are sent in an envelope or without an envelope, like Riitta Ikonen. An envelope can be crafted as an art piece. The item sent in an envelope can be a ready 2- or 3-dimensional card or a tool/ material for the receiver to use. Unfinished crafts can be sent in mail and crafted further by the receiver. Online workshops can be arranged using materials sent in mail.

**SUPPLIES:** natural materials gathered from familiar places or harvested from the woods. Flowers and leaves from the home yard, sticks and needles from lake shore pines etc. Double-sided tape, transparent tape, glue, wooden spatulas to mix colors or spread glue, paint, paper, cardboard, remnants of leather, fabric, wood, metal. Envelopes.

**TOOLS:** scissors, paper guillotine, hole puncher, DIY tools.

Use household tools to produce materials, like hole punchers to produce a pile of confetti from half-dried leaves or flower petals.

## OTHER MATERIALS

- textile: cotton, linen, silk, wool
- wood
- glass, transparent plastic sheets
- clay (ceramic), modeling air dry clays
- metal; soft metal plates, folios etc
- scraps and zero waste; yarn, cloth, wood etc
- natural materials:
- harvested materials
- re-use and zero waste materials



**Brushes made of natural materials; feathers, sticks etc.**



**Envelope printed with a self picked fern leaf.**



**Confetti made of half-dried tree leaves**

1. Getting the materials: Gather, process or/and feel the materials available.
2. Exploring the theme and design; getting necessary tools nearby.
3. Creating the card using various techniques and tools.
4. Finish the work by trimming the edges with paper guillotine, if needed.
5. Creating the envelope, if needed
6. Contemplating on the experience: making as well-being and social encounter
7. Sharing creations with other participants or on social media.
8. Sending the card to a receiver, if needed



**Leena Möller, Sirpa Mörsky and Liisa Pikkujämsä, the three Finnish participants of crafts and mail art workshop in Thessaloniki, Greece.**



# EXAMPLE OF AN ONLINE CRAFTS WORKSHOP

(<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eUTymBJ-uBiS6UfNGSGCQuoF447FVS31?usp=sharing>)



While the vast majority of correspondence art or mail art activities take place in the mail, today's new forms of electronic communication blur the edges of that forum. Many crafts workshops are available on the internet. Crafts has been widely presented online since the rise of social media.

The Finnish Crafts Museum arranged an online embroidery workshop with textile artist Leena Illukka. The Museum sent all participants a supply kit two weeks before the Zoom meeting.

It contained all the materials and tools, only scissors were not included. In the introduction sent beforehand, the artist explained that the art piece was going to be a portrait or a caricature, embroidered onto a pair of non-woven textile slippers. Detailed instructions for the embroidery work were sent as a pdf attachment in email. She sent also pictures of her previous works from different phases of the embroidery process.



Inside the envelope / supply kit: colour pencils for drafting the motive, embroidery needles, array of embroidery yarns, a pair of non-woven textile slippers.

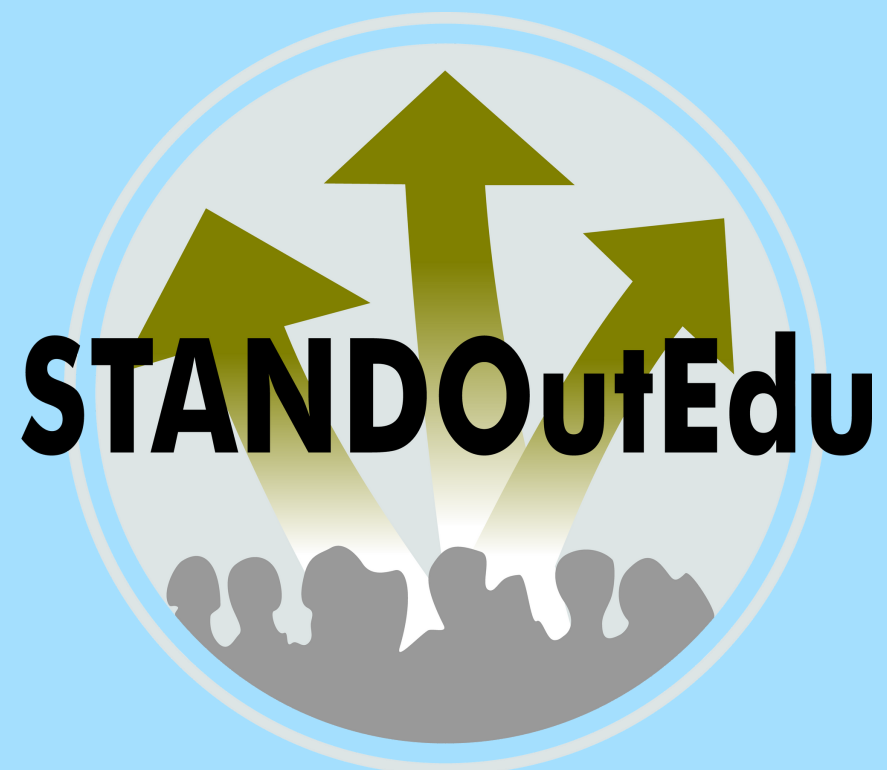
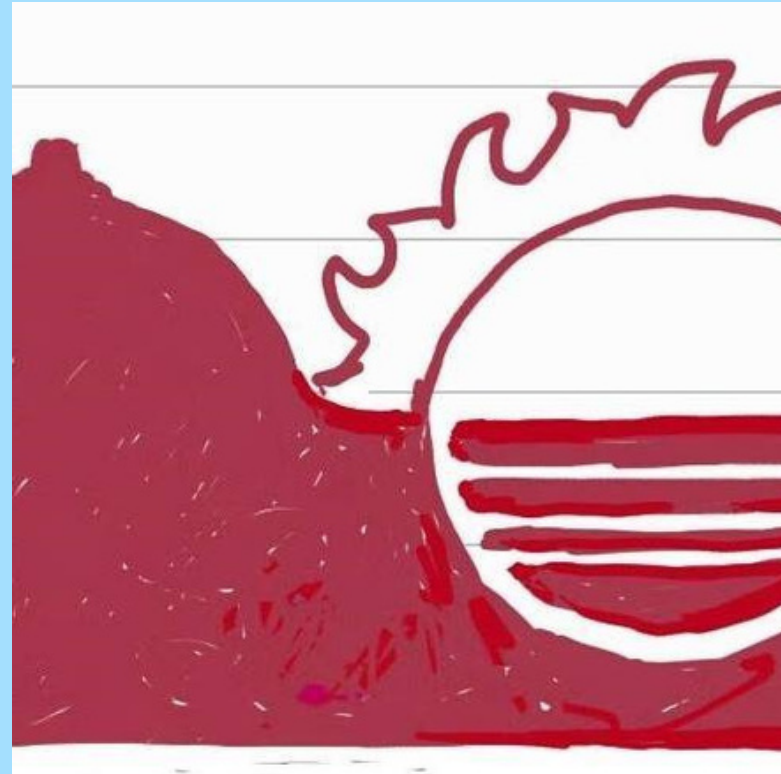


After the two-hour workshop, participants shared pictures of their works on Padlet online platform.

**WE HOPE YOU  
ENJOY THESE  
MAIL ART  
ACTIVITIES!!!**



# PROJECT PARTNERS





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

