

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GUIDE

NATASHA MAYERS: AN UN-STILL LIFE



A Film to Inspire Community Activism

The film [Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life](#) was created to spotlight an inspirational artist and community member who uses her art as activism to make an impact on the issues that are important to Maine communities and the world. **We invite you to use this film as a tool to influence and energize your community around issues that are important to them by hosting a screening event, film discussion, and creation of activist art.** We also hope and anticipate that screening the film and hosting a discussion will build and celebrate community, honor the importance of collaboration, and allow people to come together for some fun.

How can you use this film as an impetus for creative action?

Film can be a powerful communications tool which brings examples of art activism to your group. It can help create a positive focal point for organizing and information-sharing, inspire creative action, and build community in the process. It is our hope that this film encourages you to use art to rally around and bring attention to an issue that your organization/community supports.

You can use this guide to organize a special screening event of film *Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life*, with the options to facilitate a discussion of the film, display [ARRT! banners](#), and even design an “art-build” related to your cause.

As you proceed, please let us know if:

- You would be interested in including an exhibit of ARRT! banners at your event;
- We can be of assistance in identifying resources, partners, or tools, or help you craft an “art-build” for a specific demonstration;
- You have any questions or need any technical assistance to get your work off the ground.

In art and activism,

Anita Clearfield, Filmmaker

Geoffrey Leighton, Filmmaker

Natasha Mayers, Artist

Liz Hall & MaryBeth Luce, Impact Producers

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Contact us

info@natashamayers.org

www.natashamayers.org

At natashamayers.org, you will find the most recent material available, print resources, and materials for learning. Email us to get support or assistance with your plans and the link to view the film in preparation for your event.

1. Screening the Film

1. Planning Your Event

Below are the steps to plan a film screening event. If you intend to host an event, please let us know by emailing us at info@natashamayers.org. We want to keep track of and help promote opportunities for audiences to view the film and engage in local issues.

Identify Your Issue

Figure out why you want to bring people together to engage them through art activism, and keep this core topic as a common thread throughout your event planning, marketing, and delivery.

- What is an important focus area for your organization or community?
- Is there a demonstration planned to bring attention to a particular issue in which you'll take part?
- Do you want to engage core volunteers to plan ways that you can make a big impact around a key cause?
- Are you looking to rally your community around a local concern?

Identify Your Audience

Who do you want to bring together to address the identified issue? You will want to cater the elements of your event to your particular audience.

- Is it community-wide?
- Do you have a core constituency who is already engaged, such as organization volunteers or donors?
- Do you have a target audience, such as elders, families, or students?

Determine Your Event Format

What kind of event will work best for your audience, given the issue you identified?

Film screening & group discussion

- Choosing a venue:
 - Will your event be outdoors or indoors?
 - What time of day? (If outdoors, it needs to be dark enough to project!)
- In what format will you screen the film?
 - Project onto a screen or show it on a large television.
 - Download the video file from the internet (preferred method for best quality) or play from a DVD that we send you. *We encourage you to choose either of these two formats in lieu of streaming directly from the internet – streaming can be spotty, depending on your location.*

- What format will your discussion take? [Learn about the various formats by which you can conduct the post-screening discussion.](#)
 - Do you have outcomes that you want to achieve from this discussion (i.e., inspire attendees to work with your organization or engage more fully in an aspect of your work)?

- Who will lead the discussion?
 - Prepare by reviewing the film and background information on the [About the Film](#) page.
 - Determine which questions to ask the audience that will elicit the outcomes you hope to achieve.
 - Tie in your identified issue/cause as a common thread throughout the discussion.

Keys to Successful Community Events

Serve Refreshments

Nothing builds community like food. Several famous artists use food-sharing as art. Consider providing basic beverages (water, coffee, tea, etc.) and light snacks or asking guests to bring something to share pot-luck style. Of course, think about how to make this COVID-safe with hand sanitizing stations and reminders to only touch what you will take!

Continued Engagement

Have people RSVP or sign in with email addresses so you can send a thank-you message and engage them for future events, volunteer opportunities, etc.

Is this more than can be accomplished in one event? If you know this is the first in a series, encourage your audience to spread the word for the next one. Have dates, hand-outs, and committee sign-up sheets ready to go, if possible.

Be Flexible

Event outcomes are not always predictable or what you had planned. Maybe the community discussion conclusions point the way to taking a few steps back. Maybe people want more art-making in a different form than you had expected. Be ready to be open to new ideas and adjust your thinking to take advantage of the energy that's being created among the participants.

Document the Event

Photos and video can be useful for publicizing what you've done, archiving your process, or for creating materials for future events or fundraising opportunities. Think about designating a photographer or videographer so these opportunities aren't passed by.

Note: Privacy and transparency are very important. Weigh the consequences on how free people will feel to speak when being recorded. How sensitive are your topics of discussion? Be sure to get permission to record, either verbally or with posted signs.

Enhance Your Event

Display ARRT! banners and yard signs.

The [Artists' Rapid Response Team \(ARRT!\)](#) has created hundreds of issue-oriented, socially-engaged banners and props for Maine nonprofits. Meeting once-a-month in a central location, artists from throughout the state join representatives from organizations to design and paint banners, props, and yard signs that groups can use in their work. Whether it's a church that wants to welcome immigrants, an organization protesting climate change issues, or a youth group validating LGBTQ voices in their community, ARRT! is on the case. ARRT! likes to make the banners available to others when not in use by the requesting organization or over the years, copies have been made of some of the banners. You can request ARRT! banners that are associated with your issue/cause to display at your screening event. They really make a venue come alive! Contact us at info@natashamayers.org for more information.

Include an art-build.

Bring your audience together to create a banner or other art piece that showcases your identified issue. ARRT! members can be onsite for your event to help facilitate the creative process. Contact us at info@natashamayers.org for more information.

Hold a follow-up demonstration exhibiting artwork.

Determine a date and location to exhibit either the ARRT! banners or the newly created artwork. Choose a high-traffic location in your local community for the greatest exposure. Consider notifying local media outlets to gain increased attention.

2. Let Us Know What You Have Planned

If you haven't already been in touch through your planning process, contact us at info@natashamayers.org and send us the following information:

1. Organization/community group conducting the event
2. Event date, time, and location
3. Event organizers' contact information
4. Format your plan to screen the film (do you need us to send you a DVD?)
5. Any event enhancements you would like to include (i.e. Do you want us to send you ARRT! banners/signs to display? Will you host an art-build as part of the event?)
6. Any questions/requests for help or information that you have for us!

3. Market Your Event

Once you have identified your event issue, audience, and format, it's time to get the word out!

Promote Your Event via Email

You can use the email template below as an event invitation to your target audience.

SUBJECT: Join [your organization] for a film screening on [date]!

We are thrilled to announce a film screening of [Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life](#)!

WHEN: [Day, date, time]
WHERE: [venue name and address]
RSVP: [via this link]

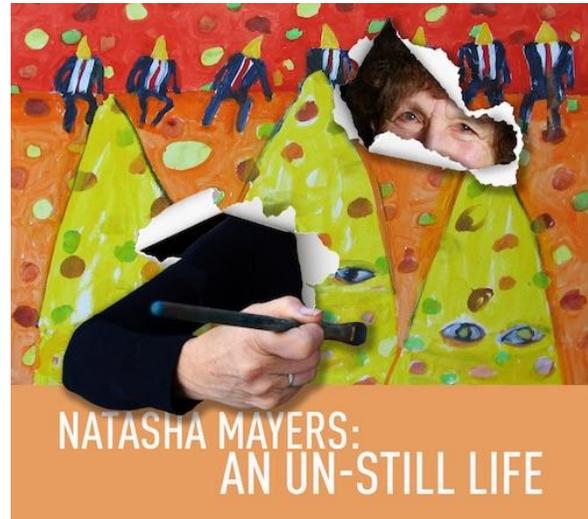
[Your organization] would like to invite you to attend a special screening of this film, followed by a group discussion about art activism and [your key issue].

Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life follows Maine's "most committed activist artist" in her quest to engage with the questions that face people-of-conscience today.

Throughout the film, hear Natasha's inspirational call to activism, then discuss how we can come together in the pursuit of [your key issue]. *[If applicable, include information about event enhancements like banners, an art-build, or a demonstration.]*

About the Film

Now, more than ever, people want to see truthful, creative role models like Natasha Mayers, who Maine Senator George Mitchell called a "state treasure." *Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life* presents an artist who has remained true to her passion for over 50 years, following Natasha as she takes on social, economic, and environmental justice issues with humor, irreverence, and a keen aesthetic that enlightens while it entertains. Using a non-traditional approach, the film's animation and special effects reflect Mayers' own art-style.



Reach Out Through Social Media

- Create a Facebook event and invite your organizations' followers to attend.
- Post regularly through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., to encourage potential participants to attend.
- You can use [this suite of images](#) to include in various posts to promote your event.

Post Your Event to Community Calendars

Maine has a variety of community calendars that residents and visitors use to learn about local events. Post your screening event on these calendars to get the word out to a broader audience!

- [MaineToday/Portland Press Herald/Forecaster Community Calendar](#)
- [Sun Journal Community Calendar](#)
- [MainePublic Community Calendar](#)
- [Maine Arts Commission Calendar](#)
- [Maine Public Calendar](#)

Outreach to Like-Minded Groups

Think about who in your community might like to partner with you to promote – or even co-host – the screening. Reach out to them to ask if they would be willing to help you get the word out to their followers through their communications channels.

4. The Screening - Using the Film Successfully

- Introduce the film, the artist, and the filmmakers (See [film description](#) and [Natasha's](#) and the [filmmakers' biographies](#)).
- Explain that the film will be shown in its entirety (38 minutes) and that there will be a post-screening discussion, followed by an art making session, if applicable. We encourage people to stay for the discussion and art-making, but they should feel free to leave following the film if they choose to do so. If possible, explain the purpose of the art-making (for example, to take to a demonstration for your organization, design lawn signs, make a parade float, etc.), since having a specific goal will motivate people to join in.
- Screen the film.
As mentioned, we encourage you to choose either a DVD or a file downloaded to your computer in lieu of streaming from the internet – streaming can be spotty, depending on your location. A DVD will be less high-quality than a file playing from your computer.

2. Post Screening

Pre-select discussion topics/questions to start. Decide whether this will be a whole group discussion or if you want to divide into smaller groups. If the latter, have the groups choose a leader who will report out to the larger group at the end. Another group member can take notes. Notes from the group discussion may be shared with the greater community who may be viewing the film in the future.

1. Suggested Discussion Topics/Questions

The topics/questions below represent a broad list that is intended to spark ideas for discussion. To prepare for your community discussion, pre-select from the topics/questions below or create your own.

Film Related Questions

1. Which idea(s) or message(s) from the film made an impression on you?
2. What questions do you have after watching the film?
3. How is humor used in the film to convey a message?
4. Did watching/hearing Natasha give you permission to do something you've wanted to do?
5. How can you use this film to inspire (creative) activism?
6. How can you use some of the lessons learned in this film to work on important issues?

Community Related Questions

1. What are the benefits of working collaboratively in the community?
2. How can you have fun while tackling important issues?
3. If your film screening is to support an issue that's important to your organization/community, can you brainstorm ways that art can call attention to that issue?
 - a. What prevents people from "seeing" the issue?
 - b. What can you do to make it more visible?
 - c. Is there a positive community-building way to bridge divides? (remember from the film painting history on telephone poles or joining a patriotic parade)

Art and Artist Specific Questions

1. What contributions do artists and their art make in our society?
2. Can artists affect meaningful change?
 - a. Art messages influence society by changing opinions, instilling values and translating experiences across space and time. When is this type of art useful?
 - b. Research has shown art affects the fundamental sense of self. It can give voice to the politically or socially disenfranchised...people who will, in turn, be empowered to make change. How can this aspect of art be used?
3. How does art contribute to personal voice? Group voice?
4. How can art be used to educate, inform, and express ideas or messages? Can this be a collaborative effort? Does collaboration change advertising into art?

5. What's special about art in public places? (Visibility, media/press love it, attention-getting, powerful messages expressed through beautiful art, re-taking public places for the public instead of corporate logos/ownership)
6. How does the medium affect the message and who decides what is "art?"
7. Do we have a responsibility as citizens to express our opinions on policies, laws, and government? As artists?

Activist/Social Impact Related Questions

1. Natasha has said in interviews that she's not courageous; she says she's a product of white privilege and knows, for instance, the police won't mistreat her. Are there other ways that privileged people can be courageous? What prevents people from acting in your community? What are they afraid of?
2. How can collaboration be used to celebrate, enhance community, and have fun?
3. What does it mean to be an activist artist? Do you have any fear of using your voice? How can you be courageous when you are afraid?
4. What are some of the key social, cultural, and political issues that impact your life and/or community?
5. In these days when people are questioning the monuments in their public spaces, what do the monuments/public art in your community honor and what would you like to see being honored? Can you be part of that change, if needed?
6. How can art function as a tool for activism?
7. Visual images have been used to persuade people to a certain point of view. At what point does art and activism intersect?
8. Describe some of the strategies that activist artists have used to communicate their intended messages.

2. Group Methods for Leading Discussions

Choose which method(s) works best for your group or create your own.

Circle

[How to use talking circles](#)

The basic talking circle has a designated leader who opens and closes the circle with a prayer, meditation, or moment of reflection. The circle then runs clockwise with everyone speaking one at a time without interruption. Participants usually give their first name before talking and may pass on speaking, choosing just to listen. Confidentiality is respected— what is said in the Circle stays in there.

Fishbowl

[A fishbowl conversation](#) is a form of [dialog](#) that can be used when discussing topics within large groups. Fishbowl conversations are sometimes also used in participatory events such as [unconferences](#). The advantage of fishbowl is that it allows the entire group to participate in a conversation. Several people can join the discussion.

Jigsaw

Jigsaw is a cooperative learning **strategy** that enables each member of a "home" group to specialize in one aspect of a topic (for example, one group studies habitats of rainforest animals, another group studies predators of rainforest animals). Smaller groups can break-out and meet, then report back to the larger group.

Journal Jumps

Sometimes the best way to engage group members is also the most direct way: by asking a question and allowing them the quiet space in which to answer. Start with a guiding question. Group members can keep a journal and spend the first 8–10 minutes of your time together building anticipation and conducting inner dialogue. We suggest that members return to their journal—a “journal jump”—at the end to stimulate metacognition.

3. Working through Divergent Opinions

Natasha says, “Words can divide us. When I was demonstrating with *Women in Black*, we found that when we used words on our placards, it kept people away, but when we switched to images with no words, people came **to** us. They asked us what we were doing and told us what the images looked like to them. Making issues visible helps people think about them and talk about them. Images elicit responses, comments, and questions.”

Consider this tack when crafting your event discussion. From the onset, how can your event be framed in a positive way? Can you start with a common history? Can you create a big, welcoming tent that includes a lot of different perspectives? Can people do something that’s fun together?

The film discusses how mixing the super serious with the super silly, often presenting two sides of an issue, makes the issues more accessible to a wider variety of people. For example, the Whitefield parade “floats” often deal with controversial issues, but since the fun and outrageous are mixed with hard-hitting topics, they become conversation starters. Even people who never agree with Natasha’s view come to the parade to see what she and her group are going to do THIS year. It always gets people talking and asking questions about what they are doing. Many eagerly read the description in the *Lincoln County News* the following Thursday in which the reporter “explains” the float.

Another example of how Natasha used this tactic was flying info sheets about drone surveillance, in the form of paper airplanes, into the crowd. And while marching as the “Green Nude Deal”, participants passed out giant playing cards explaining the Green New Deal. Consider how you can mix in fun and silly ideas to help people approach a topic with fresh eyes.

Sometimes just agreeing on a definition or seeing that divergent groups use different definitions for the same term can help people feel heard and “get people on the same page.” Use [our glossary](#) or a dictionary as a foundation for finding common ground.

In the end, remember that starting a dialogue can be more important than having everyone agree.

4. Art Making

Think about your group dynamics, individual interests and skills, and the desired product, then decide which form of Art Making would work best for your group.

Individually

Choose an issue or idea you are passionate about. Sketch or write out your ideas or create a piece of art. Share or present to the whole group.

Individual/Collective

Each person makes their own sign or piece on a topic. (For example, everyone paints an animal to carry in a demonstration about climate change, or they can all be hung on a clothesline.) For a successful women's march in Portland, we invited people to come and paint their own placard earlier in the day. We supplied the materials, lots of great examples, and asked people to potluck lunch.

Collectively

Share ideas. Those with similar ideas can work collaboratively on a flyer, banner, or mural.

3. How Groups Have Used the Film

This section will feature ways that communities and schools have used the film. We hope when you use the film, you'll send us information, photos, and videos that we can include with a link here. This section will grow and evolve as the film is used in multiple, creative ways in a variety of venues. This will give facilitators and communities lots of ideas on what is possible. To be continued!

4. [About the Film - Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life](#)
5. [About the Artist: Natasha Mayers](#)
6. [About the Filmmakers: Anita Clearfield & Geoffrey Leighton](#)
7. Resources

[Glossary](#)

[Artists](#)

[ARRT!](#)

[Books & Websites](#)