

FAKE ID

In 2017, artist Paul Ramírez-Jonas developed a series of artworks for the New Museum investigating the nature of truth during a time of misinformation and hostility toward refugees, including openly white nationalist and anti-immigrant perspectives from people with political power. These interactive performances included “Fake ID,” in which a performer invited visitors to share identification, transit, membership cards, and other items they carry, like pocket change. The performer photocopied the materials and helped the participant select elements from the collection to create a new, collaged identity card. Participants chose city names, symbols, and logos for institutions or organizations to which the participant “belonged,” a portrait (photograph or visual representation) of the participant, and something colorful to act as a frame or border.



While the new ID cards did not identify participants, they allowed them to visit the New Museum for free during open hours if they correctly supplied the security question they chose when making the fake ID. All sensitive information was shredded. The piece questioned how much power and self-determination

individuals have over their identities and how we are identified in systems. What truths, access, protections, and harms, do these systems limit or expand? Is a card created by a government, or organization, or yourself, helpful or limited (or both!) in telling a story of who you are, where you feel you belong, or what you should and shouldn't be allowed to do?

“So we are making a new identity for you out of your real identity cards and all these things we have...So we've copied all these things. It's a lot of information that makes you vulnerable... So you can also think about how this information kind of represents you and also represents, a danger to you and all the things we need to do to safeguard our identity...”

– Paul Ramírez-Jonas, Half-Truths

To learn more about Ramírez-Jonas's investigation of truth, you can **listen** to him talk about his exhibit, or watch a **video** of the New Museum's Teen Apprentice Program members, who performed “Fake ID” with museum visitors.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

- **identity:** the way we define and think about ourselves, including physical and personality traits; information others use to define and recognize us, including: physical traits, details like date and place of birth, and current place of residence
- **collage:** to remove or cut out elements from their original contexts, combining them into a new document or piece of art to create new context and meaning
- **ID card:** a card bearing identifying information about the person whose name appears on the card. Examples include a driver's license, school ID, or membership card.
- **truth:** what we know and/or believe to be factual and real
- **fake:** not true or real



START WITH ART: PAUL RAMÍREZ-JONAS

- What do you notice about the ID card in the top photograph? How is it similar to ID cards you've seen? How is it different?
- Do you think this ID card looks real? Do you think someone could use this card instead of a driver's license or other ID? What do you notice about the cards that informs your opinion?
- What do you notice about the setting and body language of the interaction between the performer and participant in the second photograph? How do you think their interaction influenced the creation of the fake ID card?

How can Ramírez-Jonas's investigation of the **truth** inspire us to examine our **identity** by making our own **fake ID cards**?

LOOK AROUND

- Do you carry a wallet or cards you use regularly, including a transit card, ID cards, library cards, membership cards, or other identifying cards?
- Do you have selfies or group photographs in which you appear?
- Do you have access to other identifying documents, like a birth certificate or passport you can look at and talk about with an adult?

MAKE ART

Let's create a fake ID card by collaging elements copied from personal documents, membership and ID cards or elements cut out of magazines.

Materials

- Paper
- Scissors

- Glue or tape
- Magazines, catalogs, or newspapers
- Pencil or pen
- ID, transit, and membership cards, plus other identifying documents
- Selfies or group photographs
- Optional: index cards; printouts or copies of selfies, photographs, membership and ID cards

Making

1. Look at your ID cards, documents and photographs, and find each of the following: words; city, state or country names; logos; and a portrait to represent you. Words can include the proper name of a membership venue; logos can include brand emblems.
2. Once you've selected elements, choose from the following options: re-draw and re-write key words, photos or images; use a photocopier to make copies; take a digital photograph and print the elements; or find images of people, logos and words to represent you in magazines, catalogs, or newspapers.
3. Trace around the edges of an ID card onto a piece of paper or index card to create a frame. Consider collaging something colorful onto the edge or frame.
4. Cut out your elements and arrange them within the frame, thinking about the story they share about you.
5. Once you like your arrangement, glue or tape your elements, and then cut around the outside of the frame to make your fake ID card.

REFLECTION

- Does your new ID card hide or reveal your identity? How is it different from or similar to real ID cards? Are there things about you that do not fit on a card?
- What do you imagine your ID card would allow you to enter or experience? A clubhouse, a job, a place to make purchases, a home?
- Are there times when you feel ID cards make you feel safe? Are there times when having or not having an ID card would make you, or other people, feel unsafe? When do you think people should or should not have an ID card? To receive food and medical care? To access free books and culture? To access an organization or a school?

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MUSEUM

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