

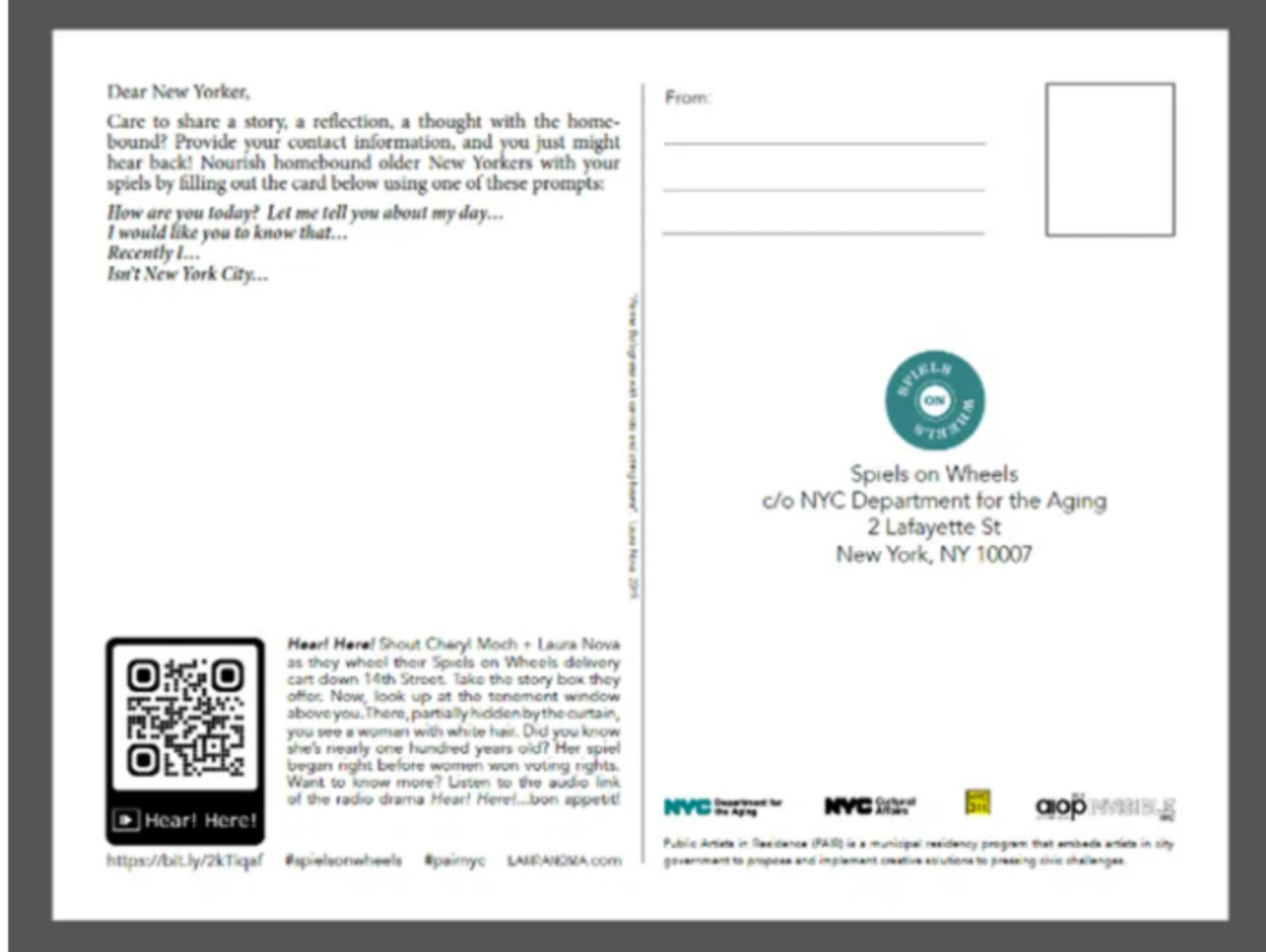
This Performance Invites You to Send Postcards to Older New Yorkers

Artist Laura Nova's "Spiels on Wheels" project replicates home-delivered meals to encourage you to send a story to the city's seniors.

by Sarah Rose Sharp
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Postcard from "Spiels on Wheels" (2019) by Laura Nova. (image courtesy DFTA)

For most people, the image that springs to mind at the mention of an iconic New Yorker is a fast-walking, monochrome-wearing, straight-talking type, busy with a day of frenetic activity. But New York City is also home to a diverse population of 1.6 million older adults, according to numbers from The New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA), and its current Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) Laura Nova will perform her interactive work "Spiels on Wheels" this weekend in an effort to celebrate some of their stories.

Nova, whose work is often participatory and encourages audience engagement, will be performing under the auspices of this weekend's 2019 Art in Odd Places Festival, curated this year by Lulu Lolo around the theme *INVISIBLE*. Elderly people are often marginalized by mainstream culture, particularly those who become housebound from physical or social dysfunction. DFTA works to eliminate ageism and ensure the dignity and quality of life of New York City's older residents, through direct outreach, caregiver support, and more ephemeral projects like the PAIR residency.



Story Box from "Spiels on Wheels" (2019) by Laura Nova. The box is based on DFTA provider Encore Community Services' Meals on Wheels delivery. (image courtesy DFTA)

Nova's performance, which will take place over a three-day span this weekend, was created in collaboration with Cheryl Moch, a playwright and social worker in DFTA's Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center. The performance leverages time spent by Nova delivering meals in-home to elderly residents with DFTA affiliate, Encore Community Services.

"I spent three hours delivering meals with Encore Community Services and was struck by how many people receive home-delivered meals and their untold stories," Nova said in a press release from DFTA. "I met 30 people — but I felt like I was meeting the ghosts of 300. There are so many stories yet to be told." For "Spiels on Wheels," Nova will wheel a delivery cart the length of 14th Street, between Avenue C and the Hudson River, distributing "story boxes" that replicate actual home-delivered meals. Included in the boxes are postcards providing an invitation to write messages to homebound older New Yorkers, as well as a link to a radio drama, "Hear, Here" — that brings listeners into the lives of those regular recipients of the meals.



Participants in Laura Nova's 2017 "Silver Sirens" project, which emerged as a cheerleading squad of senior citizens that champions healthcare issues while cheering on local athletes in public performances throughout the East Village and Lower East Side. (image courtesy Laura Nova)

"Social isolation often serves as a gateway to serious mental and physical health issues," said DFTA Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez. "Through our programs that serve homebound and social isolated populations, including Meals on Wheels and Friendly Visiting, we know all too well the severity of these issues. Our artist-in-residence, Laura Nova, brings a unique artistic lens to raising public awareness of this 'invisible' population. New Yorkers can play a part in breaking the social isolation epidemic."

So today, Saturday, or Sunday, if you happen to be walking fast on the streets of Manhattan while wearing black and making deals, and you happen to notice a call of "Hear, here," perhaps consider breaking your stride and making a little room in your life for a lonely soul. Everyone's got a story to tell, but it can make all the difference in the world to know that someone out there is willing to listen.



From the 2018 LES Citizens Parade, an activist processional and series of performances connecting community members of NYC's Lower East Side. Co-created by choreographer Naomi Goldberg Haas and visual artist Laura Nova. (image courtesy Laura Nova)

Spiels on Wheels Performance Schedule:

When: Friday, October 18, 4–5 pm; Saturday and Sunday, October 19–20, 1–2 pm

Where: Along 14th Street from 10th Avenue to Union Square, Manhattan