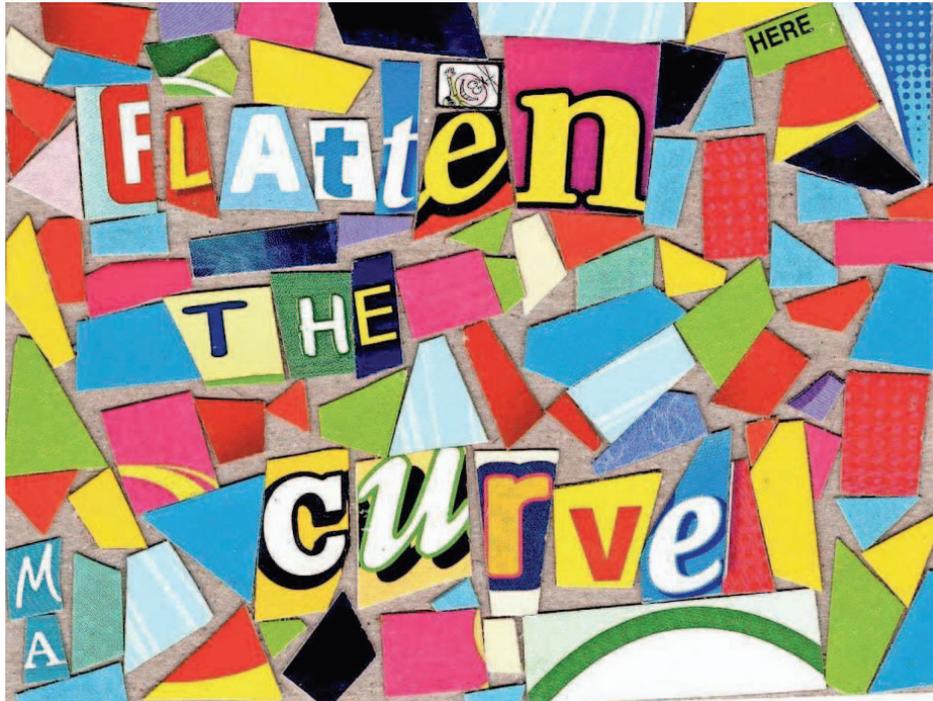


# BRIGHT SIDE



'Flatten the Curve' by Michael Albert PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JOE

## Pop artist lightens up the world during lockdown

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

Pop artist Michael Albert, pioneer of "cerealism" in his one-of-a-kind mosaics, intersects with consumerism in wild and wondrous ways. • While studying business at New York University, he often frequented the Metropolitan Museum of Art, marveling at artists like Vincent Van Gogh who challenged his classes' typical definitions of success. While Van Gogh never sold a painting in life, he rose to superstar status posthumously and his works have fetched prices in the tens of millions.

"I started thinking to myself that I wanted to do something interesting that makes other people happy and inspires people," says Albert who is both an artist and founder of his all natural and organic company, Sir Real Juices. "To me, Vincent Van Gogh is one of the most successful people who ever lived, and he couldn't make a living at all."

Inspired, Albert drew in his free time while listening to music or hanging out with friends. This year's quarantine brought him into the studio each day to engage in a very similar practice. He set up his phone, turned on Facebook Live and started streaming and sharing his unique collaging process with friends and fans from around the world.

Albert's "Map of the World" was completed during the two and a half months of COVID-19 lockdown. A visual smorgasbord of cities, countries and fonts from familiar cardboard packaging, the large mosaic is a part of The Joe Center for the Arts' "Lighten UP! Getting Past the COVID Blues" virtual gallery and window display this October.

"Since I was starting to work so much in the studio, I knew I wanted to do a large piece, and thought it was the perfect time to do a map of the world since it was a global pandemic," says Albert.

The exhibit showcases artists' pandemic creations with a limited selection on display in the windows of The Joe. The rest of the artworks are available to view in the online gallery display through Oct. 31.

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Michael Albert's "Map of the World" is a part of The Joe Center for the Arts' "Lighten UP! Getting Past the COVID Blues" virtual gallery and window display this October. ANDREI JACKAMETS

### If you go

**What:** Lighten UP! Getting Past the COVID Blues

**When:** To view in windows from 11 am-6 pm from Oct 2 to Oct 31

**Where:** The Joe Center for the Arts, 201 Reid Ave, Port Saint Joe

**Contact:** To see the online exhibit please visit, <https://www.thejoecenter.org>. For more about Michael Albert, please visit <https://www.michaelalbert.com>.

# Art

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“Life is short, especially with what’s going on now,” reflects Albert on the virus’ impact on art and the world. “You never know what’s coming down the road and whatever amount of time you have, it’s best to spend it doing something you like to do, and you feel is meaningful. There’s not enough time to waste.”

Albert has wasted no time creating collages and teaching art workshops for over 25 years. Twelve years ago, he published his autobiography “An Artist’s America.” In the book, he details how his first “cerealism” collage re-imagines the familiarity of a Frosted Flakes cereal box that he rescued from the landfill.

He has amassed quite a collection of boxes in his studio. For the “Map of the World,” Albert attempted to list every country in their approximate geographic locations, and included 119 flags hidden throughout the image.

The letters are comprised of thousands of fonts and typefaces from consumer-packaged goods that Albert has collected over the years. The coated cardboard pieces lend the piece its shiny, smooth finish, and details in the small jagged colored pieces remove any negative space to complete the mosaic.

During his many live streams, Albert even took suggestions from viewers and incorporated cities that were meaningful to them. His hometown, Woodmere, NY, holds a special place in the northeastern part of the U.S. that is represented on the map.

“There’s a lot of myself in my work which is what you have to do to make it meaningful to you and to others,” says Albert.

Over the years, Albert’s traveling art and teaching experience has grown to provide multi-generational programming in community centers like libraries and schools. He had 110 programs planned this summer in 15 states as well as a trip to Europe, all of which were cancelled due to COVID-19.

Continually resourceful, he added Zoom classes on to his calendar and has enjoyed the national audience that these workshops draw in since they are not tied to any one physical location. The materials he uses offer an accessibility for all ages to create, and he enjoys receiving feedback from teachers who are excited to see normally disengaged students connecting with the art

in his workshops.

Reproductions of Albert’s “Gettysburg Address,” his multi-color, multi-font re-creation of Abraham Lincoln’s famous speech, has made its way into many classrooms for similar reasons. Students not only enjoy guessing and identifying the popular fonts, but begin reading Lincoln’s words in a new light.

“These companies have spent all this time and money to have us recognize their brand by their font, the color of their box or their character, all to influence us to buy their product,” says Albert. “I love the idea of using that to get people to recognize things in my work. When you take these things out of context it’s a bit more of a mind game. You have to figure out where something is from, and it takes on a new meaning when it’s used for something else.”

Recently, he completed “The Supreme Court,” a collage that pays homage to the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Her words “When there are nine” – referring to the number of women justices she would be satisfied with seeing serve on the court – are represented with letters sourced from various brands. The characters Albert chose to represent justices, including Aunt Jemima and the Land O’Lakes Girl, give a modern day twist to representation.

“In a few years we won’t have them anymore,” says Albert. “My collage will be a historic moment in time when they did exist. I don’t know if it will be considered important art in the scheme of art history, but I’d like it to be considered.”

Albert looks forward to the chance to visit Port Saint Joe in February and bring his workshops to the area. He says interacting with people and hearing their stories is one of the many reasons he’s stayed inspired in this field for so long.

Though his artwork is a testament to his ability to craft vivid, and incredibly specific details, Albert’s eye is also continually on the bigger picture. He thinks back to Van Gogh, and wonders what his legacy of “cerealism” might be.

“In my fantasy, I wonder where the Map of the World will end up,” says Albert. “It’s a representation of our world at this moment, and I’m proud of it. Right now, it’s in my living room but one day will someone decide what museum it might hang in?”

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*