

Geniuses, Poets & Artists.

A cover letter
from Alex
Jonathan Brown.



Inspiration
can be
Super
weird.

The funny thing about inspiration is that you never know where it's going to come from – and you're never sure if it's here to stay.

In 2012, I moved back to Fort Wayne from Austin, TX, inspired to make a difference in the art scene I grew up around. I had degrees in media and communication, I'd made a career in marketing, I knew that I could help groups tell their stories and I think I did a pretty good job of that for two years. Unfortunately, some arts organizations are less healthy than others, and the inspiration that got me to move my little family twelve hundred miles disappeared in months of frustration, labor negotiations, and a staff of artists who were practically begging to be heard.

I left the arts. I worked in tech. I wrote for work. Slowly, I started writing for fun again. I started painting. I dug my camera out of its bag and started making videos again. I helped my partner start a marketing agency. I studied improv at the theatre Del Close started and I started taking comedy seriously. I started taking art seriously.

I found inspiration again.

I'm applying for the position of [REDACTED] because I've seen so many people in the Fort Wayne arts community get to the same point I found myself. Burnt out. Ready to move on to the next thing - whatever that is, just anything that's not non-profit arts.

[REDACTED] unique. I think [REDACTED] the answer to the problem, the one organization that's positioned to make a real difference in the way people in Fort Wayne think about the arts... and themselves.

I know there's a ton of stuff that goes into being an [REDACTED] If you'd like to talk about everything that I'm not referencing in this document, I'd love to chat, but I know there's no way to write about that stuff that isn't going to sound exactly like every other candidate.

This is what sets me apart, and I think it's what can help make sure [REDACTED] keeps being something special for years to come. It's heavily based on my background in marketing and my love of improvisational theatre. [REDACTED] focus has always been on [REDACTED], and while the ideas I'm talking about may not directly relate to [REDACTED], I think they're closely tied to the art of running an arts organization.

Thanks for your consideration,

Alex Jonathan Brown

There are two actors on stage,
performing a scene they're
writing as they go along.

Let's say they're at the DMV. One actor is portraying an employee working at the branch, the other is a customer trying to register a vehicle.

The first question those actors have to answer through improvisation is simple: why are we asking the audience to watch this? If the scene is just a guy getting tags for his Toyota Corolla, that's not interesting. If the scene shows a woman trying to register a war-surplus tank she won in a divorce, that's really interesting.

The unusual thing about a situation is what makes it interesting.

So, what's interesting about [redacted]

Maybe you're just starting to think that art is a thing you'd like to do and you're going to judge your success on whether or not you Make a Thing. [redacted] drawing classes can help you do that. Interested in having your work shown publicly? Submit to the member show. Won't feel like an artist until you've sold something? Slap a price tag on it and *then* submit to the member show.

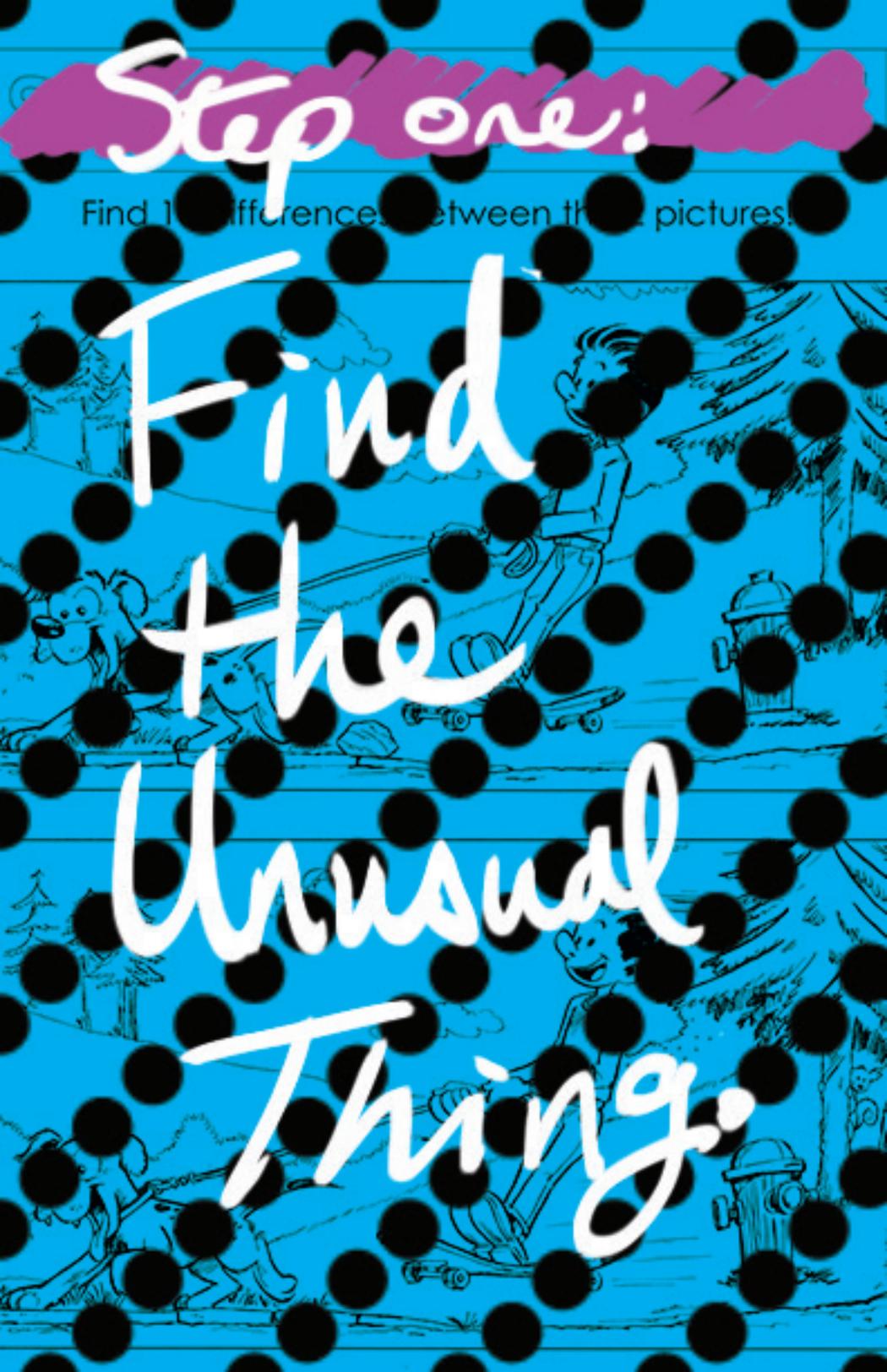
[redacted] offers the Fort Wayne area a chance to participate in the arts as artists, something that most other organizations don't. That's the unusual thing, and I think it's what makes [redacted] incredibly interesting in a city that is seeing more arts and entertainment options pop-up every week.

Almost every arts organization in Fort Wayne thinks of their audience only as patrons. You go to [redacted] to hear musicians, you don't get to climb on stage yourself. [redacted] uses local talent, but their priority isn't getting you on stage, it's getting you in the seats. [redacted] wants you on the stage, as long as you're younger than 18. [redacted] wants you to be awed by the art and exit through the gift shop.

Those are all valid models for running an arts organization, but [redacted] **doing something much more interesting.**

Step one:
Find 10 differences between these pictures.

Find
the
Unusual
Thing.





Step Two:
Treat everyone
like a genius.

"If we treat each other as geniuses, poets, and artists, we have a better chance of become that on stage." - Del Close

Del Close was an actor, writer and director based at Second City and the Improv Olympic in Chicago. (He's also the clean-cut 1950s comic on the back cover *and* the deranged mad man on the front.) He's widely credited with creating longform improvisational comedy, and he was convinced it only worked if you assumed everyone involved was a genius. They didn't have to really be one (so few people are) but by reacting to your scene partner as though every choice they make is intentional, artistic, and genius, it's much easier to create work that deserves those labels.

██████████ already gives Fort Wayne a chance to progress in their journey as an artist, but the city in general has proven less willing to embrace an extended idea of genius. Most organizations have developed a pretty good idea of "their thing" and if the art you want to make or support doesn't fit into any of those things, you're going to have a hard time finding space for it.

Because it's already proven to be a space where members are able to be more than patrons ██████████ is well-positioned to start treating the people making art in Fort Wayne like they're geniuses.

What does that mean? **A lot!** It means giving them the space to art-as-a-verb whenever we can, it means helping them leverage Fort Wayne's kind-of-easily-impressed-news-cycle to get their work in front of a larger audience, it means helping them find co-collaborators and co-conspirators who can get them into bigger, better, and more fun trouble than they could on their own, and it means making sure they can have thought-provoking, productive, and powerful interactions with people who look, talk, and act differently than they do - and making sure those conversations aren't just one-offs.

It's opening the doors and greeting everyone who walks in with a brush or pen or pencil or just an idea by saying "we don't know who you are yet and we don't know what you want to do, but we're convinced you're a genius and you can do it and we'd like to help you on the path to get there."

It's more classes and more shows and more of everything, with every new thing designed to make sure that the next person who comes to ██████████ has the chance to be a genius if they want to.

It means doing the work to creating and growing a community of art buyers who are interested in investing in this newly-cultivated talent in a way that's sustainable for both parties and values the work of the artists.

To some extent, it means faking it until we make it. And yeah, that's a little scary.

Being on-stage is hard. Being up there without a script is harder. Going without a script, trying to find emotional truth in a scene and maybe also be funny in the process? That's terrifying. But if you like improv, that's what makes it great. By following the fear and doing the thing that seems really scary, that's how you wind up creating something really special.

Shaking up the Fort Wayne art scene is scary. Everything's so settled, and we all seem to agree that change is hard. Wanna do something new? Get a new logo. Change some software. But whatever you do, don't change the way you approach art.

Many of us in Fort Wayne have been handcuffed by the idea of failure. We're unwilling to follow the fear.

When Del Close died, he left his skull to a Chicago theatre and asked to play Yorick in Hamlet. Keep getting up there. Follow the fear.

It's scary, but the groundwork's already there.

Positioning [redacted] as a launching pad for the next round of art geniuses, regardless of age, creed, religion or color takes everything [redacted] is already doing and turns the volume up to 11.

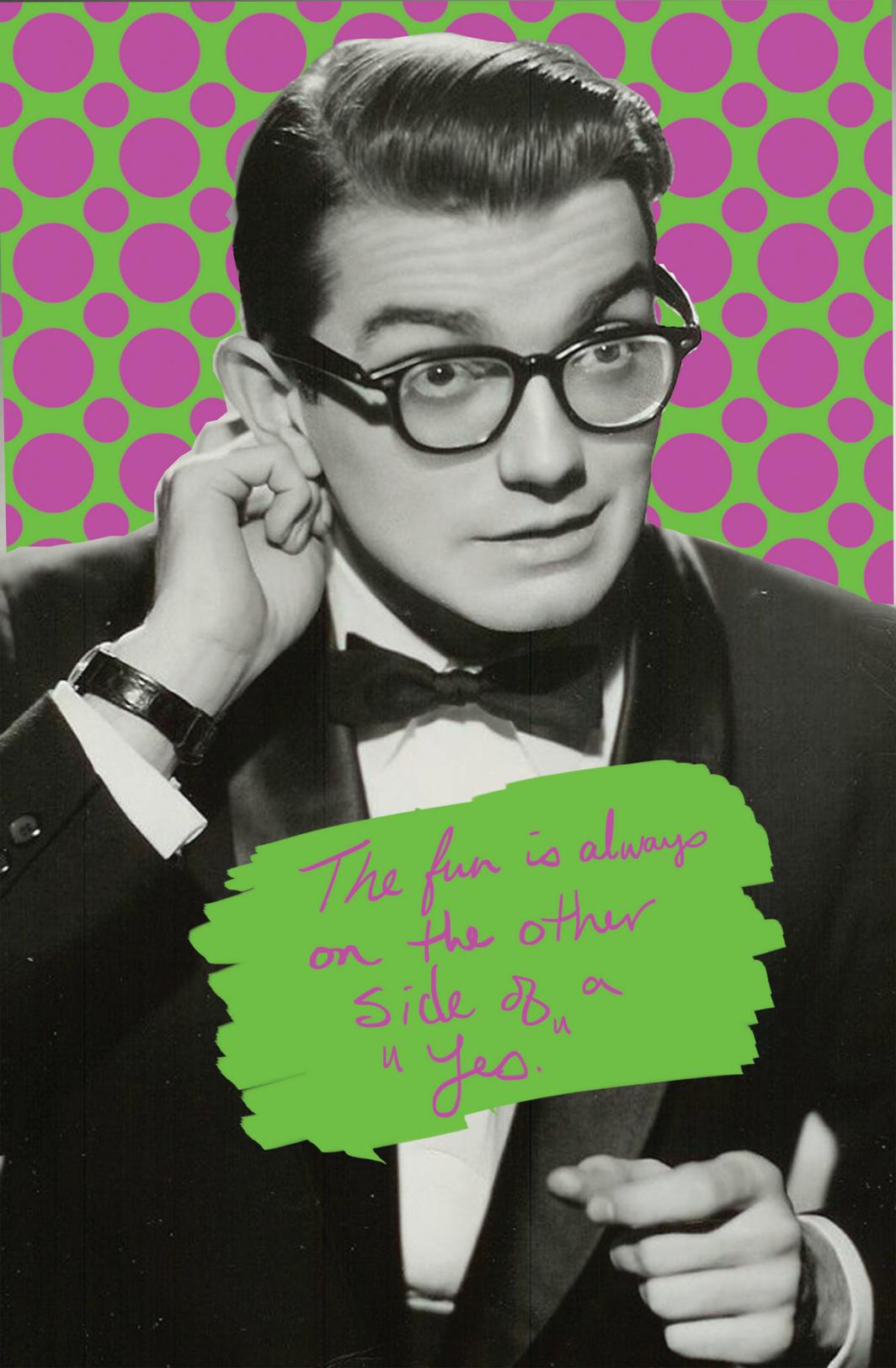
You want to support local art? This is where everything interesting is happening. You want to be an artist yourself? Join the movement. You want to turn your art into a job? We take [redacted] and the [redacted] and push the pedal to the floor, we don't make any promises, but we do say "here's our audience and here's some wall space and we will give you every chance we can to make something special, because we know you're a genius as soon as you walk through the door."

We do online profiles, we fight for space in newspapers and on TV, we work toward a business model that runs in the black without donations, and we become the organization that the next great artist thinks of as her start.

We do that because it's scary. We do it because we're surrounded by geniuses that the rest of Fort Wayne isn't paying attention to... yet. And we do it because no one else is going to.

[redacted] the only organization who can make this happen. I'd love to help.





The fun is always
on the other
side of a
"Yes."