

downtown is an “artist-run space” and an “experiment,” according to <http://thecollaborationroom.org>.

With the help of fellow artists Matisse Giddings and John Berry, Searle developed a space for art and for experiments in social behavior.

A recent Collaboration Room project explored a typical Collaboration Room question.

“We wondered what would happen if you asked people to let go of complete creative control, and be open to the idea of giving that control over to a 6-year-old child,” Searle said.

The experiment saw local elementary students drawing the blue prints of anything their imaginations could conjure, and then artists at the Collaboration Room using their creative skills to make the ideas come to life.

“It’s one thing to collaborate with other artists, but it’s quite another thing working with children.”

Searle has had a great deal of experience working with children – his day job is the program director of the Boys and Girls Club of Bloomington. While there, he envisioned a space where people of all ages could engage in creativity, and where visual arts, specifically, could be celebrated. But since then, the Collaboration Room has come to encompass many different fields.

Activities have included the creation of robots, soap making workshops, a Saturday morning animation club as well as a sewing workshop every other Thursday.

However, according to Searle, the Collaboration Room “is on the tail end of the

research we set out to do.” He had a set amount of time planned to rent the space on Rogers Street and commit himself to the project, and that time is coming to an end.

“We will still be doing research on creating collaborative programming, but it might not necessarily have a space. We think we will still be creating and supporting programming that happens around Bloomington.”

The Collaboration Room will occupy its current space though the end of July.

Searle also sees the potential for the group to serve as consultants for both creating public collaborative events and workshops, as well as being a mediator between different groups and building collaborative connections between them.

“The next step is a big question mark, but so was this whole idea in the first place,” Searle said. “Bloomington seemed like the right place to put this out there and see how people might respond. We wanted to bring our training as artists to work with people who have different sets of ideas and different skill sets. I think we’ve done that, and we’ve learned a lot about what people are afraid of when it comes to being creative and what people will respond to.”

There’s a saying at the Collaboration Room: “You and your thoughts are welcome.” Even though they will not be creating new programming, Searle and friends want the public to know there is space and materials available for individuals or groups who would like to meet and create.

Medic!

Mark Rice, who helped run the Art Hospital, said the space is such a hidden treasure it literally can’t be found – the most recent

incarnation of the artist collective, at 102 E. Allen St., has closed. The house is now being rented as a residential property.

For years, the Art Hospital was run by a group of local artists who shared studio space as well as control of artistic direction for the gallery. They offered workshops and welcomed art from the community as well as exhibited the art of gallery members.

Their website, <http://arthospital.wordpress.com>, states they had to close their doors for financial reasons, but they foretell a phoenix rising...

From the ashes

Paper Crane, a cooperative art gallery for emerging artists at 401 W. Sixth St., Suite J, was born out of the Art Hospital.

"The Art Hospital was an artist collective which had a set of studios you could rent out," said Nicole Wolfersberger, a founding member of Paper Crane. "With the rental of the studios came a say in the gallery shows. We don't do studios here. It's more of a cooperative. We are more interested in bringing workshops to the community."

Those workshops will predominately focus on the art of printmaking, and will take place as soon as enough materials have been secured.

"The idea is to offer a space for printmaking in the community. We will have printing presses and printing equipment, and will lead workshops on how to use the equipment. Then, hopefully, people can come in and rent time on the equipment," Wolfersberger said.

"When the Art Hospital closed down, we felt that left a void and we wanted to reach out to the community. It's hard to get access to

this kind of equipment without being a part of IU," said Wolfersberger, a self-proclaimed community organizer.

A person who likes to bring people together, Wolfersberger and the other members of Paper Crane are "trying to reach out equally to people with art training as well as amateurs who are interested in pursuing art, but would like a chance to try it out without having to commit to a degree program."

Opening last October in a warehouse across the street from Bloomingfoods West, the Paper Crane features a gallery as well as a gift shop stocked by artists that contribute to the Bloomington Hand-Made Market. They are currently issuing a "\$5 Call for Art" from local artists to be featured at a show which will benefit the gallery. Visit www.papercranegallery.org for more.

Teaching ourselves

"We're not in the thick of things. We're kind of off the beaten track," Beth Lodge-Rigal said of her writing center at 4638 E. Ind. 45.

This local affiliate of an Ohio-based institute has flown relatively under the radar in Bloomington for the past six years. Originally established by Lodge-Rigal closer to downtown, Women Writing for (a) Change is now located in the Poplar Ridge School House east of town.

According to Lodge-Rigal, "The mission of Women Writing For a Change is to create healthy environments for people to explore voice in writing."

She feels it is "equally important to be exploring the establishment of a community of artists. Everything we do here is focused on writing, whether it be poetry or nonfiction, memoir and even journaling. It's

about finding a deep listening space to bring words forward.”

Lodge-Rigal is passionate about a different approach, which she has devised from attending a Quaker College, taking part in various artist-in-residency programs across the country, and developing her own techniques over the years.

“There are certain things that we do differently that you would not experience in typical writing class. We work on how to listen and how to ask appropriate questions.”

We sit in a circle, we pass a stone, we light a candle, and we do all of these ritual things, but they’re all meant to do something – to slow it down and bring us into the present so that we may listen to each other with our whole hearts and bodies.”

A typical class can last two and a half hours. Participants are given writing prompts as well as the opportunity to share their work in small groups. See www.womenwritingbloomington.com for class descriptions.

“Everybody is teaching everybody, and we’re also teaching ourselves.” says Lodge-Rigal. “There is an invitation, every time you come into this space, to be fully present in the experience and try to get out of your own head.”

Thirteen to 15-week classes are available for women of all ages, and Lodge-Rigal is experimenting with shorter genre-specific classes that will be open to men as well. But as with the national organization, the Bloomington affiliate’s main thrust is to support women in writing.

“I think that women and girls are the canary in the coal mine, and the world really can be

shifted by women coming into their own voices. We really can be voices for peace and consciousness," Lodge-Rigal said.

"It's all about creating a safe space to nurture creativity. We are not here to rip each others' work apart. We are here to evoke what's great, not provoke a response."

She feels the School House, which was built in 1924 and has now been beautifully remodeled to accommodate the writing center's nurturing feel, is just the place for this to happen.

"The spirits are very generous here. It's in the brick and it's in the walls."