

New art collective stresses group support for individual artists

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This back entrance was a social area during the open house reception at Trained Eye Arts, 615 N. Fairview St., earlier this month. Art at the new cooperative ranges from ink drawings to bronzes and motorcycle detailing. Monty Howell | Herald-Times

BLOOMINGTON — Creating art can be about finding yourself. However, as many artists would attest, this can sometimes be a startling and lonesome endeavor — one that would perhaps be better experienced with a crowd.

The members of the new Trained Eye Arts Center, at 615 N. Fairview St., have come together with the idea that individual art can be stimulated, cultured and elevated to new levels in a group environment.

Trade guilds and cooperatives have been around for ages, which would seem to point to a natural human tendency to seek out the help of fellow artists when working and creating.

This particular cooperative, which had a soft opening and benefit in early September, is composed of many different mediums, all striving to capture or create art.

As described by Bloomington resident and Trained Eye founder Adam Nahas, "It's kind of becoming this inter-disciplinary art center — a lot of different kinds of people in one spot." Unlike the pop playground of Andy Warhol's Factory, this collective is about helping artists who are just getting started continue

down the path to growth and achievement.

A home on the trail

Twenty-one artists currently have spaces in the warehouse located on the B-Line Trail. Nahas, who was looking for a blank canvas upon which he could develop an art collective, hit the jackpot when he came upon the former home of the Bloomington recycling project Pedal Power.

“When we moved in, it had been used as a recycling center. So, needless to say, there was some cleaning up to do. But once that happened, we looked around and realized all the space there was to work with, so we started thinking of the best ways to offer people studio space.”

Using his a background as “something of a handy-man” Nahas began carving the space into open and enclosed areas. Some are large, shared common areas while others are closed, private rooms. Current artists include computer and web designers, painters, writers, a musician, a therapist, printmakers, videographers and even landscaping artists. Nahas subleases the spaces to the artists, which can go for \$50 to \$275, based on square footage.

Nahas, who has lived in Bloomington since he was 10, has been building a personal network of artists over the years that he drew upon when creating the guild.

“I discovered in college that I was intrigued by creating and I started falling in love with art,” Nahas recalled. After graduating from IU with a degree in studio art, he later began working for Mark Parmenter at White River Foundry in Spencer. The job has allowed him six years of formal training in foundry art, which includes mold making, wax working and metal making.

The experience of working with Parmenter, who serves as a mentor for Nahas, helped him start his own company and learn the business side of things, which Nahas now tries to share with others at the guild.

“Working with Mark has given me a well-rounded view of things, and that’s something I hope to impart to the other artists that are working here,” Nahas said. “We want to help people focus on events organization, exhibitions, commission

percentages – these are all things you need to think about but may not have acquired in your standard college arts program.”

At Sunday meetings, the tenants of the guild gather to share ideas for improving the space, discuss how to form LLC’s and how to apply for grants, as well as talk about local opportunities and commissions that are available. They can also seek help with taxes and pursue leads on gallery spaces.

When asked to define an art guild, Nahas said, “It’s a group of people working towards a common goal. And our common goal is to not only be a working studio where people can come and see the process that artists go through to create, but also a place where the community can come and be involved in workshops and learning.”

Nahas also wants it to be a place where people can better understand the process of creating art.

“A lot of people think making art is just a bunch of fun and something you do in your free time, but most of the people here are devoting a great deal of time and effort and hard work to their art.”

And that’s not all they have on their plates. “Most of the artists here aren’t career artists. They have a 40-hour a week job, but this place provides a space where they can come and get away from that and indulge in something they love. These people have a limited amount of time, but being around all of these resources – hopefully we’ve created a space where they can be more effective and learn quickly from those around them.”

Making your mark

Bloomington can be a tough town, Nahas said, reflecting on his city, which is filled with so many talented people that it can make for a tough art market. “What we’re trying to offer is a jumping off point for people to do their own art, have a space to show it, and have a network of people to provide feedback and advice. Creation can be stressful, constantly having to think of new ideas can really keep you on your toes, so it helps to have a supportive surrounding.”

Joe Masek is one such artist who sought out a collaborative environment. Like Nahas, he is a metal worker who is

developing interests in many other genres. Previously working out of his house and a metal shop, Masek plans to focus more on his painting at Trained Eye. His post-modern creations involve spray paint and stencil, as well as oil painting.

Masek's metal pieces have shown around town at spots including Max's Place and Puccini's. The Trained Eye has given him a space to hone his craft.

"This is the one that made me decide I wanted to do metal sculpture," he said, holding up a jagged yet svelte metal side-view sculpture of a fish with flailing steel fins. "When I finally put that together I was like, 'I really have to focus more on this stuff,'" he added, referring to a metal sea horse with elegant curves. His other sculptures include polished and raw steel guitars and flaming hearts.

"I was working out of a garage before coming here," said Kim Ransdell, a printmaker trained at IU. She was drawn to Trained Eye because "I just really wanted to work with other artists. I had been working a lot on my own and was looking for other influences. For a while I thought maybe if I didn't work with anyone else it would give me some quality of originality, but instead I just kind of stopped creating art. I felt stifled."

Those feelings have since vanished.

"The connections I have made through this place and the people I have gotten to know have already helped me generate so many ideas that I'm really looking forward to developing." She has screen printing equipment in her studio that was given to her that she wants to set up so it can be shared with the whole guild.

The big picture

The shared space and communal materials are a part of the larger picture. All of the tools and materials at the guild are available for everyone to use, so a printmaker interested in painting can just walk to the studio next door for some advice and direction and even some supplies.

Nahas and his guild have created a stimulating, gritty environment for creation to take hold. The inside and outside of the warehouse are decorated with graffiti murals, paintings, sculptures and drawings done by the tenants, and they hope to

reach out past the walls and into the community in an effort to beautify Bloomington.

Nahas reports that the guild was recently awarded around \$30,000 in grants to beautify the building and property. The money came from the city of Bloomington's B-Line Business Enhancement Grant Program. Since many of the individuals working at Trained Eye are sole proprietors or part of an LLC, they worked together in applying for the grants in hopes of attracting a larger sum of money.

"The funds will probably be used for landscaping, updating and adding handicap accessible decking and entrances to the building," Nahas said. Money can also be used for the creation of more murals and sculptures.

Additional plans for the future include developing an outside area they would like to convert into a space for more heavy industrial projects. Nahas says they hope to some day be able to have the amenities for ceramicists, more metal workers, and glass workers, but for now the compressed gas, dust and fumes would be too much for the current indoor space, which is zoned "general commercial."

After officially opening later this fall, Nahas hopes to lay the groundwork for something bigger. Currently in the process of becoming a nonprofit entity, Nahas would like the center to be "a community center, working studio, a gallery space, and a place for workshops and classes. Hopefully some day a kid could come here for computer design, which gets them into three-dimensional modeling, which gets them into sculpting, which could introduce him to foundry work." Nahas sees the possibilities as potentially endless for those newly exposed to art.

"We are looking forward to taking part in community days like the recent Fourth Street Festival and taking advantage of our location on the B-Line Trail," Nahas said. "One of the reasons we would like to get the outside of the building developed is so we can set up kiosks on the deck to interact with the increased foot and bike traffic that now come by in larger numbers every day. We really hope to be an important hub on the trail that the community can be proud of.

"If nothing else, I hope it will always be a funky little place where people can come and see some cool things."

On the Web

The Trained Eye Arts Center has set up a Facebook page. Search for "Trained Eye Arts" on Facebook.com to find its page, which has images and updates.