

Red Star Studios



North Side of Belger Crane Yard Studios.

Blair Schulman describes the continuing expansion of space and resources

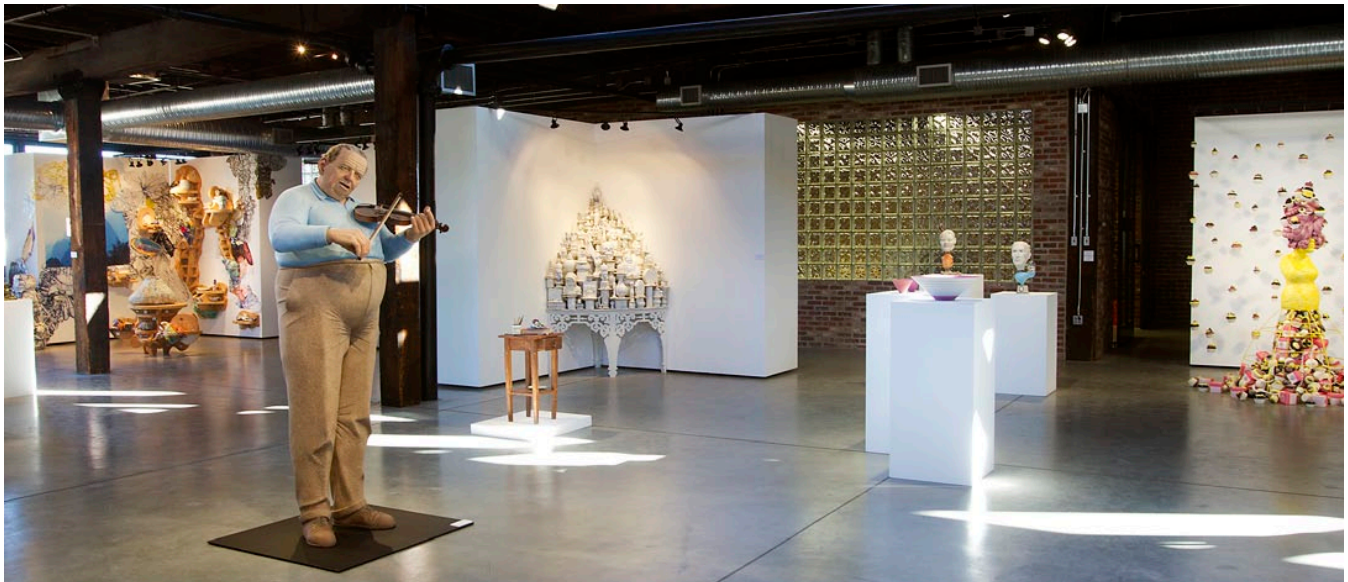
HAVING A RESIDENCY PROGRAM IN ONE'S OWN BACKYARD IS AN INVESTMENT in a community's cultural capital. Red Star Studios is one such prime investment that assures the Kansas City arts ecosystem of reaping long-term dividends.

Since mid-August 2013, the ceramics centre has fully integrated into its location at 2011 Tracy Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri, US. The campus consists of four buildings built between 1908 and 1918, which will provide ceramics artists with a full range of working space, exhibition and sales opportunities.

In May, 2013 an inaugural exhibition by Akio Takamori was held (and ran through August 2013) in part, to show off the new space. Visiting the exhibition in early evening, Takimori, a former Kansas City Art Institute alum and ceramist of renown, his show, *Lust* was showcased

Akio Takamori. *Lust*.





Ceramic Top Forty Exhibition at Red Star Studios.

by the 10,000 square foot exhibition space. Surrounded by multi-paned windows that brought in surrounding city vistas, the natural lighting helped illuminate, as what I saw as an awareness of height, benefitting both the work and adding a feeling of *chi'* to the experience.

Red Star Studios, as it continues its dedication to serving both the ceramics community and the local arts ecosystem, highlights the commitment that Dick Belger and his wife, Executive Director Evelyn Craft Belger, share. Fostering the growth of talent, it also bridges the nearby Crossroads Arts District and Kansas City's 18th & Vine Jazz neighbourhood.

Red Star Studios was founded in 1998 by artists Susan and Steven Hill in a former yeast factory at 821 West 17th Street on the city's Westside. For more than a decade, the Hills provided studios and kiln rooms in the converted spaces and offered workshops and classes. Its growth sprouted ceramics education, community programming and a nationally recognised residency program.

Steven left Red Star in 2006, Susan Hill remained behind and sold the Westside location in 2010, leaving the future of Red Star up in the air. The Belgers brought Red Star Studios to the Belger Arts Center (BAC) not long after that. The Belger, as it is known locally, houses an internationally recognised contemporary art collection while holding touring exhibitions.

As Red Star gained prominence in the ceramics community a new space to allow for growth was found in the Belger-owned property on Tracy Avenue. This four-building complex includes studio space and storage for what is the Belger Collection. Some income for the Red Star's programs derives from Crane Yard Clay, an adjacent wholesale/

*Left: Glaze Room.
Below: Kiln Room.*





*Above left: Michael Baxley, Red Star Gallery Manager and Manager of Crane Yard Clay.
Above right: Studio space before renovations were completed.*



retail business filled with a wonderland of ceramics materials for Kansas City's enormous maker community.

Housing a glaze and kiln room, Red Star Gallery occupies a third building. Work continues on Red Star studio space which was completed in August 2013 and also houses the Lawrence Lithography Workshop, an occupant since 2001. The ground floor studio area will also provide the latest in drainage systems, hoses, sinks, tables, potters' wheels and air drops to allow for work using compressed air.

By providing work space, the Red Star Studio Residency Program continues its ascent. The residency can be as short as a few months or up to three years and residents partner with Red Star Studio staff in some programming, workshops and education. Over the years, several ceramists of note participated as residents, including Iona Romule, Michael Fujita, Andrew Gilliatt, Mike Jabbur and Matt Long. Upon completion of their residencies, many of these residents stayed in Kansas City. This furthers a quality of life ideology that is imperative to the city's long-term cultural growth.

Red Star Studios Gallery Manager Michael Baxley calls this expansion of Red Star "Huge. Literally. These four buildings that make up the new art centre will allow ample space for local, regional, national and international artists to work and visit." Baxley sees the Belger Crane Yard Studios as "a real destination for people, makers and appreciators alike. A centrally located art centre helps draw people from all directions to an area that has traditionally been industrial. This (commitment) helps set the tone for others in the area to follow."

Asked about the lasting effects of this move, Baxley goes on to say, "I see this more as an expansion of the arts than a move. There will be two locations with different things happening at each location.

We will be keeping aspects of Red Star at the Walnut location. . . BAC will expand on what it already does. . ." that is, more activities for children and adults.

Red Star Studio Manager Tommy Frank discusses the effect Red Star's move will have on the community. "We are joining a variety of visual and performing arts organisations that are reinvigorating and expanding the experiences Kansas Citians have with the arts in KC." Red Star Studios has "partnered with Jazz district organisations such as the Kansas City Friends of

Shea Bishop stocking shelves at Crane Yard Clay.





Alvin Ailey to help promote (the different ways) people can experience art in their own backyard.”

The Artists-in-Residence program will feature prominently at Red Star. As Frank says, “This program has always gleaned great local talent as well as bringing fresh, new, young artists to Kansas City. This next generation of individual makers contributes to the health of the art community with their perspectives in making process and aesthetics.”

Regarding greater plans for Red Star over the next 12 to 18 months, Frank says they will recruit five to 10 new artists-in-residence to the metro. Isadora Cuellar will be coming from Mexico for a short-term residency, creating pieces for an installation-based exhibition of her work. Other residents will include a jewellery designer, a figure sculptor who incorporates video and a potter using traditional pottery methods to create “incredibly well-designed functional ware”. Says Frank, “There will also be a host of workshops, both demonstration and hands-on, that bring nationally recognised artists (from both coasts) right here to Kansas City to share. . . their techniques, perspectives and philosophies on making ceramic art in the 21st century.”

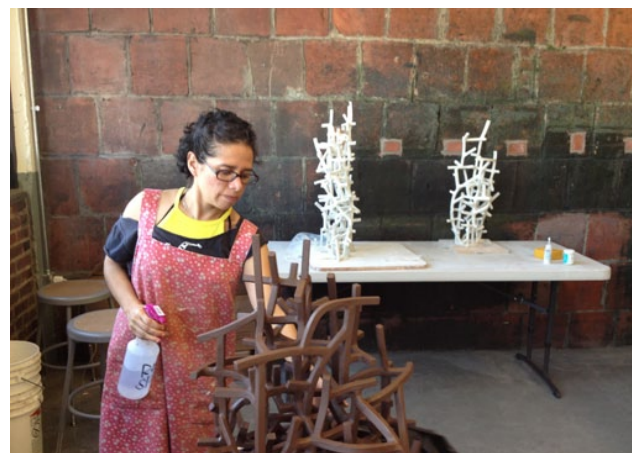
Stephanie Kantor was a Foundation Resident at Red Star Studio from 2009 until September 2011. During her residency she was hired as a Red Star Studios Youth Educator Coordinator. One of her most lasting projects is the MakeMobile, a travelling art studio for children. The MakeMobile is a minivan and Kantor says she often on-boarded all the materials herself, including a 100+ pounds wheel. The idea is to bring the arts to people who normally might not find a way to the Belger Art Center and Red Star Studios, where the MakeMobile originated. Kantor would hold throwing demos and served more than 150 budding artists. She would transport the small clay objects back to Red Star, fire all of them herself and return to the visited location with the results. As the program grows, the city could see a designated van used as a MakeMobile.

Ryan Fletcher, another former resident, began as an intern at the old space on the Westside in 2008. He needed a place to work during the summer and winter breaks from KCAI. During his senior year, Red Star moved to the Walnut location and, after completing his degree, Fletcher spent a little more than two years as a resident beginning March 2011 and ending April 2013. At the conclusion of his residency he was one of six residents in the program.



*Above left: Workshop in Session.
Above: Red Star Resident Artist Alum Stephanie Kantor.*

Red Star Visiting Resident Artist Isadora Cuellar.





*Above: Red Star Resident Artist Alum Ryan Fletcher.
Right: Red Star Studios before completion of renovations.*



The gallery provided several excellent opportunities to exhibit his work including group shows and a solo show at the end of his residency. The gallery has also maintained an online presence which has proven to be effective. As Fletcher says, "They do not require artists to donate work, but the owners are avid collectors and incredibly supportive of the arts in KC and have acquired several of my pieces over the years." He continues, "One show in August 2013, was a history of Red Star Residents Alumni exhibition that I submitted work to along with, I believe, 15 other previous Red Star residents."

Fletcher's residency proposal included a branding/marketing idea based on his experience in other studio and university ceramics programs benefitting not only him, but other Red Star residents. He noticed over the years that many glaze and clay recipes have the names of their creators attached to them such as Pinnell Celadon (created by Pete Pinnell) and Coleman Porcelain (created by Tom Coleman). Fletcher proposed to make a line of clay and glaze recipes with Red Star's name on them and distribute them publicly as a source of promotion. What this translated into – with the opening of Crane Yard Clay – was the building of their clay manufacturing line which now includes around six clay bodies that are formulated and produced in-house, mixed ready to use and sold to the public.

Mo Dickens, Gallery Assistant at BAC, is well-acquainted with the Belger Art Center/Red Star universe. He speaks here only as an observer of the Kansas City arts community for the past 17 years.

KCAI's position in the contemporary ceramics scene in the US since the 1960s is well-documented. He and his wife, Cary Esser, moved to KC in the summer of 1996 when she was named Chair of the Ceramics Department at the Kansas City Art Institute. At that time, Dickens notes, there

Red Star Resident Artist Shea Bishop.





Above: Red Star Studios Gallery Entrance.

Below: Studio Manager Tommy Frank giving hands-on workshop.

was no Belger Arts Center, no Kauffmann Performing Arts Center, no Sprint Arena and so forth. "To watch and, in some small way, take part in the transformation of the Crossroads and all of downtown Kansas City over the past 17 years has been a positive experience in every way."

Dickens goes on to say, "Knowing the Belgers for several years now, I imagine the move of Red Star from Walnut Street to Tracy Avenue will just be the next step as they aid the expansion of Kansas City's arts community. Evelyn is currently serving on the Boards of both the Kansas City Ballet and KCAI. Dick Belger spent more than 30 years building a collection that is the envy of curators around the world. Together they continue to build the collection. The public only sees the tip. . .of what those two are doing here in Kansas City."

A nurturing of ability is necessary in keeping the American ceramics scene healthy and thriving. Red Star Studios, alongside like-minded residencies nationwide, such as the Northern Clay Center in Minneapolis and the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana, to name just two, provides ceramists with a strong foundation of education and resources.

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