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Materials Storage, Arts Incubator.

Art Practice as a Business; Arts Incubator as Arts and Civic Catalyst



Arts Incubator printing press.

By **BLAIR SCHULMAN**

Crowded with potholes and competition it takes a thick skin to travel the road of an art career, but there are the occasional weigh stations. Arts Incubator in Kansas City, Missouri, is one place devoted to helping local artists and they're being recognized for their efforts.

The Arts Incubator is a member of the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA), the world's leading organization devoted to advancement of business incubation and entrepreneurship. Arts Incubator was recently named a finalist for the NBIA's 2010 Incubator of the Year award in the non-technology category. Located in over sixty countries, the NBIA is the ultimate networking community for its 1,900-plus members sharing information, education and resources.

Arts Incubator is unique in that they are the only NBIA member devoted to the visual arts. The four-story, thirty-two thousand square foot loft building stands in the center of Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District. Arts Incubator currently has 39 artists in residence. Installation artists, jewelry, graphic, scenic, fashion and furniture designers are featured alongside, painters, illustrators, writers, sculptors, photographers and videographers. All share a common space and aspiration — to build and maintain careers in the arts. Many artists involved with Arts Incubator over the years include Matthew DeHaemers, May Tveit, Lori Buntin and Ada Koch. Since its inception, they have assisted about one hundred and sixty artists of varying disciplines, earning an appropriate and impressive distinction for serving the community.

Many artists ask themselves, how do I succeed? To have the space to make work is one thing. Getting that work in front of a gallery or collector is quite another. Arts Incubator is the brainchild of sculptor Jeff Becker (a 1999 University of Kansas graduate). He worked in the business world for a few years, but after the events of September 11, 2001, Becker, like many other people, was ready for a change. With just \$1,300 and four artists he wanted to address the dearth of practical resources available to artists and implement something meaningful to himself and the community. As its Executive Director, he developed and executed programs suitable for artists wanting to stay on track with their careers by creating affordable studio, shop and gallery space. Arts Incubator fosters a culture of creative and professional growth.

Jennifer Tuttle is the Business Development Coordinator. She helps Arts Incubator members put everything into perspective. Business training coupled with access to a photography studio, woodwork studio and technological resources is the "light within the tunnel" that artists seek. Tuttle joined Arts Incubator as Program Director in fall of 2009. A graduate of



Facade of Arts Incubator on West 18th Street in Kansas City, Missouri

the Kansas City Art Institute, she has owned and operated a fine art gallery and archival frame studio and was previously the Assistant Director of Morgan Gallery. She also held the position of coordinator of the Kansas City Art Institute's Corporate Partners Art Program.

A 501c3, Arts Incubator is funded from membership fees, where artists pay a sliding scale based on need. Philanthropy from the public and private sector also supports the work of Arts Incubator. An event space on the third floor is home to fundraisers, wedding receptions, concerts and performances that open the doors for literally thousands of people who might not otherwise enter an art studio.

Another facet of Arts Incubator's raison d'être is a membership organization called Hello Art. For every artist that is unsure of how to go about showing their work properly, there are twice as many art enthusiasts wary of meeting these artists and asking about their work. That first step is often the hardest and Hello Art is the perfect matchmaker. It brings together the artist, the novice, the experienced collector and the outright intimidated (both sides!) for studio visits or acting as host at a local gallery. A relaxed environment, where one is not being jostled and interrupted by the crowds, is created. This is a chance to actually ask questions and understand how the artist's work is created, devoid of any pressure.

Arts Incubator continues to be an important facet of the city's cultural community by bringing artists and arts community stakeholders closer together.



Guest Book at Arts Incubator.



Participants in a recent project at the Arts Incubator.

