

Incubator Project Progress Report

Prior to the establishment of Art Incubate, this region was without an incubator for the visual arts, a place where talented emerging artists with highly developed creative skills could work and exhibit together in a conducive setting with support.

The Incubator was conceived to attract new and recent graduates with inter-disciplinary practices schooled in digital media, technology and the social arts to strengthen the local visual arts sector. Most graduate artists leave school facing an immediate future without jobs and saddled with student debt.

Objectives for the new Incubator included removing obstacles to creativity, developing leadership in younger artists, providing start-up opportunities, connections to employment, and expanding networks to strengthen ties with other arts organizations, UW Fine Arts Department, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions. Public engagement in creative activities at Art Incubate and collaborative activities within the Incubator are program conditions.

Studios & Practice Development

A sponsored studio with exhibition opportunities was reported as being pivotal in the decision made by these young artists to remain in this area. Most live in small restrictive spaces or with family. A working studio was important to develop their arts practice in new and different ways, to hold studio visits and meetings with curators, clients, advisors and colleagues. They were eager to expand their network, to become engaged with others in the regional arts and culture sector, attending events and exhibitions, inviting others in the arts community to exhibit and collaborate with them at Art Incubate.

The central Uptown Waterloo location of Art Incubate on the bus route with shops and services nearby is ideal as most of these artists and their visitors do not own cars.

As AP members, all of the opportunities for professional development, exhibitions and income generation were available to the Incubator artists including group critiques with professionals, workshops, display equipment necessary to participate in large art shows, art rental programs and a member discount card for art supplies, books and more. Continued membership ensures continued access to Art Incubate facilities and AP support at the conclusion of this program.

Exhibitions

In the past ten months, before social isolation began, with art produced during their Incubator residency the Incubator artists mounted solo and small group exhibitions in the Art Incubate Window Gallery and exhibited their work around and outside the region. These exhibitions built CV for master program and employment applications and involved working with community artists, organizations and exhibitors including:

- Accelerator Centre @ 44 Gaukel
- Art\$Pay
- Button Factory Arts
- CAFKA
- City of Waterloo: *LUMEN Festival*, Art Market
- City of Kitchener: Rotunda Gallery, Kitchener Market Mural Project
- Idea Exchange

- John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto
- KWAG
- Liliput Gallery, London
- Student Art Innovation Lab (S.A.I.L.)
- Toronto Artist Project
- University of Waterloo, Dana Porter Library and galleries
- Vancouver galleries
- Unfortunately a number of other planned exhibitions were cancelled in March.

Colleagues and emerging artists from UW's graduating classes and the community were invited by the Incubator artists to mount successful exhibitions in both galleries at Art Incubate.

Collaboration and Community Engagement

Not developed as necessary skills in an academic setting, these concepts are important tools for positive personal and sector development, and were a focus of residency expectations. Plans to engage other artists came easily but more challenging was the notion of engaging the community, the public in creative activities. Progress assessment meetings were held in December 2019 around the program objectives of all shareholders and areas needing more focus in the remaining time were identified. The artists had planned a number of exciting activities and projects, some of which were implemented while others were postponed or cancelled:

- **Art Incubate Launch Party:** The neighbourhood and community were invited to this event with art activities, performance art, food, music, dancing and an exhibitions. The artists assisted with set-up and event management.
- **Interactive Workshop:** *Re:definitions is* an ongoing project with an active participatory design using cultural inquiry. Taken-for-granted truths are destabilized through a series of spelling-assembling propositions to the public within various informal and non-conventional art and learning spaces. Users are invited to (re)define what these words mean to them through symbolic representations, forming collaborative installations.
- **Fall Open Studios:** an informal opportunity for the community to visit a studio and talk with the artists
- **Article Club:** like a book club, an opportunity to meet and discuss publications
- **Community Art Help Drop-ins:** open critique sessions where feedback is available to students and artists of all ages (cancelled)
- **Incubator Artists Only:** group sharing and critique sessions
- **Artist Out-Reach:** inviting and engaging other artists to exhibit, meet, visit, talk at Art Incubate
- **Interactive Community Social Art activity:** installed in the Art Incubate parking lot, this collaborative project with Textile Magazine, Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute Students, and Art\$Pay gives secondary students an opportunity to work with local artists. Professional paintings reminiscent of childhood games like hopscotch were to be painted with an app

provided to tell people how to play while exploring the question - can interactive games engage people intergenerationally? This activity, to be included in this June CAFKA Biennial, may be cancelled or revised.

- **Art Incubate Logo Design Think Tank:** Working with a consultant, the artists helped developed a logo which is a fit for all Art Incubate activities. New signs and a mural on the side of 52 Regina incorporating the logo were to be painted in April by an AP artist.

Sponsor Outreach Activity

Included in the sponsorship is a paid 10-12 hour art based activity planned with an Incubator sponsor, intended to be a good fit, mutually beneficial and with the hope that through this association and activity, greater insights will occur for all involved. On a practical note, the planning, communicating and implementation of these activities involved the development of skills fundamental to success in any field. Some of these activities are currently on hold.

- **Ioana Dragomir - Sponsor Region of Waterloo**
Working with the staff at the Region of Waterloo Library, Ioana has prepared two approved activities, to be implemented or revised if possible when regional facilities are reopened:
Drawing from Poetry programs at the Elmira Branch
Card catalog as a travelling art installation to 5 branches with patron participation
- **Melika Hashemi - Sponsor City of Waterloo**
The interactive cultural workshop *Re:definitions* was initially to be included in an Open Streets which was cancelled and was instead presented in Waterloo Square during the Art Market.
- **Andrew McKay - Sponsor Region of Waterloo**
Exteriority and the Heritage Site, a talk and open forum is being hosted by the Schneider Haus National Historic Site, and will feature a reading from the catalogue McKay has produced for a series of paintings, prints, and drawings titled, *Exteriors*. The work in the catalogue seeks to redefine the traditions of landscape depiction, reconsider the history of land-use, and reposition what democratic participation looks like with respect to questions of public land access. A temporary display of that artwork is to be installed. Those talks were booked for Mar. 26 & 28 and feasibility of rebooking will be reviewed when this regional facility is reopened.
- **Steven Restagno - Sponsor Perimeter Development Corporation**
Working with the sponsor and hotel manager, Steven selected site appropriate paintings from AP members and installed approved changing displays at The Walper Hotel in two high traffic areas. AP has paid each exhibitor an honorarium and provided project signage. That project is planned to resume when the hotel reopens.
- **Jessie Rowe - Sponsor Miller Thomson LLP**
Jessie's first solo painting exhibition was hosted by Miller Thomson in their office for their client networking and staff events. Planning installation in a boardroom around a working office with changing staff contacts and necessary social skills were all learning challenges successfully addressed. A large piece from that exhibition was purchased for the office reception area.

Mentoring & Support

Concerned with being overly prescriptive and restrictive, as project manager I initially took a laid-back approach. I assumed that within the stated project objectives, these artists would be independently motivated to use the Incubator opportunity in ways that best suited their interests and practice, and that my role was that of facilitator.

It became obvious as the first few months of this experiment went by that more structure was needed and that skills around effective communications, collaborations, leadership, business protocol, project planning and implementation, scheduling and budgeting were new to these artists. For these reasons the Sponsor out-reach activities were challenging yet also provided the greatest learning opportunities.

Individual and group meetings were held, and email sent on communications, about timing, protocol and messaging - intentional and unintentional! – and how that influences perceptions around a person's dependability, efficiency, and the willingness to recommend and to work with them.

As a result of this first year the application process and program for the new cohort was totally revised, with program expectations clearly defined and structured. This includes established monthly group meetings, two terms with a three month probationary period, and the required number of community and collaborative activities per term with deadlines for proposals, drafts and activity completion to be planned together early in the residency.

As mentor I offer help, make introductions, connections to people, services, resources and funders, help to solve problems, advise on everything from a first show, display needs to marketing and promotions, and check in on their well-being. The AP membership ensures additional opportunities for professional development and networking.

Employment & Volunteering in the Arts Sector

With free studio space guaranteed for a year, artists were able to seek part-time employment in arts-related jobs:

- Button Factory Arts - teaching classes
- Cambridge Libraries & Idea Exchange - teaching classes, assisting with installation
- City of Kitchener - Market Mural Project, 44 Gaukel Launch
- City of Waterloo - *Lumen Festival*
- KWAG - teaching classes
- UW - working for graduate students on their projects
- Waterloo Region – Jane's Walk host
- WPL- Library assistant

Others volunteered their time with Art\$Pay, CAFKA and S.A.I.L.