

## ARTS: VISUAL

## Madison doesn't have many places to do art, but that may be changing



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A vertical sandwich-board sign propped up at 1820 S. Park Street spells out the building's mission: A, R, T.

The new People's Art Collective features a bright gallery space near the entrance. But wander through and you'll find the building's heart and soul: 3,000 square feet of warehouse space with ceilings 12 feet high,

outfitted for artists who need space, storage and a no-frills, month-to-month lease to do their work.

"I've always wanted a place that had artists under one roof, and to share that with the community," said Michael Dadtka, who lives in Lake Mills and opened his self-described "art resource center" in Madison this year because "everybody's an artist in Madison."

The People's Art Collective is only one of many efforts — some successful, some frustrated — to increase the amount of low-cost, shared space for artists in Madison so talent here can thrive and build. Last year's financial collapse of plans to convert the picturesque but dilapidated Garver Feed Mill into an arts incubator broke many hearts. But at least four new ventures, including Dadtka's, are under way to put a collective roof over artists' heads.

There remains a "huge demand for affordable studio space," said Sarah Hole, director of business incubators for Common Wealth Development, which tried to get the Garver project off the ground and has a waiting list for the six art studios it rents out at 100 S. Baldwin. "People call all the time" looking to rent, said Hole, but there's been no turnover in at least five years.

### Tool to connect artists

Whether choreographing a dance, rehearsing a band, throwing clay or painting an oversized canvas, artists need space, said Pam Andros, a senior planner for Dane County. Andros, also a part-time painter who has to work out of a corner of a bedroom, is

helping develop an online survey for artists, property owners and municipalities. The survey could launch this summer to gather data for a matchmaking tool to connect artists with landlords, and vice versa.

Mayor Paul Soglin also has asked Madison arts program administrator Karin Wolf to research what artists can afford and if the city needs more studios and live/work spaces for artists, Wolf said.

"In cities like Milwaukee, Detroit, post-industrial cities where there's a lot of affordable space, there's not the same kind of problem," Wolf said. "But here where real estate is more expensive and there's less of those industrial carcasses that can be appropriated by artists, it's more of an issue."

### **The challenges of opening a studio**

It's possible a mix of nonprofit and for-profit businesses will soon bring a renaissance of studio space to the city.

For four years, the former Great Big Pictures building at 1444 E. Washington Ave. sat vacant — until the Chandler family that owns it heard about artists struggling to find work space. This month Jack Chandler hopes to reopen the building as Art In, featuring 17 separate artist's spaces and a gallery.

And within the next three years Karissa Johnson, an arts fan with a background in politics, plans to open the Middleton Arts Center, offering studio, gallery and event space.

But venturing into the studio business has its challenges. Occupants of Winnebago Studios and Sector67 at 2046 and 2100 Winnebago St., respectively, have long known they'll eventually be displaced for development. Thomas Ferrella, an ER doctor, artist and musician who rents space at Winnebago Studios, has spent the better part of a year looking for a 10,000-square-foot building to buy for artists, with an expanded Project Lodge as a primary tenant.

But "the big players" in industrial real estate aren't interested in selling, he said. Neither was the city when it bought the former Don Miller property on East Washington Avenue for development, Ferrella said.

"I think the city fell short on that. Clearly one of those buildings could've been an arts center," said Ferrella, who now hopes to buy a 7,000-square-foot building on Atwood Avenue.

### **Painter appreciates camaraderie**

Sector67 — a space for technology, business start-ups and artists that now has about 50 members — is likewise seeking a new home on the Isthmus or Downtown, said founder Chris Meyer. The process has been difficult, but it's even worse for an individual artist.

"If you don't have all these people sort of lobbying together, they don't really have any power," Meyer said. "If a person is just looking for, say, 200 or 300 square feet of messy art space, it's really difficult to find. Which is the whole reason I created a work space where a bunch of people can come together and pool resources."

That was also the intention of the Evolution Arts Collective, founded by Kim Roberts and a friend in a 500-square-foot room at 202 S. Dickinson St. in 2008.

In 2009, they expanded to the commercial building's 1,600-square-foot warehouse — and “it's been a struggle since,” Roberts said. Members come and go, which can make management challenging.

But for painter Darci Bryan, the \$50 she pays each month to share a combined studio with other artists at Evolution gives her a sense of camaraderie, she said.

“It keeps me pumped up about my art,” Bryan said. “It's open 24/7 and it seems like it always works out so you're not in somebody's else's space.”

Dadtka started the People's Art Collective in an East Side warehouse but found it too isolated so moved in January to South Park Street. The former auto body shop features a wood shop, metalworking tools, and space for artists as well as art teachers and home-school groups.

It's been a dream for Dadtka since the former printer had to leave his job because of illness and spent years recovering from a liver transplant.

“I do a lot of work for the artists here. I try to do openings, I try to find places where they can sell their art,” he said. “To be honest, I never started this to make money. I feel like to make your mark in life, you have to do what makes you happy to do.”

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