

Make Studio for disabled artists settles into former car dealership in Hampden

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The curvy Art Deco building that once housed the Schwing Motor Co. car dealership has become the new home of Make Studio, an arts organization that supports artists with disabilities. Artists have been working in the bright new studio at 3226 Keswick Road, part of the aptly named the Schwing Art Center, since January.

"We really leapt at the chance when we saw it was available," said Jill Scheibler, Make Studio's director and program administrator. "We just fell in love with the look of the building and knew it would be an appealing destination."

Make Studio, a studio and gallery for disabled artists, is the brainchild of Scheibler, of Mount Washington, Cathy Goucher, of Charles Village, and Stefan Bauschmid, of Northern Virginia, who scraped together the funds to rent a 400-square-foot studio in Station North. All three had worked with disabled artists: Scheibler and Goucher as art therapists at the St. Elizabeth School, and Scheibler and Bauschmid at Art Enables in Washington, D.C. All three were convinced of the need for such a studio in Baltimore.

"We had individually and together observed the unique benefit of other arts and disability centers that support artists in exhibiting and selling their work, as well as the positive impact of the creative process itself on specific skill development (expressive, social, cognitive, etc.) and quality of life for a target, underserved population of people with disabilities," Scheibler said.

"There definitely was a need," Goucher said. She had worked with a number of student artists at St. Elizabeth who needed a place to continue their painting and drawing. And when their first space became available, she called some of those alumni who jumped at the chance to work there.

Although the artists have some form of disability —such as autism, Down syndrome or mental health needs — here they are first and foremost artists.

"They're passionate about what they're doing," Goucher said.

With art as a part of their lives, they are able to connect with fellow artists, speak about their work and find the social support they need. "It's a fabulous reinforcing cycle," she said.

The program, begun in 2009, took off. When they lost their lease on their Station North home, they moved to a larger, one-room studio in Woodberry.

Now, in their new headquarters, the organization can spread out with a first-floor gallery, kitchen, workshop and event space and a second-floor studio filled with light, a lounge and offices.

With the new 5,000-square-foot space comes new technology, too, according to Scheibler. Computer arts and printing capabilities have expanded and computer tablets give the artists new drawing tools. Plans are in the works to install a kiln for ceramic work. The added space will enable artists to work on more three-dimensional

projects, she said.

The artists themselves have participated in creating their new work space, Goucher said. They've offered suggestions on what supplies were needed in the studio and in the kitchen. "It made it even more of a shared work space," she said.

"As we grow we have room for more artists," Scheibler said. She hopes to expand the roster of member artists while opening the space for exhibitions for outside artists. She plans, she said, "to invite especially underrepresented artists in the community who ought to have an opportunity to show."

At present, 23 artists come to the studio on a regular basis —one to three days a week —to create the art they sell during studio exhibitions. "In the next couple of years, we'd like to be up to 40," she said. Artists receive 70 percent of the price of any piece they sell and also accept commissions.

'Thoughtful, engaging work'

Local merchants say they welcome their new neighbors.

"I love what they are doing," said Carmen Brock, the owner of Trohv and a supporter of the studio. "I think it's important, thoughtful, engaging work."

Trohv has lent space for a pop-up shop inside the store and donated a portion of the gift store's sales during those special events to Make Studio. As an art collector herself, Brock said she loves the artwork.

"I'm inspired by the work they do; I'm inspired by the mission —and I love their artwork. They're really good," she said. "It's a thrill to have them in the community."

"I think it's a great fit for the community," said Benn Ray, president of the Hampden Village Merchants Association. "It's something that's needed."

And, he said, he's glad to see the Art Deco building occupied again. Since it was used as a car showroom, it has had several occupants, including a local chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

"I'm happy to see tenants in that building," Ray said. "I've always loved that building."

Since Make Studio doesn't need all the space, two other arts nonprofits have leased space on the second floor. LitMore, a center for the literary arts, moved in early in January, and it, in turn, leases an office to Dew More, an arts and community organizing group.

"It's kind of a nice fit," Scheibler said. Both organizations provide space and schedule arts events.

"We are just delighted to be in the Schwing Building with Make Studio. Our similar community arts missions dovetail so nicely," said Julie Fisher, founder of LitMore.

The staff of Make Studio was growing out of the Woodberry studio, which wasn't conducive to shows and other events, she said. "We quickly realized it was going to be too small," she said.

Cathy Goucher, client services and outreach coordinator, saw the for-lease sign in the Schwing building's window and made initial inquiries.

Funding was made possible through a fundraising campaign with Indiegogo, a crowd-funding website.

"The public support was really key," Scheibler said. Raising the funds convinced the board the move was possible, she said. "They quickly came around."

Adding the two other arts organizations helped, too.

Fisher said she had her eye on the Schwing building but knew it was beyond LitMore's means. Then she heard about Make Studio's fundraising campaign to occupy the building. "On a whim, I asked if they might sublease some space to us," Fisher said in an email.

The move, she said, has been wonderful. "We are more central to a greater number of people," Fisher said.

"We are increasingly busy each week," she said, adding that they've been adding events and workshops to their schedule. They've scheduled writing workshops, book signings and poetry readings. On Saturday, April 4, Frederick Foote, a retired U.S. Navy captain and award-winning poet, will present a multimedia performance about Wounded Warrior and veteran art.

In the days leading up to their first exhibition, studio manager Stefan Bauschmid was busy building movable walls for gallery, a former car showroom. It was ready for its first show of new works by Make Studio artists to celebrate their fifth year. Although there are no new events on the schedule for now, the studios are filled with artists creating art. With their new location, visitors are now welcome to come and see what's on display.

Make Studio at Schwing Art Center is at 3326 Keswick Road, and open Tuesday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. or by appointment. 443.627.3502.

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