

GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE

ARTS RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE



COMMUNITY

ARTS RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

82 PRESCOTT STREET

LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

L: Gwen Strahle,
Cities 4, oil on canvas,
66" x 52"

R: Lavaughan Jenkins,
Thoughts of Messer,
oil on paper, 15" x 13"

Founded in 2009, the Arts Research Collaborative (ARC) in Lowell, Massachusetts quickly established itself as a cultural presence in the heart of the city, committed to working with the arts communities of both Lowell and the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UML).

The concept for a professional workspace and gallery came from three colleagues in the Art and Design Department: Jim Jeffers, Denise Manseau and Stephen Mishol, who explained, "We wanted to create a hybrid space where our students could have more direct interaction with professional artists." Both Manseau

and Mishol were quick to acknowledge the critical role Jim Jeffers played in developing ARC. "It was Jim who found this space, and we would not be here without him. He was really the straw that stirred the drink. I know we are indebted to him to this day and he remains a great friend," Mishol said.

According to Manseau, establishing the Arts Research Collaborative was first and foremost in response to the need for a professional studio space for the three co-founders. "We started by looking for a place to work, but also with the idea of bringing UMass to the downtown by having small shows and student events," she said.

"Early on we held a postcard fundraiser downtown – people loved it, it was very successful. The community's reaction to the postcard show sealed the prospect of establishing ARC in downtown Lowell," said Manseau. "We continue to help out with fundraising events for the students – whether a postcard show or silent auctions, we find a way to incorporate fundraising events for the students into our programming."

The founders' vision was to give the students experiences that could not be accommodated in a classroom setting or within the curriculum of the university. "We try to make a difference, to make a difference to our students

THROUGH
FEBRUARY:
SELECTED WORKS
OF JESSICA
TAWCZYNSKI
FROM HER
RECENT ARTIST'S
RESIDENCY
IN AKUREYRI,
ICELAND

and to the city of Lowell," stated Mishol. "By expanding their lessons down here, giving them a chance to think like professional artists, allowing them to exhibit in a professional space, having them interact with the community and the city, you provide things that really can't be replicated in the classroom.

"Nothing could be more experiential than making a painting or drawing, and an extension of that is when artists put their work into the world. That was the thinking originally - we could really offer more experiences not only to the students, but to the Lowell community as well. It gives opportunity for discourse that students miss once they leave school. That's significant. ARC has become a hub as students are able to come here for these shows, meet the artists, see their colleagues, and reconnect with each other. It gives them an opportunity for a continuing, ongoing dialog. It's all part of a larger process."

Both Manseau and Mishol were pleased to discuss the drawing residency program they initiated and named in honor of their former colleague and co-founder of ARC. The Jim Jeffers Drawing Residency has now become an integral component of ARC's professional offerings. According to Manseau, the goal of the residency is to support recent UML graduates who plan to continue their academic training with a Masters of Fine Arts degree. Four residencies have been awarded thus far, with recipients receiving studio space for four months. "We allow them to establish a studio practice and make art while they're working at a regular job, allowing them to build a portfolio for their grad school application," explained Manseau.

"We focused on drawing because you can argue that drawing is the foundation for all the arts. Drawing allows you not to worry about making a finished product," added Mishol, "and students always have to do more of it!"

Presenting professional and educational opportunities to students and the community also means exposing them to the bigger art world. With an early grant from the Lowell Cultural Council, ARC funded a lecture series with renowned artists Taylor Davis, Erika Adams and Tory Fair. The ARC gallery then featured solo exhibits for the artists. "We want to bring in artists from outside of Lowell - from Boston, from Rhode Island, from New York," Mishol said. "We have had artists involved in our projects who have exhibited at the Whitney Biennial, have won Guggenheims, people who have gotten Massachusetts Cultural Council grants. I think we have more value, and the difference we make is greater by using this space to bring Lowell and the larger art world together instead of using it as a self-reflective activity.

"We have great students and I know the close interaction they have with the artists we invite to exhibit gives them real-life experiences that are not always available at other art programs. We understand it as being another aspect of their formal education at the university, helping them continue their commitment to the arts, whether that is pursuing graduate studies, moving to New York City or Boston, or working in Lowell and maintaining their own studio and continuing to produce art and contributing to the cultural life," Mishol added.

At the time of my visit, the ARC gallery was exhibiting "...but in bat-talions," a selection of drawings and paintings by former UML student Alex Sewell. Now living in Brooklyn and represented by TOTAH gallery in New York City, Sewell received notable recognition for his work in a recent review in ARTFORUM, quite an accolade for the young artist. Manseau used the exhibit to demonstrate the value of ARC and its intended mission.

The opening for Sewell's show served as a mini-reunion for UML students and grads, where they could ask Sewell about his art and his career. Mishol invited him to speak at the university about his experience and where his art-making has brought him thus far. Manseau also emphasized that students need models like Alex. They want to see the trajectory from working on a portfolio to representation in New York. Sewell's success continues. In January, he is scheduled to be part of a five-person show at the Orange County Museum in Los Angeles.

In February, the ARC Gallery will present an exhibit of works by another UML alum, Jessica Tawczynski; the show's artist reception takes place on Thursday, February 15 from 6-8 p.m. A 2014 graduate, Tawczynski received an M.F.A. from Massachusetts College of Art and Design in 2017. This was quickly followed by an art residency, titled "Gílfelagid Listagil," in Akureyri, Iceland. During the month-long residency, Tawczynski presented a guest lecture at Akureyri Art Museum at the invitation of its director, and had a solo exhibit of works produced during her residency at Deiglan Gallery.

Her exhibit at the ARC Gallery will include works from her residency that combine prints with drawing and painting - works she described as "hybrids." Tawczynski was animated and enthusiastic when asked to comment on her experience at ARC.

"I have friends I went to school with who are constantly working at ARC," she said. "Some have studios there; some have had drawing residencies there. It becomes this cultural idea-developing, brainstorming, research place. It shows different classes of students, 'These are people that graduated from UMass and they're off doing good things, and you can, too.' I really enjoy it. It gives me a sense of home base. I really like that."

| Flavia Cigliano