



A PUBLICATION OF THE COLLECTIVE ARTS NETWORK | CLEVELAND

ART IN NORTHEAST OHIO | SUMMER 2014

CASE STUDY CAN Journal: Pressing for Change



Printmaker Liz Maugans saw a need: many of Cleveland's artists and arts and culture organizations were going unnoticed and lacked an effective platform for getting the word out about their work. Maugans knew that together their voices would be much more powerful and so the Collective Arts Network (CAN) Journal was born.

Cover of CAN Journal, design by Joanne Dickey, Cover art "Buried It Off Of Ira" oil on panel by Steve Ehret / Photo by Michael Gill

90
UNDERCURRENTS,
RECEPTIONS, RAIDS

CLEVELAND MONUMENTS
MAN JAMES RORIMER

MY MAY SHOW

CLEVELAND ARTS PRIZE
MYSTERIES REVEALED

ARTFACE

The art of printmaking is defined as the transfer of ink from a plate, block, or screen to a flat surface to create a single fine art print.

Yet this general description is deceptively simple. To produce just one print, a printmaker must carry out a number of steps and utilize a wide range of techniques. In the printmaking process known as intaglio, for example, a printmaker will first use a tool to create an image on a metal plate that is covered with an acid resistant material. The plate is then submerged in an acid bath to etch the image onto the metal. Next, ink is applied to the plate and wiped off so it only remains in the etched lines. Finally, a piece of paper is put on the plate and pushed with uniform force onto the plate using a printing press. This transfers the image from the plate to the paper.

Just as every component of this process—whether large or small—is required to make the final product, a strong arts and culture sector is built on the recognition and understanding that every individual artist and arts and culture organization, even small ones, are essential components of the broader cultural ecosystem.

The Spark

A 2009 Arts and Culture Roundtable hosted by the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC) brought together members of the arts and culture sector during the height of the Great Recession to catalyze discussions on how the sector could develop strategies to weather the economic downturn. To facilitate discussion, those in attendance were asked to form four, impromptu breakout groups representing artists and small organizations, medium organizations, and large organizations. As the groups coalesced, participants like Liz Maugans, co-founder and executive director of Zygote Press on Cleveland's East Side, recognized that even within the smallest category, the range of challenges facing organizations were varied.

“It became clear to the smallest of the small organizations that their needs were materially different from others who put themselves in the small category, which included organizations with budget sizes up to \$500,000,” says Megan Van Voorhis, chief operating officer of CPAC, who led the discussion among the small organization group. “They recognized a need facing the smallest organizations and were catalyzed to do something to address it.”

Upon leaving this event, Maugans wanted to do something that would lead to greater awareness and appreciation for the important work the arts and culture sector does to make our city and region stronger, while ensuring that even the smallest organizations, like Zygote Press, were involved. Later that year, Maugans invited a group of local artists and leaders of arts and culture organizations to discuss the challenges they faced and how they could work together to overcome them. This meeting would become the basis for SALT (Sustainable Arts Leaders Talk)—a monthly convening of arts and culture leaders from organizations like BAYarts, City Artists at Work, Cleveland Arts Prize, CPAC, the Council of Smaller Enterprises' Arts Network, Orange Art Center and RED DOT Project. Although their missions were very different, one mutual dilemma soon emerged: exposure.

The Collective Arts Network (*CAN Journal*) was thus created with the goal of drawing attention to, and elevating the voices of, artists and organizations who they believed lacked an effective platform for promoting their work.

Filling a Need

This lack of publicity pointed to a clear need for a publication that would spotlight members of the arts and culture sector, especially those that were not well known. “All of these galleries need people to know what they are doing, and they need to be able to catalyze beyond to some sort of critical mass,” says *CAN Journal* editor



Four artist-printmakers, Joe Sroka, Liz Maugans, Bellamy Printz, and Kelly Novak, joined forces in 1995 after recognizing the need for a working fine-art printmaking facility in Cleveland. Through this synergy and collective effort **Zygoté Press** was born. Zygoté Press is a non-profit, cooperative, fine art printmaking workshop that offers studio space, printmaking equipment, and technical assistance to local artists. The organization aims to help artists create fine art prints in a collaborative atmosphere promoting the exchange of ideas, increasing awareness about the printmaking process, providing affordable studio space and exhibition opportunities, and stimulating communications between artist-printmakers and the broader community. Zygoté Press also offers several different programs in printmaking for individuals of all levels, from novice to professional artists, including classes that teach participants to use the tools of the trade so they can leave the workshop with a tangible print creation.

To help further the connection between printmaking and the wider community, several initiatives have been undertaken: Press on Wheels, an opportunity that brings printmaking to students by offering them onsite visits of the facility; The Printmaking Expedition, a travelling expedition of the Zygoté Press archives; and the Works in Progress program, which offers an open forum where practicing artists can present and discuss their work. The press also maintains an artist exchange, called the Dresden Program, which brings German artists to Cleveland and sends Cleveland-based artists to Germany. Through this collaboration, Zygoté Press creates connections between the global printmaking community and the community here in Northeast Ohio.

Website: <http://www.zygotepress.com/>



Jen Craun (pictured) in Zygoté Press shop; Photo courtesy of Michael Loderstedt

Michael Gill. “If you want [your exhibit] to be more than your friends getting together, if you want to be engaged in the arts economy, if you want to show people works of art not just because they are your friends, then you need public awareness. You need a way to reach people.” The *CAN Journal* set out on a mission to provide the publicity that was so important, yet often lacking.

Prior to the creation of *CAN Journal*, coverage of the local visual arts scene, and the visual arts sector in particular, often focused on the larger players in town, exploring exhibits and events happening at the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cleveland Institute of Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Cleveland. More recently, challenges in the newspaper and periodical industries have shrunk coverage of arts and culture across the board, but especially for exhibits and activities that fall outside the mainstream.

Comments from focus groups also echoed these concerns, voicing regret about the lack of quality local coverage of the arts even as artists and institutions in the region are recognized by outlets like *The New York Times*. Others note the lack of art critics and arts segments in local print media and broadcast media respectively. Even as the Cleveland Museum of Art engaged in its largest expansion in a century there was little more than a “blurb” on the 11 o’clock news. Referring to this perceived lack of quality of local media coverage, one focus group participant asked “why do we limit ourselves to something that is average?” The *CAN Journal* set out to fill this media gap by going well beyond “average”.

Working Together

Networking and collaboration have been the driving forces behind the *CAN Journal*, Gill says. The first issue was actually conceived as the only issue—a onetime overview of the local arts scene. Individual artists and groups would pay \$100 to be listed as a *CAN* member at the back of the publication. Membership fees would provide the match for a \$2,400 grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

Liz Maugans says she anticipated getting 16 members to sign on to the deal; the first issue, published in January 2012, drew support from 28 members. All members agreed to contribute content. “We each picked a member organization out of a hat” to interview, Maugans says. The group paid \$6,000 to have the *Plain Dealer* print 10,000 copies of the first issue as a newsprint tabloid. As a way to generate excitement and distribute copies, the *CAN Journal* staff threw a launch party, inviting members to mingle and take copies of the publication to share within their own organizations. Free copies were also made available at branches of the Cuyahoga County Public Library and Heinen’s stores.

Though the first issue was out, it did not happen effortlessly. “The problem with the first issue is that structurally we could provide an overview of the organizations, but we couldn’t do anything timely,” Gill says. Follow-up interviews with all 28 original members found overwhelming support for a quarterly publication that would allow local arts organizations to publicize upcoming events. “It’s hard to get these disparate organizations to participate willingly without money coming to them,” Gill says. “That makes this noteworthy.”

In demonstrating the value proposition, Maugans and Gill compare the cost of membership and member articles to the traditional way of promoting art exhibits through postcards. Printing and mailing 1,000 postcards to a list of potential patrons may cost \$500 or more. The *CAN Journal*, on the other hand, provides members a medium for showcasing their events to an audience ten times bigger and wider in scope—at a cost significantly less than \$500. “We looked at this as a model of cost effectiveness,” Maugans says.

Sustaining Efforts

Since the first publication, membership has grown to 55 galleries and organizations and 14 individual artists. Members submit their own articles, with galleries frequently providing a biography and perspective on an artist’s work. All the articles, which Gill edits for style and readability, are meant to preview and promote exhibits

coming up in the next three months. Members pay \$125 for a half-page article and \$250 for a full-page write-up. Traditional advertising space is also available, costing members \$500 and non-members up to \$1,000 for a full-page display. “It’s a good deal,” Gill says. “We can’t really price it much higher. We want it to be affordable for these small organizations. Being inclusive like that is important to us.”

The *CAN Journal* also received support from local businessman and longtime arts patron, Wally Lanci. He serves as corporate counsel for his family’s Consolidated Graphics Group printing business and agreed to print the *CAN Journal*’s first year of issues, in full color and on nicer-than-newsprint paper, for free. “Help from Consolidated Graphics has been pivotal,” Maugans says. “We talked to all sorts who print magazines. The cheapest we could do was tabloid newsprint. . . . Wally Lanci has been amazing in his philanthropy. He walks in and says, ‘I will pay for the first year.’ That freed us to focus on getting off the ground and in the form we wanted.”

Lanci says he was drawn to the *CAN Journal*’s focus on galleries and smaller arts organizations, yet has been impressed by its ability to attract the interest of the region’s larger arts institutions as well. “When you look at the membership and the variety they have, I think that speaks volumes for the need for something like this,” Lanci says. “[Cleveland Museum of Art] doesn’t need to advertise in this, but they see the value.” He cites two features of the *CAN Journal* business plan as critical to its sustainability: membership and collaboration. Membership means there is “financial skin in the game,” which, in turn, enhances collaboration. “If there’s not enough skin in the game for each nonprofit, then collaboration sometimes fades away.”

In a mark of tradition for the young publication, launch parties continue to serve as the primary mechanisms for distributing the 10,000 copies of each edition. Each launch party for a new edition of the journal is held at a different member’s site. “That gets us around town and connects us in the community,” Maugans says.

Although she and Gill are thrilled with the growth in membership, they would like to see more community support for the publication through advertising. So far, most of the advertising has come through member non-profit institutions, such as CPAC and the Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as local community development organizations that appreciate how the publication groups activities by neighborhood. Gill, a former editor at the *Sun* newspapers and *Free Times* and former arts editor for *Scene* magazine, would like to see more restaurants and other businesses advertise, the way that they do in more traditional publications. “We need larger organizations paying for more,” Gill says. “We need more banks, hotels, for-profit advertisers. These are the sorts of things we need for actual sustainability to happen.”

Other challenges that have arisen for the nascent journal include a perception among some non-member artists that the *CAN Journal* represents a closed club of sorts. A focus group participant noted she viewed the *CAN Journal* as a network that strengthens connections within itself, but that it has yet to reach those unfamiliar or outside of the existing network. “It doesn’t reach the average person that is going to pick up the newspaper... it’s preaching to the choir” observed other focus group participants. Part of this issue arises from the fact the *CAN Journal* has, in large part, eschewed embracing digital and social media in promoting and supporting its primary print offering, aside from offerings available on their website. Overall, much of this criticism may be a direct result of *CAN Journal’s* relative youth, small size, and the fact that it was never designed to compete, or in this case supplant, mass media coverage of the arts—the true source of much of the criticism. The core of the *CAN Journal’s* brand in the foreseeable future is to remain the printed journal itself.

Printing in a Digital Era

In an era when long established print publications are folding or switching to online content, why take the risk of a printed journal? “Print helps crack the whip,” Gill says. “It’s distinctive. It’s limited and therefore people take it seriously. It requires more planning and forethought to get in.” He points out the journal also offers space online, at canjournal.org, for events that don’t make it into the printed version.

Maugans believes the infrequency of the quarterly *CAN Journal* helps make it seem more special than a daily newspaper or weekly magazine. “There’s something about these [journals] that they can be archived. We need bibliographies and something as artists that’s sexy and that’s written up about us... something that we can put in a PR packet. I just did a program down in Collinwood. I could have [promoted] it online through my blog, but this is something that people wouldn’t find online. It finds you instead of you trying to track it down.”

Looking Forward

Entering its second year, the *CAN Journal* kept with tradition and celebrated by holding a launch party. However, unlike in the past, the June 29, 2013, event was structured as a fundraiser called “Y2CAN”. The *CAN Journal* also experienced another milestone earlier in the month, when it emerged from under the fiscal wing of Maugans’ Zygote Press. As of June 1st, the St. Clair Superior Development Corporation assumed the role of fiscal agent for the journal. “The journal will still be part of our mission at Zygote Press. We will always be a member. I will be active as one of the founders,” Maugans says. “But this was always an aim of our board.”

While Maugans’ Zygote Press may have stepped away from fiscal control of the *CAN Journal*, the experience has forever changed her relationship with the local arts and culture community. The *CAN Journal* has led to the creation of a database of artists, galleries and organizations and has resulted in a sharing of grant-writing

resources. “We really are tethered because of this experience,” Maugans says. “We all support each other. There is strength in numbers, energy especially. . . there’s cohesiveness in the fabric of this art landscape.”

Focus group participants [noted] how essential it is that public funding for the arts remain strong so that the region can not only draw artists in from elsewhere, but also its role in retaining existing artists and recent graduates of local colleges.

Pressing for Change

As the *CAN Journal* enters its third year in print, the organization has begun to shift toward a greater advocacy role for arts and culture as a community development tool. “Broad acceptance of arts organizations and galleries can bring new energy to neighborhoods and catalyze rebirth,” Gill says. As examples, he points to the 78th Street Studios in the Gordon Square Arts District, the Waterloo Arts District in Collinwood, and the Quadrangle arts district in the St. Clair Superior neighborhood as helping to reinvigorate those communities culturally and economically by infusing art and retail spaces. Additionally, public support in the form of a cigarette excise tax, which Cuyahoga County voters approved in 2006, has been central to these creative and catalytic developments, he says. Thanks

to this funding, Cuyahoga County (via Cuyahoga Arts & Culture grants) routinely provides more public funding in terms of real dollars to arts and culture than in all but two states—New York and Minnesota—uniquely positioning the region as a premier supporter of arts and culture nationally. Focus group participants echoed this, noting how essential it is that public funding for the arts remain strong so that the region can not only draw artists in from elsewhere, but also its role in retaining existing artists and recent graduates of local colleges.

Maugans agrees public sector support has been critical. “I just think we’re in a renaissance here as far as arts go,” she says. “I can feel it.” Her next effort will be to use the *CAN Journal* as a platform for arts advocacy. She plans to invite key decision-makers—politicians, corporations, educators and community development leaders—to events that showcase research on the connection between creative workers and economic growth as well as artists who are actively re-envisioning Cleveland neighborhoods. “We need these groups to be our advocates. We’re taxpayers too. We care very deeply about our everyday practice. We need help to be able to vocalize our connection within the community.”

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About the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC)

Well-resourced, connected and united arts and culture has the power to improve lives and communities. To that end, CPAC serves and supports arts and cultural professionals and community leaders who are creating a bright future for greater Cleveland. CPAC's research and advocacy fosters informed decision-making. CPAC's training, counsel and online resources provide those we serve with the ideas, skills and connections to achieve their aims. By bringing people together both within the sector and throughout the region, CPAC ensures arts and culture is a continued force for community betterment.

Vision

Greater Cleveland's diverse arts and culture sector will be a leading partner in contributing to our community's vitality and enlivening the human experience.

Mission

To strengthen, unify and connect greater Cleveland's arts and culture sector.

Learn more at www.cultureforward.org

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