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CREATING THEIR OWN BREAKS **Program teaches artists how to take control of their own careers**

By ALICE THORSON

Kansas City artists have become bolder in recent months about touting their achievements, and it seems they have more achievements to tout.

So what is behind this new confidence?

A growing number credit the Creative Capital workshop, an intensive career development program brought here by the Charlotte Street Foundation and the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City.

For two and a half days, artists learn about planning, marketing and fundraising from five successful artists and a professional consultant engaged by the Creative Capital Foundation. The New York-based national nonprofit was founded in 1999 to help artists through grants, advice and services.

"Having the message coming from artists to artists is critical to its delivery," said David Hughes, director of the Charlotte Street Foundation.

"It's not a detailed 'how to write a resume' weekend. It's more about a mindset change of creating space in your life and brain to devote to business in support of your work."

The Kansas City workshop is one of a half dozen weekend retreat workshops that Creative Capital is presenting this year in Tucson, San Antonio and other cities. With major funding from the Karen McCarthy Charitable Fund, founded by the former Missouri congresswoman, the KC program is now in its third year.

Hughes points out that the workshop also enables Creative Capital to learn about Kansas City artists.

"In learning about the quality of the artists and work here, they become emissaries for Kansas City artists," Hughes said.

In 2007 the Kansas City groups put out a call for artists and selected 24 to participate in the weekend retreat. The process was repeated in 2008. Next month another 24 artists will go through the program.

Photographer Elijah Gowin, winner of a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship in 2008, went through the 2007 workshops.

"I was a little bit skeptical," he said, "but I was happily proven wrong. It really was very rigorous. They had high-quality people in charge."

It's extremely beneficial, Gowin said, to interact with successful artists who have gone through the New York system.

"They are aware of what a dog-eat-dog world it is and that kind of intensity and competitiveness rubbed off."

The grant-writing workshops helped him get a couple of grants, Gowin said, and the program as a whole

inspired him to start Tin Roof Press.

"Publications are not something that happens to artists, but it's another aspect of your artmaking, another venue to share your artwork," he said.

In 2008 he released *Maggie*, a book of photographs taken by Gowin and his father, Emmet Gowin, of their elderly aunt, Maggie. (Dolphin gallery has copies of the book, which also is available at www.tinroofpress.com.)

Matt Dehaemers, creator of the recently completed "Seven Sentinels" sculpture for Kansas City's new Vehicle Impound Facility on Front Street, has been working in the public realm for 15 years. One of the most valuable things he took away from the 2007 workshop, he said, was advice about how to negotiate.

At the time he was firming up a commission from the Evanston Art Center in Evanston, Ill. The skills he learned at the workshop enabled him to get adequate funding for the project.

"It helped me understand what I should be able to ask for instead of being the artist who just says yes to everything," Dehaemers said.

Painter Grant Miller, who also participated in the inaugural 2007 workshop in KC, said it was "an eye-opening experience."

"It really forces you to understand your priorities and what your goals are," he said.

"What it does is breaks things down," he added. "If you don't have a contact in L.A., it breaks down steps and procedures of how to go about doing that."

Miller said he gained valuable advice about how to deal with galleries.

"They gave me the perspective of the gallerist," he said. "I was showing in New York, and I'd had a couple of shows. They helped me firm up my relationship with that gallery and be frank with them and they were frank with me. It really sets in concrete what you're wanting and what they're expecting."

Artists who have attended the workshop have been spreading the word. The program received 89 applicants this year compared to 50 for 2008.

"A lot of people told me it was quite useful for them to get some advice," said Jennifer Boe, a 2001 alum of the Kansas City Art Institute who has shown her provocative embroidered works in the U.S. and overseas.

"All the stuff I've done has fallen in my lap, and I've just said yes. There are other things I would like to do, and I'm hoping they can tell me how to make that happen."

Linnea Spransy, whose new paintings are being exhibited at Byron C. Cohen Gallery in Kansas City, said she was encouraged to apply to the program by Miller, who is also showing new work at Cohen this month.

"The world is changing," Spransy said. "Galleries are an element of an artist's career; they aren't the catalyst any more. You have to push as well. You can't rely on other people to do that for you."

The 2009 workshops mark the Creative Capital program's final round in Kansas City, but it has inspired a new local program of entrepreneurship and business training for artists of all disciplines, scheduled to launch in May.

The KC Artist LINC (Leveraging Investments in Creativity) professional development workshops are being developed in conjunction with the 6-year-old national LINC initiative.

The UMKC Innovation Center has teamed up with the Charlotte Street Foundation, the Arts Council, the Kansas City Art Institute and the UMKC Conservatory and are in the process of developing the curriculum, Hughes said.

For more information about the KC Artist LINC workshops, visit www.linc.artskc.org.

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