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Charlotte Street Foundation creates a vibrant canvas for artists

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by [Michael Braude](#) Contributing Writer



Dan Maginn, a principal at [el dorado inc.](#), is one of the most talented designers in our town. In an earlier column, I described some of his architecture firm's innovative projects. When Dan called recently to suggest I might want to learn about the [Charlotte Street Foundation](#), I readily jumped at the opportunity.

My visit with David Hughes Jr., founder and director of the Charlotte Street Foundation, was very illuminating.

It also came at a propitious time, as the exhibition "Troost Troost Troost" will be open to the public at the foundation's Urban Culture Project space, 21 E. 12th St. in Kansas City, through June 12.

This project, which offers a great taste of what the foundation is all about, is a collaborative exhibition with the [University of Kansas School of Architecture Design and Planning](#), the [Kansas City Art Institute](#)'s department of graphic design and el dorado.

The exhibit focuses on student work exploring realities, possibilities and fantasies for Troost Avenue. Students were challenged to come up with concepts that focus on Troost's history and that could replace its blight with viable initiatives. I previewed some of their ideas, and trust me, they are creative.

When Maginn introduced me to Hughes, he said: "David is a hero of artists in Kansas City." After a lengthy visit, I concurred totally.

David started the foundation in 1997 as a modest effort to recognize and support individual artists. At that time, Kansas City was losing many of its artists and creatives.

Charlotte Street was one of the first programs in the United States to offer unrestricted grants to individual artists. It was a rare, but very intuitive, concept.

In the past, Kansas City's leadership had been generous with large arts organizations such as The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art but had virtually ignored grass-roots artists. David changed that.

He cited a very interesting statistic: "Ninety-six percent of the population values the arts, but only 27 percent value artists." From the start, the Charlotte Street Foundation listened to artists. It also encouraged the community to grasp the economic impact of artists' contributions.

The foundation has succeeded by being catalytic, as evidenced by its collaboration with the two educational institutions on "Troost Troost Troost."

The foundation has six core initiatives:

1. Cash grants and commissions to Kansas City artists, providing financial support and validation.
2. Studios, providing key space to create and make work.
3. Performance and exhibition opportunities.
4. Training for professional development and business skills.
5. Advocacy and planning on behalf of artists.
6. National outreach for the Kansas City community of artists.

Nancy Lee, on behalf of the prestigious Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, perfectly summed up the Charlotte Street Foundation's impact when she said:

"Charlotte Street Foundation's first 10 years are a great success story, and the organization has made significant contributions toward strengthening Kansas City's contemporary visual arts scene. CSF is in the growth phase of its organizational life cycle, with highly talented, well-connected staff who have created clearly focused programs that serve growing audiences. Their impressive ability to form partnerships with other nonprofits, businesses and civic leaders has become a highly successful strategy as well as a means for building visibility and community support."

I am very grateful to Dan Maginn for introducing me to David Hughes Jr. and to both of them for opening my eyes to what a tremendous asset the Charlotte Street Foundation is to our community. A dynamic community must have a vibrant arts scene, and this foundation contributes mightily to the vitality of Kansas City's arts community.

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