



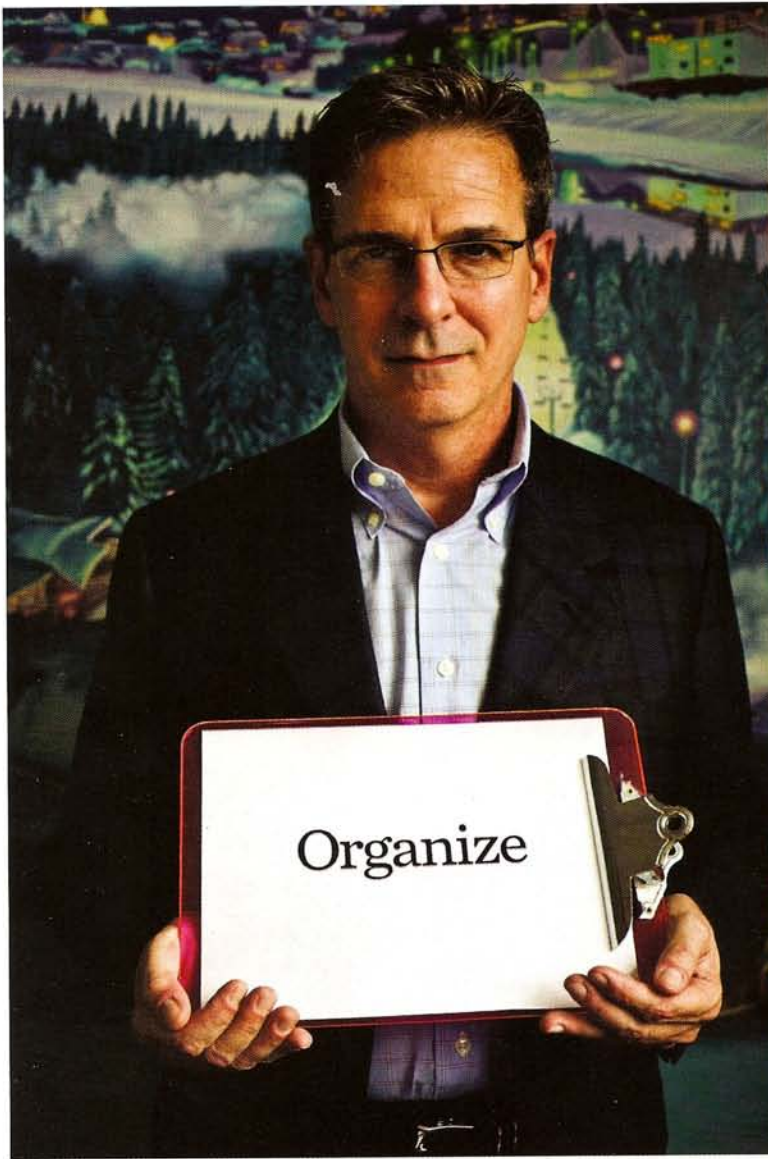


Organize  
Unify  
Support  
Local Art

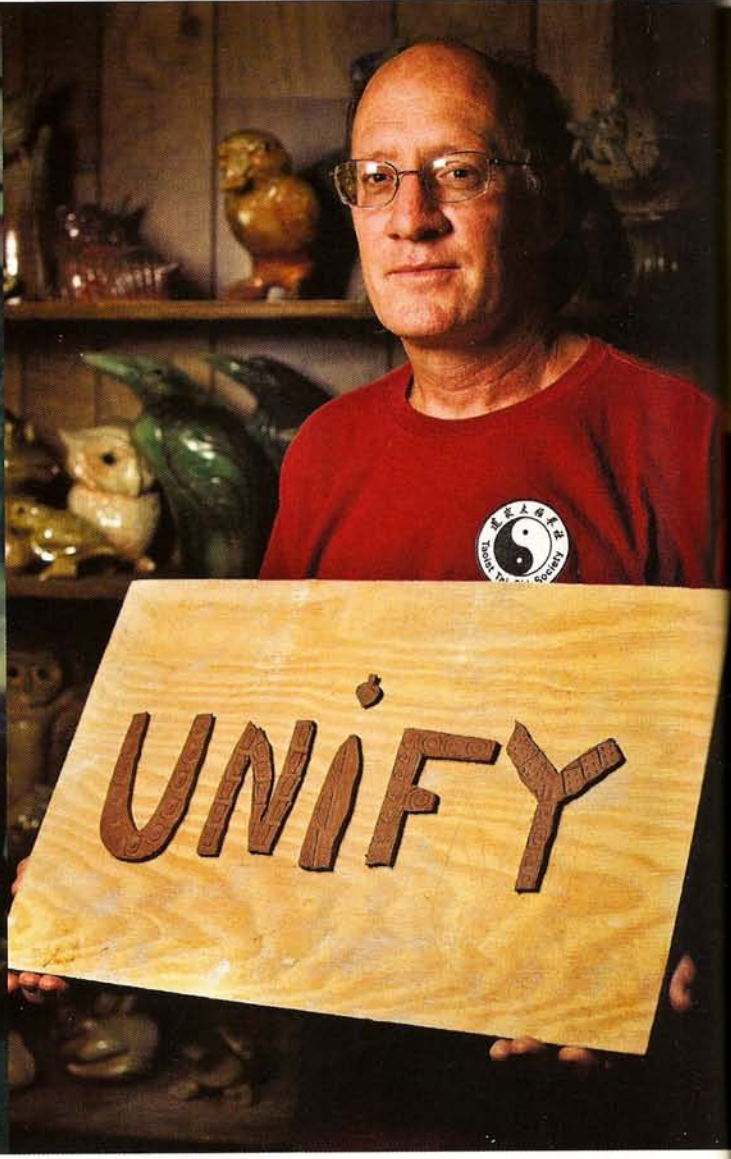
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"The potential"  
*Mixed Media*  
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something has to change to attain what's possible.



David Butler, Knoxville Museum of Art



Peter Rose, Potter

## Knoxville's art community is reaching a tipping point.

**I****N THE PAST 10 YEARS**, the city's contemporary arts scene has gone from underground to around town. But despite the emergence of progressive art galleries and support groups, many in Knoxville who make a living producing art are still finding it difficult to sell their work in their home town. It's not due to a lack of venue, but a

lack of focus: a desperate need for the growing number of separate districts, initiatives and artists to find a common ground that is closer than most people think.

Knoxville's art "reawakening" came thanks to a grassroots movement of contemporary visual arts that spans the last decade. From the dawn of First Fridays to the rise of Gay St., Knoxville's initial hipster arts scene forged ahead in the beginning as

a small, tight-knit community of artists. The defining year of the movement came in 2004, with the opening of two critical Knoxville art institutions: The Emporium Center and Three Flights Up Gallery.

The Emporium Center, which will receive \$2 million in city funds over the next 10 years, was a small step forward toward the city's involvement in the development of downtown arts. The center quickly became a gathering place for artists and an anchor on South Gay St.

That same year, University of Tennessee graduates Lauren Karnitz, Clark Gillespie and Ben McKamey envisioned a new outlet for young artists when they created Three Flights Up Gallery. The result was a 69-step hike into contemporary art heaven and the turning point for the Knoxville arts scene. There,



Chris McAdoo, Painter & Charcoal Artist



Lauren Karnitz, Painter & Gallery Founder

for a mere \$75 per show, artists at all levels and walks of life could present contemporary ideas in an open environment and, at the same time, have an opportunity to sell to the public.

"We formed to help people not be starving artists; that is our job," says Karnitz, who recently moved the gallery farther north downtown off North Broadway. "We wanted to give everyone a voice."

**FLASH-FORWARD TO TODAY**, and those voices have turned an arts scene into an arts industry that shows intermittent flashes of light. A colony of progressive galleries sprang up and has since incubated the work of countless contemporary artists, providing essential creative outlets in the process. Unfortunately, a lot of that success, at least in terms of dollars and cents, is either coming from markets other than Knoxville or experiencing a spotted record of interest from a scattered group of arts supporters. The natural growth process seems to have caught the arts community in Knoxville off-guard, leaving many local artists to wonder why formal arts organizations and city

government aren't playing a bigger part to help keep these new talents in Knoxville.

Painter and printmaker Chris McAdoo has shown at exhibitions up and down the East Coast. One of Knoxville's hottest emerging artists, McAdoo is selling works in places like Atlanta, Chattanooga and New York. He represents a growing number of contemporary artists who are gaining national attention as professionals, not hobbyists. McAdoo would love to see Knoxville evolve from a launching pad for artists into a home base where contemporary work would be sold and celebrated on a regular basis.

"By attracting professionally driven 'creatives,' which we've started doing, you make the arts scene strong enough to survive on its own," McAdoo says. "I'm talking about reaching the starch-shirt community here. An artist has to have business savvy. And sometimes it takes putting yourself out on that limb. Sometimes it takes risks. To shed the next layer of skin, artists, organizations and the city must come together and move to-

## A Scattered Geography

**TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANT ROLE** geography plays in arts success, consider Maryville's Art Walk. In a short period of time, Maryville's "Last Fridays" event has dramatically grown thanks in large part to the cohesive nature of the event. Everyone in a concentrated district participates: bars, coffee shops, theaters and retail. In Asheville, that urban lifestyle, which works so well with the arts, feels easily attainable. Knoxville's arts potential is bigger in size and audience, but subject to the city's uncommon width. Take a look at some of Knoxville's elite galleries and the miles that separate them.

### • Hanson Gallery

5607 Kingston Pike, Knoxville  
865-584-6097

### • Three Flights Up Gallery

800 Tyson Street, Knoxville  
865-256-8361

### • Art Market

422 South Gay St., Knoxville  
865-525-5265

### • Ewing Gallery of Art & Architecture

1715 Volunteer Blvd., Knoxville  
865-974-3200

### • Bennett Galleries & Co.

5308 Kingston Pike, Knoxville  
865-584-6791

### • Art Gallery of Knoxville

317 North Gay Street, Knoxville  
865-595-4401

### • Karns Art Gallery & Antiques

7811 Oak Ridge Hwy #C,  
Knoxville, 865-694-4955

### University of Tennessee

**Art Gallery**  
106 South Gay Street, Knoxville  
865-673-0802

### • Village Fine Art

4660 Old Broadway Street,  
Knoxville  
865-687-0411

### • Lyons View Gallery

4509 Kingston Pike, Knoxville  
865-584-7733

### • Bearden Art Gallery Custom

4942 Kingston Pike, Knoxville  
865-588-4554

### • Fountain City Art Center

213 Hotel Road, Knoxville  
865-357-2787

### • Gallery Province Soo Cha's Art Studio

5412 Kingston Pike, Knoxville  
865-588-2888

### • Wildwood Gallery

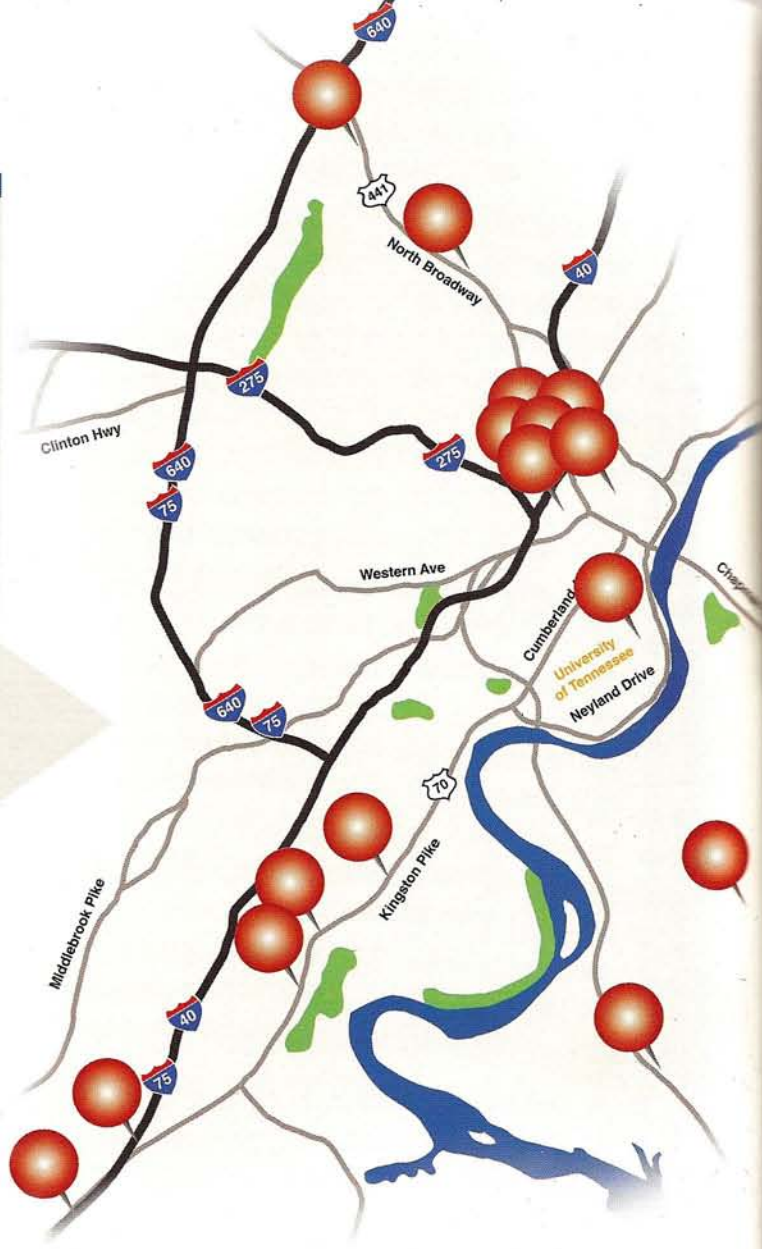
2924 Sutherland Ave., Knoxville  
865-546-3811

### • Art Galleria

6915 Kingston Pike, Knoxville  
865-583-0044

### • A-1 LabArts Gallery

201 Randolph St., Knoxville  
*no phone available*



wards a collective vision about the arts scene's infrastructure."

To attain this vision, many have looked to Chattanooga as a template for merging art and business. However, Christa Mannarino, Executive Director of Chattanooga's Association for Visual Arts (AVA), stresses the importance of artists becoming more than their craft and every key player coming together.

"We have a couple of foundations very interested in bringing creative jobs to Chattanooga," Mannarino says. "But that doesn't necessarily mean you are going to see contemporary art flying off the wall. In a city the size of Knoxville, artists must find creative ways to position themselves as tools for economic development in order to meet disposable income with underground art in a trickle down process. I would start with getting folks around a table. That is how we do/did it here."

**TO CREATE THAT MEETING,** Liza Zenni, executive director of Knoxville's Arts and Cultural Alliance, believes the trajectory of contemporary artists must be able to move beyond the intrinsic value of their work and view economic develop-

ment as a common-sense consequence. Only then will government and the major philanthropists take notice.

Under rising criticism that her organization has neglected to seize the opportunity to give the recent movement a solid foundation and encourage this type of internal and external development, Zenni spent her summer traveling to cities across the U.S. She left to find ideas for making Joe and Jane Knoxville excited and aware of Knoxville art as a mainstream medium. When she returned from the trip, her head was brimming with ideas. But soon, a defacing reality began to sink in.

"I had this moment when I got back: almost like a hangover," Zenni says. "People would come up to me and say, 'Liza, you are the thought leader.' And I thought, 'Oh my God, I couldn't come up with a new thought if you put a gun to my head.' And I'm not just being self-deprecating to make an excuse for the Alliance. I will never come up with an idea in the four walls of this office that even compares to the ideas that are walking up and down Gay Street and Cumberland Avenue. That is when I told my board that I either have to get some new perspective or we need to get someone else."

Zenni's self-assessment and subsequent realization underscore the need for new ideas to give the aforementioned voices a single voice. And to get those ideas circulating, Zenni has been feverishly soliciting the input of a cross-section of artists and potential investors and rightly puts part of the responsibility into the talented hands of local artists.

"I am a salesman," Zenni says. "If those artists could make a good case for how their individual work could contribute to economic development, the ACA could be the face for gaining support, but they have to come up with ideas. What I am trying to do now is bring in new life," says Zenni. "And that input defines what we do."

**OF COURSE, WOULD-BE BUSINESS** partners and government must also be willing to meet artists halfway by expanding their knowledge and focusing their support of contemporary arts in Knoxville. That's not to say that the Haslam regime has not been a consistent supporter of the arts. More than its predecessor, it has and has done so well. But, as local potter Peter Rose points out, there's support and then there's serious action toward building a strong extension to Knoxville's economy.

"What we need to do is get the mayor, Bill Haslam, to sit down with the art organizations and artists and business owners to actually map out a concrete blueprint for developing art in Knoxville," Rose says. "Where can we sell it? What offices and storefronts can we put it in? Where will we build a single arts district? We could answer these questions at a meeting like that and move forward getting local people excited about art again."

And that is where David Butler, the Knoxville Museum of Art's recently hired executive director, enters the story. Butler and his new, talented staff of art diplomats are reaching across all artistic dialects and sensibilities to make museum visitors more comfortable with and energetic about the work that is on display. Butler is pushing branding and art awareness to expand the museum's audience. As a part of the campaign to get people in front of the area's work, admission to the museum is free through the remainder of 2008. Other ideas include having artists physically present as often as possible to answer questions and instill a sense of Knoxville art history through permanent exhibits.

"I think art can be scary for people," says KMA curator Stephen Wicks. Wicks believes that the arts community must make the art experience more comfortable. "I am more afraid of apathy than I am hard feelings," Wicks says. "People think the visual arts should be instantly accessible. We can't let them get disinterested if something requires them to step outside their comfort zone."

## THE STAGE IS SET AND THE ACTORS ARE IN

place for supporters to have what they've always wanted. When the perceptions are gone, the roundtables have taken place and a single vision for art's rightful place on the economic and social priority list of Knoxville and Knox County has been realized, there will be a true arts community. Who goes first? ☺

## Get An Early Start on Art

### ARTISTS DON'T TYPICALLY PICK UP A BRUSH

for the first time at age 30 and produce a masterpiece. Likewise, an art lover may like art on first sight, but they don't love it without a lifetime of exposure. A child who is exposed to art at an early age—painting, sculpture, film, music—is better off for it personally and has a greater chance of giving back to his or her community as an adult. Knoxville has a handful of fantastic art programs for the city's youth to make sure each child knows that the arts aren't just for adults.

### MEDIA HIGH

Media High is a media literacy program sponsored by Knox County Public Library. Founded in 2006, Media High is a summer, after-school, and on-line program where high school students learn the basics of digital media design and production and have created high-quality documentary films such as history of downtown Knoxville and the story of "The Clinton Twelve." Their summer filmmaking program is designed particularly for rising high school juniors and seniors and recent graduates. **865.215.8729**

### COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF ARTS

In this fantastic art option, kids can learn to appreciate the process involved in art while also giving to the beautification of their community. The Community School of the Arts, housed at First Presbyterian Church in downtown Knoxville, provides affordable quality instruction in the visual and performing arts to children of all ages, abilities, and economic backgrounds. One project example is a ceramic tile and "found-object" piece dedicated at the City County Building in 2005.

### JOY OF MUSIC SCHOOL

Art, like love, is blind. Every child in Knoxville has the right to experience the joys and challenges of creating music or art. That is why this local philanthropy is so special. Started in 1997 by business leader James A. Dick, Joy of Music School is dedicated to providing financially disadvantaged kids and teens with the equipment and classes to develop a love of music. In conjunction with the Boys & Girls Club of Knoxville, the school provides musical instruments, private and group lessons, ensemble and music enrichment classes. **www.joyofmusicsschool.com, 865.525.6806**

### CHILDREN'S THEATRE OF KNOXVILLE

Child acting doesn't have to be limited to juice commercials. Locally, kids can experience the challenge and excitement of stage theatre right here in Knoxville. Children's Theatre of Knoxville is a non-profit dedicated to producing meaningful theatrical productions for children and families, providing advanced theatrical instruction for children, and serving the community through drama-related outreach programs. At the end of 2008, Children's Theatre will have put on six, full-length productions. **www.childrenstheatreknoxville.com, 865.599.5284**