



## **Exhibition Audio Guide: *Creating Communities Through Art***

### **Introduction**

Today, we are at Union Gallery looking at their latest exhibition, *Creating Communities Through Art*. The gallery space is filled with artworks, archival materials, and ephemera from artists, art collectives and organizations in the Katarokwi-Kingston area.

### **Introduction to the exhibition**

The curators welcomed a broad definition of the terms: art, community, teaching, learning, and collaboration. This exhibition brings together 23 local organizations, collectives, and individuals some of which you may know, some you may be unfamiliar with, or perhaps some you never considered to be artistic, a place of learning, or community driven. These include: the Artel, the Calliope Collective, Dead on Collective, ForWorld Studios, Free Little Libraries, the H'art Centre, Heather Poechman, Immigrant Services Kingston and Area, Kingston Handloom Weavers & Spinners Guild, the Kingston Hidden Artists Collective, the Kingston School of Art, the Mess Open Art Studios, Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre, New Climate Stories, Oak Street Garden, Ollin, Rideau Trails Association, Skeleton Park Arts Festival, Winter/Summer Training Festival, Tallack Martial Arts, the Tett Centre for Creativity and Learning, the Tiniest Gallery and the Union Gallery.

*Creating Communities Through Art* grew out of conversations with passionate, creative, and community-driven individuals involved in these organizations and collectives. For many, art has been a catalyst for building a creative community that was missing from their lives. We have used their perspectives and experiences to look at the ways that art making facilitates connections between people.

*Creating Communities Through Art* begins to map learning and teaching within Katarokwi/Kingston. Questions emerge about art making and other creative collaborations as forms of community-based learning, mentorship, and world making. The informal and reciprocal learning that happens through the processes of making art and sustaining communities is reflected in the artwork and ephemera created and displayed here in the gallery today.

As you make your way through the exhibition, we ask that you consider the following questions: what roles can art making and arts education play in creating community? And how does your community use art making to pass down knowledge, or enact social change?

As we move through the gallery, we will engage with five organizations that exemplify the ideas that the curators were thinking about. We hope you take your time to engage with the art, ephemera, texts, and your peers in the gallery.

### **Kingston Handloom Weavers & Spinners Guild**

First up is the Kingston Handloom Weavers & Spinners Guild. Currently located in the Tett Centre for Creativity and Learning -- a hub where creative communities can forge connections through shared space, learning, and

programming -- the Kingston Handloom Weavers & Spinners Guild has been an advocate for sustained interest in fiber arts in Kingston since 1948.

Weaving, a method of textile production where two sets of yarn or threads are interlaced to form fabric, and spinning, a twisting technique for forming yarn or thread from individual fibers, are techniques that predate modern history. The guild seeks to maintain and promote the techniques so that the skills can be passed down to future generations who may continue to explore, innovate, and advance the fiber arts.

Since its creation, the guild has sought to promote learning through discussion of the history of the techniques, learning contemporary modes of making, and innovating new techniques. Today, education takes many forms. The guild has an extensive library, and members offer a range of workshops. The cost of handlooms and spinning wheels can often be a barrier for participation in the fiber arts, and so the studio owns and offers these to members to use on self-directed or collaborative projects. When members use the apparatuses, they emphasize hands-on learning. This also allows the guild to offer demonstrations and give people the opportunity to try spinning and weaving for themselves, playing with fibers, enjoying the tactile experience, and exploring curiosities about fiber practices without worrying about a finished product or the skills needed to participate. As Nancy Bowman, a member of the guild said, "leave your brain behind, get your hands in."

The display at Union Gallery has various items from the guild. We would like to highlight two of these items that exemplify the mandate and goals of the guild. Each year, the guild participates in the Sheep to Shawl competition held during the Sheepdog Trials at Grass Creek Park. The competition involves five spinners and

one weaver working together to produce a finished shawl from raw wool in only five hours. This type of public demonstration is an important part of guild's activities. They are an informal opportunity for learning as people stop, watch, ask questions, and learn.

The 100-inch loom requires two people to operate it. Working on the loom demands a great deal of cooperation and collaboration and helps foster a supportive learning environment for skill-sharing and communication.

## **New Climate Stories**

New Climate Stories prioritizes collaboration in conversations about ecological activism and art making. Art making provides a way to process the seriousness of climate change – allowing stories to unfold through art. The organization is an emerging community group created by environmental activists Hannah Ascough and Nancy Bayly, who both saw the need for more accessible and empowering communication around climate crisis in Katarokwi-Kingston. To quote Ascough's message, "when you put those imaginative, hopeful stories into action, it makes it a lot easier for people in the here and now to envision and start acting out what they also hope for." As many people can relate to, discussing the negative impacts of climate change is difficult and emotional. This is where New Climate Stories steps into the conversation, facilitating conversations on the climate crisis in new and empowering ways. In this case, art has the unique ability to take hard conversations and transform verbal messages into visual stories. New Climate Stories has created a model where members participate in a three-part process: conversation,

visualization, and action.

The group honours the stories and work of activists in (re)imagining an alternative future – futures where the health of the planet is prioritized. Ascough explains that their group is focused on “a way of thinking about not only the futures that we wanted to see and create through art, but as well as thinking about redefining what it really would mean to communicate about the climate struggle.” The organization has collaborated with Ollin, another organization highlighted in the exhibition, to combine different learning and teaching methods to facilitate conversations about the climate crisis on Earth Day.

### **The Mess**

The Mess Open Arts Studio was established by Sandi Dodds in 2009. The idea for this studio grew from conversations with fellow artists. They identified an essential need for a space in Kingston that could focus on building a healthy community through art and creativity. The Mess started from modest beginnings, operating out of the friendship room at Martha’s Table, where approximately 4 to 6 participants met weekly to create and connect. Today, The Mess runs out of Gill Hall of St. Andrew’s Church. Their community has grown significantly, welcoming over one hundred participants from diverse backgrounds each week. Coming together at The Mess, participants share a common interest in artmaking and being a part of a community. In the studio, a curiosity-based approach encourages conversation among the artists. Participants learn various art techniques from each other, including acrylic and watercolour painting, ceramics, and mixed media. At The Mess, everyone is an artist, despite background, education, and experience, and they have the freedom to have fun and express themselves without judgment.

Dodds explains that while The Mess is not “deemed the type of social service that can actually fix everything... we can walk beside people.” Friendship and community are what you’ll find at The Mess. Dodds tells us that artmaking is “a peaceful and calming way to build a bridge between two people” who might not have otherwise had the opportunity to meet. This idea is beautifully illustrated in their tagline: ‘Building community with hands and heart.’ All are welcome to join in the events and activities facilitated through The Mess!

## **The Artel**

The Artel, a live-in artist collective, was unlike any other artist-run space in Kingston. Artel members recognized that Kingston’s creative sector offered few opportunities for emerging artists to develop their practice and gain arts administration experience. So, they built this residency with the hope that it would meet the needs of artists who were establishing their creative careers. Initially, The Artel was run out of a house on Sydenham Road, and it became the home to many artists. It provided residents with a collaborative and supportive space to work, learn from peer-to-peer interactions, and build community.

In the early days of The Artel, artists involved in the residency were passionate about what they wanted the space to become. They regularly came together to brainstorm, dream, talk through administrative details, and ultimately take strides towards their vision for the collective. Meetings in the common area of the residence were collaborative and engaging. One topic of conversation during this early period was the name – it wasn’t always called The Artel. There was no real name for space for the first few months. But one thing is for sure, the artists were

committed to finding the perfect name to capture the collective's purpose. The story goes like this: the name selection process was thorough. Everyone brought different ideas to the table. Shortlists were turned back into long lists that were whittled back down to shortlists. Artists were dedicated, and there were a lot of impassioned speeches from members. In the end, two artists were flipping through a dictionary and pointed to a word that would resonate with everyone: artel. The definition of artel is a cooperative association of craftsmen living and working together. Everyone agreed; Artel would be the name. It was the eureka moment that everyone had been hoping for. Jenn Snider Cruise reflected on that moment, telling us "it was that spark of lightning. A bolt of creativity that just made sense after months of slogging through the process of trying to come up with the perfect name. It was collaborative and amazing, and we celebrated with champagne."

The name captures the mission of The Artel, but through their consensus-based decision-making processes and dedication to non-hierarchical arts administration, it became both a reflection of and model for the community's transformations, aspirations, and goals.

### **Kingston Hidden Artist Collective**

Kingston Hidden Artist Collective (or KHAC) began in August 2021 through conversations between a Queen's student and a local artist. They discussed issues that centred on houselessness in Kingston, career opportunities for artists, and being a part of the larger art community in Kingston. KHAC was founded as a liaison between the broader community and the artists to both market their works to a wider audience and build a stronger professional networks for artists in Kingston.

Artworks created by the artists are sold through KHAC's website, where users can purchase the original works or printed reproductions. Proceeds from the artworks are given directly to the artists. With liveable wages and work opportunities at the core of KHAC's mission, community exhibitions in public spaces are important in facilitating conversations between the artists and the community, such as with their recent exhibition at Elm Street Café. The artworks act as a mediator, humanizing issues such as houselessness experienced by artists in the collective. The initiative promotes the artists' careers, platforming conversations about the livelihoods of artists and the communities that support them.

Each artwork from KHAC's artists featured in this exhibition are examples pulled from their wider collections. The uniqueness of each artwork highlights the personality and style of the artists, relating to the different experiences and perspectives each artist brings to the table.

## **Conclusion**

We hope that you have enjoyed *Creating Communities Through Art*, and that the exhibition sparks inspiration within your own communities and acts as an invitation to engage with others.

Please visit the Union Gallery website and the exhibition's own website to learn about upcoming programming and more information about our satellite exhibition at the Tett Centre.

Lastly, please remember to take a complimentary Kingston Hidden Artist Collective print, leave us feedback, and visit the Union Gallery again soon!



