

The Miami Herald

Posted on Mon, Sep. 03, 2012

South Florida program teaches artists how to become art-preneurs

By Nancy Dahlberg

ndahlberg@miamiherald.com



Artist Carol-Anne McFarlane is shown with her "Target" series. She's learning more about her target market and how to strategize the full distribution cycle of her art business.

Sixty-four South Florida artists are now at work on a new creation — their lives as successful artist entrepreneurs.

The 64 are now alumni of the Artist as an Entrepreneur Institute (AEI), presented each summer by the [Broward County Cultural Division](#). Since 2007, the institute has graduated 377 artists from across South Florida from the visual, performance and musical arts.

From painters to playwrights to puppeteers, many of the artists have day jobs but dream of making their art a full-time venture. Some struggle with mixing their art, which is deeply personal, with business. Others want to hone their skills in a particular area, such as

marketing. But they all want to learn how to make their passion pay.

“The most important thing to do is do what you love — but make money too,” says banker-turned-artist [George Gadson](#), one of AEI instructors. His large commemorative bronze sculptures have been commissioned by Super Bowls, companies and philanthropic groups — including the 12-foot-tall monument at the African-American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale.

The [Artist as an Entrepreneur Institute](#) is just one of a growing number of local programs designed to promote the creative economy. There are art incubators, artist lofts, marketing workshops, an art-education directory, networking groups and grant and micro-credit programs, all designed to spur the growth of an artist ecosystem and keep artists creating in South Florida.

Efforts have been paying off. Broward County's arts and culture industry grew by 50 percent from 2005 to 2010, generating \$230 million in economic activity, according to a study by the national nonprofit Americans for the Arts released in June. This total number supports 6,402 full-time-equivalent jobs, the study said. In Miami-Dade, the industry grew by 17 percent in the same period and generated almost \$1.1 billion in economic activity,

supporting 29,792 jobs. The study, Arts and Economic Prosperity IV, included 182 communities across the nation.

James Shermer, grants administrator for the Broward County Cultural Division and the passionate force bringing together AEI every year, explains that the institute uses a successful curriculum developed by The Community Partnership for Arts and Culture, a national nonprofit based in Cleveland, Ohio. In October 2006, seeing the need for entrepreneurial education to help promote the emerging arts community, the Cultural Division brought in a leader from The Community Partnership nonprofit to present a workshop for local artists and meet with artist groups. In 2007, the Cultural Division piloted the first program, with the help of Community Partnership faculty.

“We wanted to help support the creative industries,” Shermer says, adding that the Cultural Division estimates there are about 10,000 artists living in Broward. “Artists are essentially small businesses and an important part of the economy, but there was a lack of services to support them. We wanted to help the individual artists.”

Artists attending AEI spent four Saturdays — about 32 hours in total — learning about writing a business plan, creating a product mix and pricing, copyright and trademarks, business structures, identifying target markets, marketing, social media, raising capital, distribution, accounting and more. There was homework, too.

“Most art schools didn’t teach you to go after money,” says Rafael Cruz, regional director of the Florida Small Business Development Center in Broward and a lecturer at AEI, who led a workshop on business planning. “Your success is more about how you deal with patrons than about your art.”

In response to the need for continued in-depth coaching for the creative economy entrepreneur, the [Small Business Development Center](#), in partnership with the Broward County Cultural Division and [ArtServe](#), an artist incubator, launched the Creative Entrepreneur Development Program, allowing artists to meet one-on-one with a business coach that understands the creative economy and can help them further develop their business. “Most artists create individually but to be a business success you need a team around you,” says Cruz. Gadson leads the program at the Small Business Development Center.

Photographer David I. Muir discovered during the AEI course that developing his brand is job one. Even though he was busy promoting his new photography book called [Pieces of Jamaica](#), a passion for the native-born Jamaican that is years in the making, Muir says going through the program was time well-spent. He learned about putting together a business plan, received tips on nontraditional funding sources and plans to apply for some grants. But mostly he learned to think of his art as a business.

Besides promoting the book, for sale on [PiecesofJamaica.net](#), and running [DAVIDiPhoto.com](#), Muir has been busy helping to plan South Florida’s first [Caribe Arts Fest](#) for Sept. 28-30 at the Las Olas Riverfront in downtown Fort Lauderdale.

“I’m much more sales oriented than I was six weeks ago,” Muir says after completing AEI. “I want to be successful. It gives me tons of motivation for pushing.”

He also cites the benefit of sharing with successful business people and artists who were brought in as speakers, such as Cruz and Gadson, as well as Michael Joseph, a photographer well-known for his black-and-whites of architecture. He now owns [Artists Haven Gallery](#) with his wife.

As an artist, Joseph says he has become a success because he shifted with the market. When the market wanted lower priced offerings for instance, he found a way to provide them. “One thing I’ve learned, it is more important to click with people than click the shutter.”

And as a gallery owner Joseph gives artists a wakeup call: “We meet a lot of artists who don’t seem to be about business. It is a business... You’re the one percent — there are thousands who aren’t you. But when you meet my wife and you don’t talk business, you’re done.”

Kathleen O’Leary, a marketing professor at Nova Southeastern University’s Huizenga School of Business, helped Carol-Anne McFarlane (www.cmcfarlaneart.com) understand her target customer. McFarlane’s paintings are created to make you think.

“My work is really direct. It can turn you off or on, depending on how open the viewers’ mind happens to be,” she says. “The marketing expert answered the questions that I have been struggling with. I felt really encouraged. I began brainstorming new ideas and strategies for discovering my target audience.”

She is producing her “Targets” as large-scale paintings on panels. She was invited to participate in a group show at the University of Kansas City this fall. Seven paintings will be on display there and she is thinking about the different possibilities to take advantage of this opportunity.

“The biggest change I am making in my business is to think of my art making process as a more fully realized manufacture and distribution system,” says McFarlane, who also attended AEI in 2008. “I am really thinking about my next series, the Strip Club Signs, not just making the work, but finding a unique space and time to display the work. I now understand the need for a team in order to bring my artwork to market the right way.”

The AEI also came at the right time for Alexis Caputo, helping her to hone her business skills, particularly marketing, in order to take her art to larger platforms. “I want my art to have international appeal, I want to be able to go anywhere in the world to work as an artist and entrepreneur. ... AEI gave me another window on how to attack that,” says Caputo, a multidisciplinary artist, poet, dancer, writer and adjunct professor at New World School of the Arts at Miami Dade College.

Shortly after going through the course, she says she was awarded a grant from the Broward Cultural Division for her [Afro Diaries](#), a multidisciplinary project about women of all walks of life that developed out of her one-women shows. “There are great things unfolding,” she says. “AEI is definitely an investment in yourself and your future.”

Many of these AEI alumni have remained a network. Three artists from the first class — Virginia Fifield, LeeAnna Yater and Jacklyn Laflamme — launched the annual [“Doing](#)

[Business As](#)” art exhibitions to promote the work of fellow AEI alumni South Florida.

“We all met in AEI. We were all pumped up. We wanted to step up to the plate after the class and do something. We thought why don’t we make it about the class, give back a little and inspire everyone,” says Laflamme, an accomplished painter with a colorful, rhythmic style. The first show in 2009 was such a success they have been doing it every year.

“Doing Business As” is a juried show held at the Broward County Main Library in downtown Fort Lauderdale featuring 10 to 12 artists from among the AEI alumni. The six-week-long show, which starts in January, also includes an opening reception, a closing artists’ forum with guest speakers and a catalog featuring the artists.

“In AEI, they teach us not to be afraid to ask for what we want. It is possible to be a full-time artist,” Laflamme says. “Don’t be afraid to take risks,” she advises artists.

[Laflamme](#) won grants for a mural project in Wilton Manors in 2009, her “Fairy Tale Project” in 2010 and her “Big Mouth” work in 2011. Her show called “The Voice” is currently part of the group show Serendipity at Studio 18 in Pembroke Pines that closes Sept. 7.

“Follow your heart and follow your dreams,” Laflamme adds. “Take these [business] principles and put them to use. It really works.”

© 2012 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.miamiherald.com>