

BUILDING A STRONGER COMMUNITY

THIRD FLOOR INITIATIVE

“A community is a group of people who share things in common, who work together towards a common purpose which they care about and who care deeply about each other. Creating the conditions for such a community to emerge should be a goal of any organization.”

-- David Gurteen, writer

Octagon Center for the Arts

427 Douglas Ave.

Ames, IA 50010

www.octagonarts.org

OCTAGON
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

50
1966-2016

Hard & Soft
July 20 to Sept 17 | 1st Floor
Artists by Al Zandi

Surface Wear
May 11 to July 21 | 3rd Floor
Artists by Al Zandi

Twenty Years
May 25 to August 17 | 3rd Floor
Artists by April Katz & Bruce
Espenlund (S) Printmaking Community

HEROIC
INK

HEROIC
INK
TATTOO AND
PIERCING

OCTAGON
GALLERY SHOP

417

Please enter through Gallery

7&C

WHO WE ARE

The Octagon Center for the Arts is a non-profit community art center in the heart of downtown Ames, Iowa. A cornerstone of the cultural scene in Ames since 1966, the Octagon a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization funded in part through memberships, donations, and grants, including the City of Ames Commission on the Arts (COTA) and the Iowa Arts Council.

Communities (real communities) matter. We yearn to belong, to feel connected. We need each other to manage our everyday lives and to chase our dreams. In the face of continuing pandemic conditions and societal unrest, community is more important ever – yet, it seems more difficult to grow.

It is time to rethink everything, to take a good close look at “what we’ve always done”. This is a time for clarity, innovation, creativity, and inclusion. This is a time to think about what we have to offer, what we can do for our community, and, even, how we can change the world. We want to listen, build, and chase some dreams.



Inaugural Business of Art Conference, Octagon Main Gallery, 2018



Working at the pottery wheel

At the Octagon, our community includes:

- fulltime and parttime artists across Iowa and the Midwest
- those who wish to buy or to experience art
- students of all ages and skill-levels who enjoy the process of making
- folks who are passionate about the value of art and culture in a city
- our business and residential neighbors in downtown Ames.

Hard work has already begun on inclusion, diversity, and equity in our organization; it is our goal to create a “longer table”, so that all feel truly welcome at the Octagon.

WHAT OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS

In 2018, we sent a questionnaire to a large pool of artists that applied to show their work at the Octagon over the years. Last year, we invited independent artists to the Octagon for a focus group. We asked questions, listened to ideas, and discussed what artists in Ames need to thrive. The artists in both cases (questionnaire respondents and focus group participants) were consistent on several key points:

- **Exhibit space is very important.**The artists love to show their work in the Octagon's beautiful street-level Community Gallery. Conversely, the Octagon's largest gallery (Main Gallery) is not well liked due to its overly large space, high ceilings, relatively poor lighting, and third floor location. The space feels like a rental venue, rather than a gallery. Despite the Octagon's efforts to promote it, the public is often unaware of the third floor.
- **The Octagon has the potential to impact the community by fostering emerging artists as entrepreneurs via studio space and education.** Artists emphasized the need for space to work and connect with each other and potential customers.

In the time since these conversations, Ames has lost studio space due to the closure of ISU's Design on Main. Design on Main was a gallery space and studio space for College of Design graduate students and closed for financial reasons.

The loss of Design on Main is part of a troubling pattern. Ames has lost other spaces for creative work, such as DG's, The Space, Zeke's, and La Boheme (venues for music, theater, and/or spoken word). Ames has become more dependent on the Iowa State University for cultural events and venues, but ISU is not immune to budgetary cuts. The future of CY Stephens Auditorium appears to be in question. Other arts and culture organizations are in danger with the lasting effects of the pandemic.

Yet, data tells us that arts and culture impact quality of life:

“Arts and culture help fuel our state's economy – it's that simple. Economic impact studies have proven time and time again that there's an inextricable link between the creative industries in a community and that community's economic development, job recruitment, and tourism... National and statewide research confirms the importance of the arts to economic development and revitalization. In 2010, Gallup and the Knight Foundation found 'empirical evidence that the drivers that create emotional bonds between people and their community are consistent in virtually every city and can be reduced to just a few categories. Interestingly, the usual suspects – jobs, the economy and safety – are not among the top drivers. Rather, people consistently give higher ratings for elements that relate directly to their daily quality of life. The arts are in the top five drivers attracting people to communities.”

(Source: <https://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/commentary/article/The-arts-and-culture-affect-community-s-quality-4407124.php>)



THE SOLUTION: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING



“It’s always been ‘cool’ to have a charming, vibrant downtown. Now it’s necessary. That’s because a place attracts talent and talent attracts investment. This trend has been rising for a while, but the pandemic has underscored its validity. More and more, people can work from anywhere. Increasingly they will choose where they want to live, regardless of where their employer is located—and the communities that give them what they want will be the winners.”

(Source: <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/5/8/why-now-is-the-time-to-get-intentional-about-placemaking>)



Creative Placemaking recognizes the value of arts and culture in creating a vibrant place where people want to live, work, and visit. In creative placemaking, diverse partners work together to reshape a place and build a real community.

(Source: <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/ROW-Creative-Placemaking-handout.doc.pdf>)



WHAT WE CAN OFFER



Mission: The Octagon Staff and Board spent a year crafting a new mission statement and strategic plan. This new plan underscores the desire to: 1) support artists, especially emerging artists; 2) engage with a more diverse and inclusive pool of artists; 3) create a space that invites and welcomes all in the Ames community.

Programming: We have long demonstrated a strong commitment to serving and supporting artists and, in 2018, we took it a step further. We partnered with the Ames Community Arts Council to create the Business of Art Conference. This annual conference is meant to fill a gap often found in formally trained and self-taught creatives by providing a place to learn entrepreneurial skills and connect with each other. We have also offered free workshops to assist artists in applying for exhibitions, photographing artwork, and writing artist statements.

Space: The Octagon third floor (Main Gallery, Sweeney Gallery, Reading Room, kitchen, bathrooms, and closets) is underutilized. The large space has not been able to contribute significant revenue to the organization. Due to building layout, the use of the third floor as gallery space has necessitated extra staff, but it has not seen high traffic. Additionally, artists do not feel their work is enhanced by showing in Main Gallery.

How could this large space better support the work of local artists and support our mission? We envision a large co-working space, coupled with smaller private studio and artist residency spaces. With relatively minimal financial investment, we could offer artists a place to work, gather, exhibit, and grow their businesses. The space could include needed amenities such as a kitchen, a meeting room, and spaces for product photography, mat cutting, recording (for podcasting or virtual teaching), WIFI, a printer, lockers for storage, and use of specialized studios (clay studio, print studio).

Community Engagement Emerging Artist in Residence: One studio or co-working space on the third floor would be dedicated to hosting an emerging artist who's focus includes community engagement as an artist in residence. Due to the proximity of Iowa State University and the Art and Visual Culture Department in the College of Design, this would provide an opportunity to partner with the AVC Department and help support a recent graduate of the program during the life transition period between being a student and being a professional. Furthermore, it would support our mission and strategic plan.

THE DETAILS

Co-Working Space for Creatives (Main Gallery)

Available for up to 6 creatives during pandemic and up to 20 creatives after the pandemic

General Fees (contracts available by semester/summer session):+

- January-May (5 months) \$150
- June-July (2 months) \$60
- August-December (5 months) \$150

Additional Fees for Use of Ceramics or Printmaking Studio:+

- January-May (5 months) \$50
- June-July (2 months) \$20
- August-December (5 months) \$50

Amenities

- Use of Co-Working Space for "clean work" (Main Gallery)
- Cleaning area (Mop sink, utility sinks, ventilation cleaning table)
- Kitchenette (Fridge, kitchen sink, microwave, coffee maker)
- Lighting studio (Basic photography lighting equipment, tripod, backdrops, projector)*
- Small meeting room (For client meetings, virtual meetings, phone meetings)*
- Virtual recording space (Recording equipment, tripods)*
- Framing area (Mat cutter, Framing stapler, extra blades, hammer, pliers, microfiber rags, glass/plexi cleaner and rags), Tools available for checkout
- Gallery pin-up space (Hallway, Small Wall Gallery)
- Art book library and loungeStorage (For tools, paper, canvasses, etc.)
- Wifi internet
- Printer
- Cleaning for the bathroom, vacuuming
- Opportunity to participate in Octagon Gallery Nights

Access:

- Monday-Friday, 10:00am - 5:00 pm
- Open Studio Nights, Wednesday and Friday, 5:00 - 9:00 pm
- Open Studio, Sunday, 12:00 - 6:00 pm

+Fees are subject to adjustment as more data about costs are collected.

*by reservation

Private Studios for Creatives (Sweeney Gallery)

Available for up to 4 individuals. One of the four studios would be dedicated to the Artist in Residence.

General Fees (contracts available by semester/summer session):+

- January-May (5 months) \$625
- June-July (2 months) \$250
- August-December (5 months) \$625

Additional Fees for Use of Ceramics or Printmaking Studio: +

- January-May (5 months) \$50
- June-July (2 months) \$20
- August-December (5 months) \$50

Amenities

- Private studio space (Sweeney Gallery)
- Cleaning area (Mop sink, utility sinks, ventilation cleaning table)
- Kitchenette (Fridge, kitchen sink, microwave, coffee maker)
- Lighting studio (Basic photography lighting equipment, tripod, backdrops, projector)*
- Small meeting room (For client meetings, virtual meetings, phone meetings)*
- Virtual recording space (Recording equipment, tripods)*
- Framing area (Mat cutter, Framing stapler, extra blades, hammer, pliers, microfiber rags, glass/plexi cleaner and rags), Tools available for checkout
- Gallery pin-up space (Hallway, Small Wall Gallery)
- Art book library and lounge Storage (For tools, paper, canvasses, etc.)
- Wifi internet
- Printer
- Cleaning for the bathroom, vacuuming
- Opportunity to participate in Octagon Gallery Nights

Access:

- Personal studio, 24/7 access
- Studio Space, Monday-Friday, 10:00am - 5:00 pm
- Open Studio Nights, Wednesday and Friday, 5:00 - 9:00 pm
- Open Studio, Sunday, 12:00 - 6:00 pm

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE -- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 6 month residencies available by application
- AIR compensation: private studio and a stipend of \$500 per month
- AIR responsibilities: community engagement activities/events as agreed upon

+Fees are subject to adjustment as more data about costs are collected.

*by reservation

NEEDED RENOVATION/CHANGE

ESTIMATED COST

ESTIMATED TIMELINE

Artist in Residence Initial Stipend
Artist in Residence Studio Space

\$3000
Renovation is not necessary

January 2021

Convert current 2 small bathrooms to one accessible bathroom

\$8000

1st priority: Jan. - April 2021

- Plumbing, water and return pipes
- Plaster/drywall repair
- Framing
- Flooring
- New door and frame, accessible size, door hardware
- Fixtures, sanitary napkin box, toilet paper holders, grab bars, mirror, hand dryer, infant changing table
- Lighting
- False ceiling

Renovate kitchen and create cleaning room

2nd priority: March - July 2021

- Plumbing
- Framing
- Flooring
- Lighting
- 2- Utility sinks
- Mop sink
- Ventilation
- Fixtures, coffee maker

Renovate Main Gallery to create co-working space

3rd priority: June - July 2021

- Add a lockable door at the bottom of the mezzanine
- Add electrical outlets
- Update lighting
- Improve WiFi, add hardwired internet area

Renovate Sweeney Gallery to create private studios

- Add electrical outlets
- Update lighting
- Framing

NEEDED RENOVATION/CHANGE

ESTIMATED COST

ESTIMATED TIMELINE

Studio Equipment Needs

4th priority: 2022

Ceramics Studio

- Ventilation
- Kiln in the room
- Pug machine

Printmaking Studio

- Ink slab areas
- Ventilation area, hood
- Rollers, Large brayers, barens
- Drying racks
- Other types of printmaking

\$650

THE IMPACT

Sustainability: Some progress on the third Floor Initiative can be completed almost immediately, such as the hiring the AIR. Grants, donations, and sponsorships will be needed to finance the renovations. The stepped approach will allow us to make progress in a manageable way.. Converting the space would result in loss of rental revenue (venue rental), however, the space is not being used at all at this time due to COVID. By carefully adding a limited number of people to the space, we hope add over \$2000 to the budget. The goal is to make the spaces affordable to students and other emerging artists (those who need it most) and cover all expenses. We will need to adjust fees as we collect more data in order to keep the project financially sustainable.

Another aspect of sustainability is the ability to maintain excitement and investment in the organization. Empty rooms do not engage the public -- vibrancy comes with a busy space. We believe that the re-imagined space will reinvigorate all of our programming and increase our relevancy to the Ames community.

Our Vision for the Future: By creating this inclusive vibrant space based on the input of artists, the Octagon is poised to impact the whole downtown. More artists downtown could translate into more activity – more people in coffee shops and businesses, more people attending downtown events, and more people actively creating the downtown they want. We imagine active partnerships with other nearby cultural organizations, like the Ames History Center and the Ames Public Library; retail businesses; and residents. We imagine a lively space that draws people in, a space where people feel they belong and want to stay, a real community.