BEST PRACTICES AT-A-GLANCE

Artist Residencies in Industry

A series of brief reports documenting the management practices of artist residency programs

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Artist Residencies in Industry

Introduction

Within the burgeoning field of artist residencies, new models for serving artists are being developed and refined. While a large percentage of residencies are incorporated as non-profit entities, there is a growing cadre of programs that choose to operate under a different business structure – such as programs that are created, embedded, and operated within a commercial venture.

Three programs in particular pursue this model: Bullseye Glass’ Factory – Artist Exchange Program, the Pfister Hotel’s Artist-in-Residence Program, and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center’s Arts/Industry Residency Program. The goal of these programs is to develop a symbiotic connection wherein art, artists, and commerce mutually benefit one another. Each attempts to balance the needs of the artist with the demands of the enterprise that funds and supports the program.

The following case study examines these programs, asking: How does the organization create a positive experience for participating artists? And how can an artist residency program benefit a company?
Bullseye Glass Co.

www.bullseyeglass.com

OVERVIEW
Location: Portland, OR
Eligibility: Emerging-to-established artists wishing to work with kiln-glass
Length + Number of Residencies: Length varies according to the needs of the artist's project. Residencies occur as qualified candidates become available.
What's Provided: Studio space, technical support, materials at no cost; housing may be available at no cost

APPLICATION PROCESS
Application Fee: None
Requirements: A curriculum vitae, at least eight digital images of current work, an image description sheet, at least two letters of recommendation from professionals in the glass field, written proposal of no more than 200 words
Before submitting an application, artists should be able to answer yes to the following questions:
1. Is the project strongly technically based?
2. Is the artist/designer willing to share the knowledge gained during the project?
3. Is the proposed working method related to the kiln, the torch or cold work?
Deadlines: None

Bullseye Glass Company

In 1974, three young glassblowers – with the goal of supporting their art through industry – formed Bullseye Glass Company in Portland, Oregon. One of the founders, Daniel Schwoerer, still serves as the company's president and CEO. Bullseye has built its reputation on manufacturing colored glass for use in art and architecture and it provides more than 1,000 glass products in a wide range of color palettes to artists worldwide.

The Factory-Artist Exchange Program is part of the company's for-profit business model and it is directly integrated into the operations of the Research and Education Department. According to Ted Sawyer, the director of the department, the program's intent is to expand the technical and aesthetic territory of kiln-glass: “By technical, I mean that it allows us to confront new challenges and develop new methods for making work. By aesthetic, I mean that it engages the issues of contemporary art and design as opposed to operating within a more insular set of material-specific concerns.”

The program benefits the business strategy of Bullseye by stimulating the market in which the company supplies products. The works that are created by artists in its residency program become showpieces for what can be accomplished using the materials produced in the factory, inspiring its customer base. The company also maintains a gallery, which both displays and sells finished pieces produced by the artists-in-residence to collectors, curators, and the public.

There is also an artistic benefit for Bullseye that is not as readily quantifiable. The company still employs a large percentage of practicing artists. The work performed in the factory is materials – as well as labor – intensive and can be quite challenging to perform. The exchange program helps the company to stay connected to its roots by supporting artists directly and gives meaning to its work by enriching the community.

Bullseye confronts a number of challenges in executing the exchange program, including the allocation of resources and successfully establishing expectations between the artist and company. Often the projects undertaken by the artists-in-residence do not have a direct financial return, but instead must be leveraged into the company's marketing campaigns. Also, projects must be balanced with any constraints on time and resources by the individual departments that are busily engaged in the company's day-to-day operations.

Artists are selected through several different methods. Some artists inquire about the program, having heard about it word-of-mouth through their networks. Each artist is evaluated on the merits of his or her proposal; Bullseye publishes a set of application guidelines. Some artists are approached because they are working with ideas that the company would like to explore in kiln-glass or provide an opportunity to overcome technical challenges in materials and processes. There is no application period or deadlines; the duration and timing of the residencies are decided on a case-by-case basis.

Former artist-in-residence Munson Hunt was motivated to apply for the program because of a curiosity to “transfer the language of wood into glass. I hoped to really explore the medium and really find what those qualities
were. “The staff was on hand to work with her as she explored the possibilities of working in glass. She felt challenged to “understand a medium I knew nothing about and push it as far as it would go for this particular project. Ten ideas came out of this one idea.”

In order for the residency to be successful, there must be the right fit between the selected artists and the company. Participating artists need to understand that it is an exchange in which both parties need to add value in order to gain value from the experience. Ideas are solicited and a dialogue is established to flesh out the scope of the intended project. Ted explains that during this conversation, “We actively communicate about what can and cannot happen (and why) and make sure that we understand and can make reasonable efforts to fulfill the artist’s expectations; and that the artist understands and is capable of fulfilling our expectations.”

Once selected for the program, the artists are offered support appropriate to their projects. Bullseye provides materials, studio space, equipment, project management, documentation, and technicians; in some cases it may also provide lodging. The technicians operate as both assistants and collaborators – they are paired with the artist based on their knowledge of materials and processes. They can help an artist to think through the technical, aesthetic, and conceptual possibilities – and the ramifications – of realizing the artists’ ideas in kiln-glass.

Jun Kaneko, renowned ceramic artist and co-founder – along with his wife Ree Kaneko – of the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, was invited by Bullseye’s owners to work at the factory and find new and creative ways to use their product. The most rewarding part of the experience was working with the staff in the factory environment; the most challenging was “making something exciting with this way too pretty twinkly stuff called glass.” The residency gave him a chance to work with a material that he had had little experience in. 

Artist Sylvia Levenson at Bullseye Glass Co.

Artist April Surgent and Ted Sawyer at Bullseye Glass Co.
The Pfister Hotel

www.thepfisterhotel.com

OVERVIEW

Location: Milwaukee, WI

Eligibility: Emerging-to-established artists working in the visual arts, specifically painting and illustration

Length + Number of Residencies: 12 months for one artist per year

What’s Provided: Studio and gallery space; $1,000 monthly stipend; $500 monthly house account; free parking and access to cafeteria

APPLICATION PROCESS

Application Fee: None

Requirements: Current resume, CD with 10 high-resolution images of artist’s work, documentation of lecturing or art history background, two written professional references; if selected as one of six finalists, availability for video interview for panel review

Deadlines: December 1

The Pfister Hotel

Built in 1893 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin as a luxury hotel, The Pfister has hosted some of the world’s most celebrated dignitaries and entertainers. It boasts a renowned collection of Victorian art encompassing 84 pieces – the largest of its kind in any hotel in the world. The Marcus Corporation, under its Marcus Hotels & Resorts Division, is the owner of The Pfister. It is a major supporter of local artists and arts events, including the quarterly Gallery Night & Day tour. This intimate connection with arts and culture is an important component of the hotel’s marketing and branding strategy.

In April 2009, The Pfister initiated its artist-in-residence program featuring a working art gallery and studio that is open to hotel guests and visitors. Three visual artists have participated in the program since its inception. According to Joe Kurth, the hotel’s general manager, “We wanted to expand on our reputation as a destination hotel for art connoisseurs by offering our guests and the public a glimpse into the world of art as it is being created – in real time, by amazingly talented artists.”

Katie Musolff, the second artist select into the annual residency program, describes the 600-square-foot studio/gallery located on the ground floor as a “fishbowl” – anyone can walk in and interact with the artist. Having this open access is important in making the art “alive and relevant” for the patron. The goal is to create an emotional and personal engagement between the artist and hotel patrons by removing some of the barriers to witnessing the creative process. Artists-in-residence are available to answer questions by patrons and to attend and speak at corporate events. Stories about the program have appeared in several media outlets including the local public radio station and the hotel has collected positive individual feedback from visitors about the program.

Reginald Baylor, a Milwaukee-based painter, was the first artist to participate in the Pfister’s residency program. He had previously attended a more traditional residency at Ragdale in Lake Forest, Illinois, as the recipient of the Alliance of Artists Communities’ Midwestern Voices and Visions award. While he appreciated the solitary and contemplative environment afforded him by his Ragdale experience, he felt that the Pfister residency challenged him to “articulate what type of artist I am.” He quickly formulated the tools and vocabulary to communicate his art and process to the multitude of visitors that stopped by his residency studio each day.

For the participating artists, the benefits include rent-free use of the studio for a year and a showcase to sell their art. Artists are also paid a $1,000 monthly stipend along with a $500 monthly per diem throughout the hotel to help them entertain potential clients. They also receive additional benefits, such as complimentary meals at the hotel’s restaurant and parking. The Pfister attracts over two million visitors yearly, providing tremendous exposure and sales opportunities for the artists and their work. Current artist-in-residence Shelby Keefe feels that the residency has allowed her to capture the attention of people “who wouldn’t ordinarily find me at my studio.”

The openness of the residency experience requires a certain type of artist, one who is comfortable engaging with the public and able to articulate his
or her creative process. One of the challenges that Shelby has encountered while in-residence is that people are free to wander into the studio and engage her “mid-brushstroke.” But the residency has also allowed her to talk about her art and she feels that the openness of the studio helps to demystify the creative process.

Artists interested in the program can download an application online. A juried selection committee – culled from local arts institutions, philanthropists, the public, and business community – selects the finalists. This program has already spawned a six-month program for a writer-in-residence, who creates an on-site narrative history through interviews with hotel guests and visitors for twice weekly entries onto the Pfister’s blog (http://blog.thepfisterhotel.com). In collaboration with the Marcus hotel group and the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, and inspired by this residency program, the Pfister’s sister hotel in Milwaukee, the Intercontinental, worked with MIAD to create its own student curator program for its gallery space. Also in the works is a similar residency program at another sister property, the Hotel Phillips, in Kansas City, Missouri.
The John Michael Kohler Arts Center

www.jmkac.org

OVERVIEW

Location: Kohler, Wisconsin (approximately 150 miles north of Chicago); artists studio located within The Kohler Co. factory

Eligibility: Emerging and established artists of any discipline

Length + Number of Residencies:
Two to six months; up to 19 artists participate in the program each year; typically four artists-in-residence at any one time

What’s Provided:
Studio space at Kohler factory (with 24-hour access), free materials, use of equipment, technical assistance, photographic services, housing, round-trip travel, modest honoraria (American artists only)

APPLICATION PROCESS

Requirements:
Current resume, 20 high-resolution images (with descriptions) of artist’s work, four references, 200 word proposal

Acceptance Rate: 8% (16 out of 190 applicants)

The Kohler Company


With the success of the exhibition, eight artists under the leadership of Jack Earl were initially invited to participate in residencies of six weeks to four months. The artists worked primarily in Kohler’s Pottery Shop. In the early ’80s, the program was expanded from seasonal to year-round residencies and from invitation-only to an open call selection process. A second residency track in the Foundry was also added. At full capacity, up to nineteen artists per year participate in Kohler’s Arts/Industry residency program.

Ruth Kohler, granddaughter of the company’s founder and sister of CEO Herbert Kohler, has been a driving force behind the development of the Arts/Industry residency. The program is managed by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, an independent non-profit organization located in the former residence of company founder John Michael Kohler. Artists-in-residence are given studio space in the Kohler factory that is generally accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Additionally, they receive free materials, use of equipment, technical assistance, photographic services, housing, round-trip transportation, and, for U.S. artists, a modest honoraria.

The Arts/Industry program is seen as an extension of the company’s mission of improving the lives of its customers. For the research and development staff at Kohler who work with the artists in solving technical problems, these interactions help to deepen their understanding of ceramics process and materials. The program also provides employees with a diversion from their normal work routines and a chance to engage in meaningful social exchanges with the artists.

Participating artists-in-residence are given a studio space in the casting shop of Kohler’s Pottery, one of the largest potteries in the world. Arts Center’s technicians and Kohler’s industrial artisans and engineers are on hand to provide technical information and advice to the resident artists. The artists get the full impact of working in an industrial factory and having its considerable resources at their disposal.

Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, a metalsmith and former artist-in-residence, observes that “On the one hand the facility is modern, with its design research center, robotic enameling, and the most current 3D technologies in the pattern shop. On the other hand, it is medieval black on black, an expanse of cold steel inventory, interrupted by the awesome glow and sparks emitting from the active lines, the big melt. As an artist-in-residence I had an amazing amount of access to the floor, to the technology, to the product. But with it comes the huge responsibility and requirement to conform to the industrial and the human mechanisms of the factory.”

Financial support for the residency program is entirely underwritten by Kohler Co. and changes in the economics of the company can impact the program.
For example, the Foundry residency program was recently suspended until the economy regains momentum. The factory is a union shop, and labor relations and contracts may also affect the residencies. During the recent downturn in the economy, layoffs meant changes in the R&D personnel involved in the residency program.

Former artist-in-residence John Himmelfarb likened the experience to “being let loose in Fort Knox with a wheelbarrel for a limited amount of time.” His residency was a period of intense creativity, working 12-14 hours a day, six days a week. Access to a factory space and resources, plus the luxury of time to concentrate, resulted in a huge output of work. His fondest memory is of the working relationship he developed with the factory workers.

According to Beth Lipman, acting Arts/Industry residency coordinator, “The majority of finalists for the program are artists that have a specific process in mind. The factory is best utilized by artists who have a specific project in mind that they would like to realize with the resources provided. Artists typically produce a large amount of work.” Residencies last between two and six months, with the first month spent acclimating to the unique environment. Each resident is asked to make two gifts of their work and to engage in educational outreach through a lecture, workshop, demonstration, etc.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center
Artist Residencies in Industry

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ABOUT THE ALLIANCE OF ARTISTS COMMUNITIES
The Alliance of Artists Communities is an association of artist communities, artist colonies, and artist residency programs – representing a field of 500 organizations in the US and more than 1,000 worldwide that provide artists of any discipline with dedicated time and space to create new work. Believing that the cultivation of new art and ideas is essential to human progress, the mission of the Alliance is to advocate for and support artist communities, to advance the endeavors of artists.