

Local Art Hives provide community space for creativity and healing

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As the wind and rain raged in the dark on a cold November weeknight, it was warm, bright, and dry in the Salle le Tremplin, where Lou-philip and his friend Benjamin gathered paints and brushes for a project Benjamin was about to begin. All the while, fragments of music from an upright piano and acoustic guitar filled the room while several others sat at vinyl-covered tables working on paintings, sculptures, and more.



Only open since last spring, the Art Hive held every Wednesday in Tremplin 16-30's multi-purpose room is one of the region's better-attended hives. Like most Art Hives, attendance is open to the public and free of charge.

Art Hives are a global movement, founded in Canada, to help likeminded people start communitybased studios. At an Art Hive (Ruche d'art in French), anyone can work on self-directed artistic projects, with no instruction or direction. The concept was conceived by Janis Timm-bottos, an art therapist and associate professor at Concordia University.

The history of Art Hives begins during the 1990s when Timm-bottos was working in a community clinic serving the homeless in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

As an art therapist, she saw how offering a creative space was a healing and therapeutic experience, creating what is known as a "third place", a social environment distinct from the home (first place) or workplace (second place). The clinic's studio improved the factor of recovery and wellness, as there was mingling and integration between the clinic's clients and the community.

In 2010, she relocated to Montreal to teach at Concordia, where she brought the idea with her. It was at this point that Rachel Chainey, now the Art Hives National Coordinator, was starting her Masters in art therapy. Chainey met with her as a master's student hoping to glean insights and knowledge but found that Timm-bottos' work aligned with the vision of an art therapy studio that Chainey was planning.

"As soon as I met her, it clicked instantly," said Chainey. She was offered work by Timm-bottos and was there for the early evolution of the Art Hive concept. The name "Art Hive" was chosen due to the way bees support and aid each other as part of their hive.

Chainey opened one of the first Art Hives, La Coop Le Milieu, in Montreal. She now consults and trains people across the country who want to start their own Art Hive. She was in the Eastern Townships this week to tour the Art Hives in the region. In the Townships, there are several Art Hives, serving different communities and specific purposes but united in the goal of being welcoming, supportive, and safe spaces for healing and creativity. Tremplin 16-30's multi-purpose room has been host to their Art Hives since spring, after a period of public or mobile Art Hives that were held outside because of pandemic restrictions.

Tremplin, a community organization providing residential support to young people between the ages of 16 and 30, discovered the Art Hive concept during widespread COVID-19 restrictions. "The topic was looking at how can we unify our social mission and the way we know art can heal and bring us together," said Milène Richer, the coordinator of the Tremplin Art Hive. When speaking about her role in maintaining an art studio, Richer states that she feels more like a facilitator than a coordinator. Many of the Art Hive's users are at-risk youth, some of whom live in Tremplin's subsidized housing.

Art Hives aren't charities, instead adopting an ethos of solidarity. Camila Vasquez, the coordinator of the Community Art Lab, which serves as the educational platform of the Foreman Art Gallery at Bishop's University, felt that Art Hives represent a "unique opportunity of the end of the pandemic", which has left "people really needing to be together in the same space and building communities again".

When coming to an Art Hive, it can be confusing or overwhelming to see all the materials and workspaces, and people's ongoing projects. What Chainey suggests people do is to "Go explore the space. Look at the materials, see what calls you, what do you like, what materials, what textures, what colours appeal to you". There's no wrong way to start.

"We believe that everyone is creative," says Chainey. According to the Art Hives organization website, an art hive "welcomes everyone as an artist", "celebrates the strengths and creative capacities of individuals and communities", and "fosters selfdirected experiences of creativity, learning, and skill sharing." Art Hives also provide free access to their materials and space. The Art Hive website describes these places as "gardens wherever possible to renew, regenerate, and spread seeds of social change."

In addition to the Tremplin Art Hive, the Community Art Lab at Bishop's University holds an Art Hive three times a week, Monday from 1:00 to 3:00 pm, Thursday from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm, and Saturday from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm. The Musée des

beaux-arts in Sherbrooke, as well as Carrefour jeunesse-emploi de Sherbrooke also offer monthly and weekly Art Hives, respectively. More Art Hives are located around the world, some online, and can be searched for on Arthives.org, which maintains a map of hives that have been submitted to them by their coordinators.