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Victor
by Grigor Eftimov.

Inspiration

Reclining Figure

by John Wolfer, 2005,
charcoal, 18 x 18.
Collection the artist.
Image courtesy
Manifest Creative
Research Gallery and
Drawing Center,
Cincinnati, Ohio.



Through Outreach

Nonprofit arts organizations and galleries not only impact their communities, they inspire professional artists as well. | **by Naomi Ekperigin**

ONE CAN OFTEN FEEL great satisfaction when presented with the opportunity to share a skill in which he or she excels with those who are being introduced to it for the first time. Many professional artists agree that teaching and assisting emerging artists is a rewarding experience. But for artists who work with nonprofit organizations that aim to rebuild and unite communities, their time and energy yield results that are noticed on a larger scale, both in their neighborhoods and in their own creative processes.

The Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center, in Cincinnati, is one organization that believes in the power of art to revive downtrodden communities. Founded in 2004 by a group of art professors and students in Ohio, Manifest exposes area residents to work by local and national artists—professional and student—and gives them the opportunity to display their work at the museum. Often, both established and emerging artists are shown side by side. Although some may think that this diminishes the quality of the exhibition, organizers at Manifest strongly disagree. “We feel this is an immeasurably valuable opportunity,” says Manifest co-founder Jason Franz. “We prove that students are capable of creating valuable and valid cultural arti-

facts that operate on par with those created by professionals.” Manifest enables students to reach this high level of skill by acting as an educational resource for high-school, undergraduate, and graduate art students. “We actively invite teachers to bring their classes to our gallery and use our space and exhibitions as a learning lab,” says Franz. In addition to its contributions to local art education, the mere presence of the Manifest gallery has added new life to

the East Walnut Hills area of Cincinnati, a neighborhood that previously lacked artistic venues, and has helped make it a popular place for nearby residents to visit and dwell.

For both established and aspiring artists, it has also provided a much needed creative outlet and opportunity to showcase their work. “Manifest provides instant access to stimulating dialogue and working artists,” says artist Janiene Baker. “In a place like



Rebecca and Marie

by Jessica Grace Bechtel,
2004, pen-and-ink, 9 x 12.
Collection the artist.

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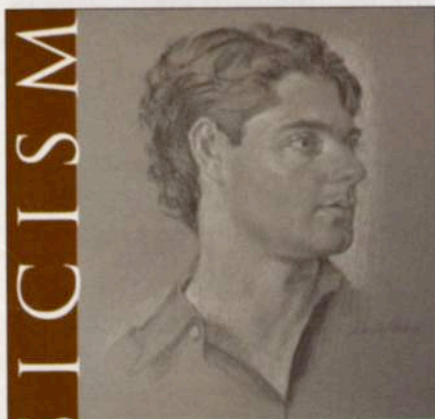
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LEFT

Lauren 1

by Emil Robinson,
2005, charcoal and
graphite, 9 x 11.
Collection the artist.
Image courtesy
Manifest Creative
Research Gallery and
Drawing Center,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

OPPOSITE PAGE

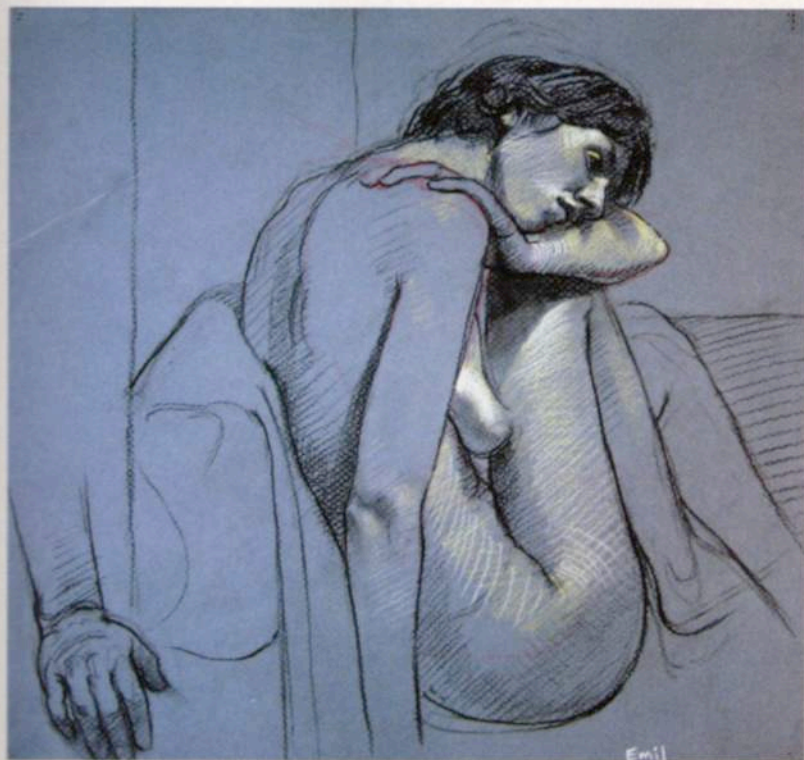
Lauren 2

by Emil Robinson,
2006, pastel, charcoal,
and graphite on paper,
17 x 16½. Collection the
artist. Image courtesy
Manifest Creative
Research Gallery and
Drawing Center,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Cincinnati, Manifest is a valuable resource." The gallery offers many incentives to artists who choose to showcase their work, and they take only a small percentage of revenue from the sale of work they exhibit. "We are not in any way driven by sales, meaning that artists are not our 'cash cows' to be used and cast off when they are no longer profitable," explains Franz. "We continually get great feedback from our exhibiting artists because we are so different from their experiences with commercial galleries." In addition to their commitment to the high quality of work on display, Manifest provides a full-color catalogue for every exhibition, thereby providing featured artists with residual exposure long after their artwork appears in the gallery.

Artists wishing to improve their skills can also look to Manifest for support. The Manifest Drawing Center promotes one of the key goals of the organization, which is to promote and explore drawing as the fundamental skill underlying the visual arts. They do so by offering classes and open figure ses-

sions, in which they provide participants with approximately 152 hours of access to the nude model each year. Classes are small (eight to 12 students), and usually consist of a mixture of professionals, students, teachers, and other members of the community. Each session lasts 10 weeks and meets weekly for two hours, under the supervision of a moderator. These sessions are affordable and accessible, which pleases professional artists and novices alike. "I have found that the level of intensity in the sessions is a match for me and how I work," says Baker. "Interacting with and watching other artists work is very important to me and balances the isolation of working in my studio." Although other professional artists may be turned off by working with students, many agree that working with emerging artists is quite beneficial. Jessica Bechtel, another artist who takes advantage of the open figure sessions, enjoys being part of a diverse group of drawers. "Students aren't as tainted by the pressures that working artists face," she notes. "They are more likely to



tell the truth—good and bad—which I find invaluable. Also, they are discovering the model and the world with fresh eyes and perspectives; it can be just the shot of inspiration I need.”

THE NEED FOR FRESH EYES and perspectives is of great importance to the world of art, as styles change and evolve in response to the community and times in which an artist lives. Artists who step outside the confines of their studio and work with other art enthusiasts in their own neighborhoods play active roles in such evolution. Those who share their expertise and passion with those who have yet to—or lack the opportunities to—discover that the joys of art play an even greater role in this process. This is one of the main tenets of **The Drawing Center**, in New York City. Since 1977, this nonprofit organization has solely focused on the exhibition of drawings, and has always aimed to support upcoming artists. In 1980, it expanded its public programs and began teaching local public-school

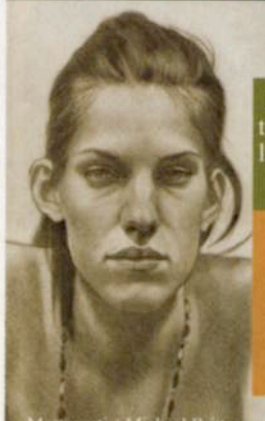
children about their exhibitions through drawing activities and discussions. With such activities as the Draw and Reflect Art Workshops, more than 1,000 students from public schools in all five boroughs of New York City come to the gallery every year. Each student has the opportunity to actively engage in the center’s current exhibition by participating in a guided tour and completing a hands-on project—and it’s free of charge for all participating schools. One of the main goals of such a project, according to education coordinator Aimee Good, “is to create an exploratory safe space where there is no wrong answer.” Good knows the importance of having such a place, as she is a fine artist herself. “The Drawing Center was an important place in my development as an artist,” she says when explaining how she became involved with the organization. “They are committed to supporting emerging and under-recognized artists, and they stay in touch with what is going on in the art community.” The opportunity to give back to an organization that once supported her work

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Hands

by Jessica Grace Bechtel, 2005, pen-and-ink, 12 x 9. Collection the artist.

allows Good to put her passion into action and inspire others.

At the Drawing Center, children are able to thoughtfully respond to the art around them, as well as create some of their own. For the Drawing Connections program, teaching artists go into a classroom in a nearby public school and work with teachers and students to create an original project. The students then have the pleasure of seeing their work exhibited in the gallery—the Drawing Center even hosts a reception to celebrate the work. Students of all ages participate in this program, and each project incorporates an element of a current exhibition at The

Drawing Center as well as part of the classroom's curricula. "We created this program in response to the need for arts education in New York City public schools," explains Good. "Most schools don't have ongoing arts programs, and there's always a school that can use additional creative outlets." Providing this creative outlet is essential, especially for disadvantaged youth, who often do not have the opportunity to participate in such activities on a regular basis.

Although the impact on the students is undeniable, the artists who lend their time as teachers also feel the impact of their work, both personally and creatively. Artist Maria



Emil

by Jessica Grace
Bechtel, 2005, pen-and-
ink, 12 x 9. Collection
the artist.

Dobrovskaja has been a teaching artist for several years and has worked at some of the most prestigious museums in New York City. However, it is work as a teaching artist at organizations such as The Drawing Center that gives her the most satisfaction. "I've worked in museum education for a long time, but teaching studio art—the hands-on aspect of it—is really the most gratifying part of teaching," says Dobrovskaja. "Having the opportunity to build a rapport with the children and to actually see the results of my effort is wonderful!"

The opportunity to see the results of one's efforts allows for a tangible sense of accomplishment.

However, there is a less visible result of teaching that is just as influential: the chance to see art and new concepts through the eyes of children. This can provide an artist with a new perspective and inspire them to approach their own work in a different way. "I strongly believe that children are natural artists who have a lot to teach me," says Dobrovskaja. "With just a little guidance, they come up with the most original work that completely avoids cliché. Children—especially young children—are able to see in an unadulterated way and express themselves directly and freshly. Whenever I get the opportunity to teach in the classroom, I take it." ♦

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