

Behind the Scenes

with Kurt Hertzog



Artisan Works

In the woodturning community, there are those who produce for their own enjoyment and those with a need or desire to sell. Within the selling faction, the venues can range from the web to physical spaces, being anything from a storefront to a craft fair to art galleries. The turnings can be purely functional, artistic, or some combination of both. Regardless, most turners do appreciate recognition of their work. The artists who need or want to sell their work are often in search of outlets to help them. The gallery is one of the typical outlets. Whether they have one or more galleries marketing their work, the mechanics are similar. Rarely does a gallery buy work directly. Their method of operation is to accept work from selected artists on consignment. The value of the gallery is to display the work and make it known to those who collect art. For this function, they deduct their commissions and fees from the proceeds of any sales and then the remainder belongs to the creator. The commissions and fees vary, but are usually in the 40% to 60% range of the selling price. The time between the creation of the work and any payment to the artist may take years. In a perfect world, the artist would be able to operate similar to a craftsman—put out your work, get to a mutually acceptable price, sell it to the end user, and put the money in your pocket. The real difference is that for the artist, it might take years to find and nurture a buyer for the sale. It all depends on the artist, the name recognition, the price range, and the economy in general. In previous eras, many artists were supported by patrons, leaving them far more freedom to follow their own artistic direction with less attention to the marketable creation. With a patron or working on commission, the artist can focus on creation. Though that does occur today, it is far more rare than in the past.

An interesting model for the artist takes form in Artisan Works. Imagine 60,000 square feet of artistic displays and storage. The founder, Louis Perticone, is adamant that Artisan Works is not a gallery—it is an art space. Finding its home in part of a repurposed factory complex, the art space is an “art machine.” The purpose is to be an art-creating market rather than an art-sales market. Tired as having commoditized art, Louis

makes no apology for their methods. Artisan Works buys art directly from artists who might never be known, up-and-comers, and just plain creators. Their advice is to keep your day job so that you can do the art you desire. It can be showable versus saleable. With no intention of being a gallery or a museum, Artisan Works’ entire focus is on being an art space to display art from all the various disciplines. As a 501c3 (nonprofit) company with no government sponsorship, they have an entirely different model from other art institutions. There are memberships and donations, as most nonprofits have, but that isn’t sufficient for sustainability. The environment they’ve created is used as rentable space. Weddings, meetings, conferences, and other bookable events help provide the funding to make the system work. With complete catering capability available, the various theme rooms can be booked for anything from a fifties-style rock-and-roll party to the most formal board meeting in the Frank Lloyd Wright Room. Always being changed, refreshed, or updated, Artisan Works’ rentable event spaces currently include Vertigo Heights, Main Showroom, Boulevard Garibaldi, Urban Garden, Tap Room, Firehouse, Retro Room, Frank Lloyd Wright Room, Vintage French Dining Room, Triangle Theater, Marilyn Monroe Room, and Hunt Room. Artisan Works has not only booked events, but also grand openings and special events for its collected artists and onsite resident artists. Originally including a very unworkable fifty artist co-ops and now at a manageable twelve, there are grand openings for books, paintings, sculptures, and other artistic publicity events. Over its ten years of existence, Artisan Works continues to evolve. The need for continual change keeps the artists, who are also the staff, hopping. Another avenue for revenue is the art rental business. The corporate environment, whether it is in a lobby or executive offices, is much better served by renting decorative art than buying it. Artisan Works has a complete floor of paintings, sculpture, and other artistic creations on display in an office environment from which the corporate client can pick. They can rent or rent to own. The beauty of the program is that the decorative art can be rotated and refreshed on any timetable the clients wish. Picking exactly what pleases

them and what complements their spaces gets them the beautification needed without becoming art collectors and owners.

Visiting Artisan Works is a truly unique experience. The entry into the building takes you right past two of the artist-in-residence studios. With frontage right on the walkway, you are welcome to sit and watch the artists work at their craft. The arts included in Artisan Works run the entire range of creation. From the traditional painting, glass, ceramics, wood, metals, and sculpture to fiber and photography, walking into the facility is total immersion. There isn't any space in the entire volume of the facility that isn't covered in artistic work. The many theme rooms are in an ongoing makeover. Wherever you wander, you'll also be exposed to the history of the last hundred years. Faithfully reproduced firehouses, vintage dental offices (1930s), historically accurate photographic studios and labs, safari lodges, and more are spots along the trail as you follow passageways that are completely enveloped with visual displays from antiques through art completed mere hours ago.

The turnings and woodwork in the facility are unique. There is a vintage pickup truck entirely hand-crafted from wood from the dished wheels through the spark plugs. Turnings and decorated turnings are evident in every corner of the facility. Collected, donated, or made onsite, they reflect the makers desire to create rather than be in demand at the craft show or traditional gallery. The hope of Artisan Works is to replicate itself in other cities, not as a part of Artisan Works, but as that regions own fully independent operation, building on the lessons already learned, providing a place for art and artists to be created, seen, and enjoyed. You can find out more about Artisan Works at www.artisanworks.net.



Fig. 1. Situated in a repurposed industrial complex, the entry door to Artisan Works gives a hint that the unexpected can be expected upon entering.



Fig. 2. The welcome desk immediately inside reinforces the feeling of the pending unique experience you are about to undertake.



Fig. 3. Artisan Works has an array of "theme" rooms. The firehouse theme room is complete with fire engine, dalmatian, fire pole, and firefighters' coats, boots, awards, and more.



Fig. 4. Upstairs in the firefighters' quarters, the room is decorated with art and woodworks opposite the traditional TV and game room rest areas.



Fig. 5. As you travel from theme area to theme area, the halls are filled with some of the most unique arts and crafts available. The antique truck completely hand-crafted from wood is the creation of one of the on-site artisans.



Fig. 8. The resident artists' work ranges from metals, ceramics, and glass to woodworking and photography. The studios are open to visitors and much of the artists' work is sponsored by Artisan Works.



Fig. 6. Every cubic inch of space is decorated with something unique, whether it is a trophy from years past or artwork created only days ago.



Fig. 9. Mark Groaning is a celebrated local artist whose work spans everything from painting to glass to metals. Most recently, he was a feature at the Burning Man phenom (www.burningman.com).



Fig. 7. The Frank Lloyd Wright theme room is two stories tall and is available not only for events, but also for the visitor to lounge and read in.



Fig. 10. Whether flatwork, turning, carving, or other crafting is taking place, the wood-working shop is always in use. The artisans are also the building and repair crews, expanding the gallery and recreating the spaces for display.



Fig. 11. A unique feature of Artisan Works is the rent or rent-to-own program. An entire upper floor is dedicated to showing the art in an industrial office environment for customers to select according to their needs.



Fig. 14. Every cubic inch of available space is used to display work. The break room has work displayed from floor to ceiling. With the spaces being continually revised, artwork is always on the move.



Fig. 12. The theme rooms and the maze of interconnecting hallways are adorned with some form of artistic creation. The diversity of displayed works keeps the exploration of the space extremely interesting.



Fig. 15. The offices are adorned with some of the artwork as well. Whether it is woodwork, glass, painting, or pictures, every area has all the available space decorated with art.



Fig. 13. Among such diverse offerings, the straightforward works seem unusually bland. This beautiful hand-crafted wooden clock seems plain by comparison.



Fig. 16. For all the work that can't fit into the various areas, there is a storage warehouse on-site, as well as several off-site. Where else can you temporarily store your donated hippopotamus head trophy?