

THE NEW Hamilton Weekly

NOVEMBER 25, 1987

A MAGAZINE FOR THE WORKING FAMILY



HAMILTON ARTISTS INC. — Still Flourishing After 12 Years

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Hamilton Artists Inc. — Still Flourishing After 12 Years

From a modest beginning in 1975 when a dozen people founded the city's first artist-run co-operative, Hamilton Artists Inc. now boasts of more than 200 members and an ambitious program of annual events.

The founding principle was straightforward: to provide an area where Hamilton artists could exhibit their work, and to develop a line of communication between artists and the community. It was also hoped that the organization would encourage dialogue among art-

ists and help those who might otherwise have difficulty exhibiting their works.

Nearly 13 years later, administrator Joan Urquhart says the organization is flourishing.

The group's link with the community was pointed in the right direction from the beginning, when it set up its gallery in a storefront on James Street North. What appears to be a small shop from the outside is actually three floors of exhibition and office space. The main floor gallery has about 400 square feet of space, with

the second floor a little more than half that size. An upper floor is used for members' works, and also serves as an exhibition space when the need arises.

"This is the sort of grass-roots level of artists working in Hamilton," said Urquhart, who added that about two-thirds of the group's members say they are working artists.

The group doesn't restrict itself to any one particular form of art. In addition to painting, printmaking, lithography and silkscreening, programs are



Frank Francalanza works on a four-colour print at the Printmaker's Co-op studio, next door to Hamilton Artists Inc. gallery on James Street North. Four separate copper plates must be etched and inked in the process.

organized on music, film, video, theatre and a host of other art forms. About 24 visual arts exhibitions are held annually.

Urquhart said there are both drawbacks and advantages to working as an artist in Hamilton.

"People who are really serious tend to get frustrated at the lack of awareness of culture in Hamilton," she said. This has led to the inevitable migration of artists to Toronto and other centres.

But there are positive features as well, and for many people they outweigh the disadvantages.

"The advantage of being in Hamilton is that the rents are cheaper, you can work in relative anonymity and there's less competition," she said.

After years of criticism that the funding organizations pay too much attention to Toronto, to the detriment of other areas, the situation appears to be changing, she said. The Ontario Arts Council now provides support for the arts group, as does the City of Hamilton and the Canada Council. But the organization continues to depend on its members and friends for its most important support.

A good example of the way members' generosity contributes to the group's development was the opening last year of a printmaking co-operative next door to the gallery. Four members took care of the initial financing, although the gallery itself now has taken over paying the rent and utilities. One tabletop press in the shop was donated by a mem-

ber, while another is on permanent loan. Other equipment was also contributed by members and friends so the project could get off the ground.

The result is a Print Maker's Co-op which is equipped with etching and relief printmaking

PRINT SALE CONTINUES TO NOVEMBER 21

There is still another week left to attend the Hamilton Artists Inc.'s seventh annual print sale at its James Street North gallery.

Each year the group's board of directors calls on members and all artists to donate prints, photographs and other works on paper for the sale. Proceeds go to help finance the gallery's ongoing activities.

Gallery administrator Joan Urquhart said the prints are priced very modestly, giving people a good opportunity to acquire an original work of art at a reasonable price.

Since the sale opened on November 3, about \$650 worth of prints have been sold, but organizers are hoping the final tally will reach \$1,000.

This year the gallery offered any artist free use of its Printer's Co-op studio next door in exchange for a donated print.

Urquhart said one of the most interesting prints in this year's sale is a nine-colour lithograph by artist Don Carr. The gallery is taking bids on the print and will award it to the highest bidder at the end of the sale. ❀

facilities. Founding co-op member Frank Francalanza says the shop is available for anyone who wants to use it, 24 hours a day. A rental fee of \$6 per day includes materials such as inks, solvents, acids, grounds, tarlatan and blotting papers needed to make prints.

The shop, Francalanza says, can be a boon for people with an artistic bent who don't know which medium to use to express their talent. It is also useful for established artists who find it difficult to get studio space and equipment.

Although the Inc., as members call the group, has retained its grass-roots image, Urquhart said this doesn't mean it is divorced from the more established arts community in Hamilton.

Two years ago the group curated a large exhibition with the Art Gallery of Hamilton. This year it is also working on some joint programming. Both galleries worked on an Art Retrospective of Hamilton Artists from 1910 to 1950, and the Hamilton Artists Inc. subsequently published a book on the show called "Climbing the Cold White Peaks".

Urquhart sees a solid future for the gallery. The group's work has been recognized and lauded on many occasions in the past, as evidenced by an Excellence in the Arts Award received in 1983 for its contribution to the community.

Although financing will always remain a concern, Urquhart said she is confident the community support will continue to be there to ensure the gallery carries on its work.

