Welcome from Ron Mallis

Introductions

Presentation from Jason Talbot:

Artist for Humanity was started in 1991 by Susan Rodgerson. Susan came to my junior high and wanted us to paint a giant mural in a week to sell to a corporation for their lobby. This was my first experience with what become Artists for Humanity. I still work at Artists for Humanity as Special Projects Director, which means I’ll do anything. I got into this because I loved graffiti, I liked looking at the tags and I even tagged too until I got busted. Susan gave me the opportunity to make art in a positive way. It was crazy in my neighborhood and it was good to have a place to go after school.

Today we are in the EpiCenter. We opened our doors in 2004. The EpiCenter was the first Leed Platinum-certified building in Boston. Susan had the desire to build it that way, before it was a thing.

John Cannistraro did our plumbing and fire suppression and has been an outstanding collaborator ever since. This partnership with business is at the core of our programming. All the work we do in our studios is work for commission. For a non-profit organization it’s turning the model on its ear. Paying for art is sometimes a thing people are reluctant to do. Artists love what we do; creating art is a process that builds you up. We think artists should be paid for their work and we pay every artist.

Teen artists creating in Artists for Humanity get paid an hourly wage, and the work gets displayed. Paintings are treated as projects and kids are mentored through their paintings. Our process of project management is having an idea, creating sketches, and executing the plan through exhibition, marketing, and sales. We want the kids to be able to initiate action; it does not matter if they are “good” artists. When clients come in to commission work they talk to the teams of kids, this experience of working with clients is extremely important.
AFH Statistics 2012/2013:

- Employed 271 teens.
- Paid teens over $700,000.
- Made $810,000 from the sale of art.
- This is 30-40% of budget.
- 84% kids come from low and very low-income households
- 95% matriculate to college
- 100% graduate high school
- 1,200,000 viewers of AFH youth art.
- 52 exhibitions and public art installations

Jobs are a huge part of combatting poverty. I had my first job at AFH at 14 and I never gave my parents money, but I never took their mobile [DID JASON MEAN HE NEVER TOOK THEIR MONEY??]. This made me feel upwardly mobile.

Questions to AFH:

*Is being low-income part of the recruiting?*
We do recruit based on need but those needs are varied. Maybe you are in the program because you can paint like crazy or maybe you need it because you have no parents or maybe because you get into trouble.

*Are kids identified at schools and recommended?*
Yes, we have relationships with counselors and teachers, etc. Having a diverse mix is what we really want

When you get to see your artwork on the wall or when you’re walking down the street it is extremely powerful.

Another example: the kids at AFH proposed and created bike racks in the AFH shop. Kids got to meet the Mayor as part of this project. To work with a team, contribute to your city, and be acknowledged by your city is transformative.

AFH also did a project for John Cannistararo:

*John Cannistraro presents on projects with AFH:*

We had a property in the business for many years, and there was an old ice house that we didn’t know what to do with. A family in Worcester had a plumbing museum and wanted to donate it. So we ended up with everything from the Plumbing Museum and worked with AFH to redesign the set up of the museum.

When I first met with AFH I was a businessman who was just going to see a client but I fell in love with what they do. I realized they don’t just paint or draw, they are really creative
and the whole collaboration was amazing. At first they were intimidated by me and everything, but art is what brought everything together and the ideas just flowed.

The kids knew nothing about plumbing but one after another the table of teens came up with great ideas for the museum. They did all the building and painting and murals and designs. The best part about it is it’s our brand. These folks collaborate for you and design for your brand and what personality you want to portray through art.

At the space now there have been parties, weddings, showers, etc. We have 120 people in the office, half of which are under 30. They want a cool, vibrant place to work that relates to community and to art. That’s why AFH is fantastic. Everyone in this room wants to collaborate with the community.

When you invest in a system and people, it helps everybody, it relates to your company and its well worth it.

Discussion:

What do you think is replicable? Can we think about ways to take what they have done and move forward?

How do we convey to business people how and why to invest in art? Is it by pushing the message of investing in art that is tailored to their brand? How do we communicate the worthwhileness of that investment to the business owners so they will invest in the art to attract people?

We can put art in public places with everyday things: hydrants, light posts etc. If we have AFH, contractors and/or businesses can design a new way.

In St. Paul artists have been given opportunity to create the poles that the stop signs sit on.

Lets do that as way to engender civic value in communities. Creating connections in communities around art so that art that is seen as having value. For many public art programs it’s about alienation. Property values going up. (I did not catch all of this somehow...Do you remember her main point here?) NO: NOT SURE WHAT “IT'S ABOUT ALIENATION” MEANS...?? MAYBE WE JUST DROP IT...:)

In Uphams Corner, a group of community agencies received an ArtPlace grant. Been working with art and community engagement, getting the community involved, getting art out of community as way of social engagement, good model for us to take a look at. How do you bring art along and artists along and not gentrify, etc.? It’s about connecting people who don’t identify as artists who live in a community with artists. How do we bring them all together to have an impact that everybody owns?

Jason:
After 24 years we are embarking to expand our facility. The proposed Creative Industries Center will triple capacity, kids, open it up to the public. Exhibitions, subscriptions services. 

*Create the pinnacle of maker's spaces, where anything any of us imagines can be created in these spaces.* [NOTE: I love this! Let's italicize it, just for the hell of it.]

We invite everyone to jump in on this vision with us. We were in the Innovation District before there was an Innovation District. We want to anchor one side and have a more public face. We have other fantastic partnerships and when I ask them what the value to their company is when they do business with AFH they explain that when they vie for talent in the workplace, their space looks cool to potential employees, and it also shows they are involved in the community. These are values that employees can get behind.

The Gardner Museum has a Third Thursday Event every month that involves people in 20’s and 30's. There is an interest in keeping people in that age range in Boston. A huge part of keeping young people in Boston is arts and culture.

One of things we are trying to crack here has to do with the private sector and what is the role of the private sector in supporting art in public places. Bay Lights Project in San Francisco is a $6 million project that is entirely privately funded. Then look at what is in Boston, many of the same companies as in San Francisco are now setting up in Boston. What is the argument to them to fund us? The employee argument? Does that make it sound critical?

Rich Frank, AFH: Let the businesses do an NCAA bracket of public art and let the public vote in Boston to pick a champion. This would make companies vie over public art and be competitive which could increase investment.

For the private sector, you have to make it worth their while. So somehow you have to have a model where you can show that it increases productivity or something along those lines. Thinking creatively is a necessary skill now (the ability to problem solve etc.). So bringing that creative intelligence to companies is necessary as well. We can't just say that “art is great” and expect everyone to invest.

Mark Mattel and Sebastion Mariscal have built this idea of art as necessary into their financials for projects.

Mark Mattel: We build the infrastructure for art to happen but not for art itself, it's worked into operating costs of the actual building. Then we have a pocket of money that we can give out to folks to bring in a cycle of art to the area to help establish a place of culture.

We need the vision too. In downtown Chicago, there is the vision and opportunity for art. But now we need to look at best practices, how do you have good art in that space? We all have had art that did not manifest that, where we weren't supported. [Again do you remember the main point of this?) [No, but I think what you've captured is fine as is!]
From Mark Matel: A great thing about the Bartlett project [in Roxbury] was it allowed the community to feed into its own self-image. That relates to what is being talked about. If we can put together what we have here and construct a way for a community to speak to itself, with itself, then we can make a grand statement in Boston and invite art. People will be able to see Boston’s art as a representation of artists and the community and as part of what defines Boston and how we feel.

This is what is so tragic, how many people in AFH end up coming back? How does Boston support its artists? They have that cultural capital; coming from a community is important. What if artists created work in the MFA, you might have more people come. AFH has young people making art in their community. So people can see that point of view and comment on their community.

John Cannistraro: The other problem with keeping artists and young people in Boston is it’s just too expensive to live in Boston. So these artists are below the poverty level, AFH is saving their lives, but maybe its not in Boston that they will be able to work.

Jason Talbot: It’s a different demographic. MIT grads go all over the world to seize opportunities, but I would say most kids from AFH go back to Dorchester or Roxbury or Mattapan. They are ignored, not treated as a resource. I went to Atlanta when I graduated. I had a great time but I loved Boston.

AFH is a place where kids can be enriched instead of exploited. And it’s not just art, designers and related disciplines as well. We are aspirational in that sense that we want to develop the skills and confidence for everyone who comes through AFH. We want our kids to finish. We want them to feel like they can be part of growing opportunities. Whether an artist or not, we want them to have skills for the new economy.

Question to AFH: Are you seeing kids wanting to work in arts jobs after?

We are probably are not as strong in post-alum tracking, but that is a great question. We are trying to track it better. But we do have kids who want to do that. It’s not just about putting kids into an arts economy; we want to teach kids how to work.

It’s important to be able to bring in an example, stuff that we already have, expanding their efforts and being able to spread out more in Boston. Kids can see it and acknowledge art, if it’s everywhere.

One of the places is public art, and one of the things is realize is that there are new projects happening: example is the I-93 underpass makeover. The new mayor has a great commitment to make more public art.

The one mural that Boston has, the whale mural, is disappearing soon because they are constructing a building in front of it.
Murals cover the East Boston corridor, but that whole area is now aging, that project was from 2007 and everyone (Mayor, mural crew) needs to focus on that. People need to look at other cities and understand that the art revolution we are looking for already exists and ask why we are not doing the same things as other cities.

When we talk about creative economy, we are silencing people. *All parts of jobs and the economy need to be creative.* The way the economy is growing is through creation and we need each other. Maybe we could frame the fact that we are more interrelated and call on each other that way, instead of focusing on the differences.

There is a Massachusetts law for the creative economy sector that describes the interlocking of different industries and allows people to get together and be creative.