



# OUR CREATIVE CONNECTION

WORDS:  
DOUG GEYER  
ILLUSTRATION:  
WE B TEAM



In Utah's Fishlake National Forest, what appears to be a massive stand of independent quaking aspen trees is actually a colony of clones known as Pando, or the Trembling Giant. It spans 107 acres and is one of the planet's oldest and largest organisms, with an ancient root system that connects nearly fifty thousand trees.

Wending through Cincinnati's alleys and avenues, you can see many manifestations of our diverse and dynamic arts community. Though comprised of autonomous individuals and entities, a common spirit weaves through our classrooms and studios, theaters and halls, emerging in a myriad of ways to bless the Queen City. Like an organic internet of roots, countless threads of artistry vibrate and pulse everywhere you set your foot. In every direction, art is there. Nourishing and revitalizing, answering and questioning.

Our creative scene is enjoying a moment in the sun. With the success of BLINK, the homegrown art and light festival, perceptions of who we are and what we can do are evolving, both beyond city limits, and more importantly, within. But this breakthrough shouldn't come as a surprise. Cincinnati's exceptional and long-standing commitment to feed and sustain the region's culture has already established world-class offerings and attracted world-changing talent. Emerging from that history of support, an invigorated creative class of young and old is branching out and up without looking back or down.

Steve McGowan and Dan Reynolds, co-founders of Brave Berlin and the impetus behind BLINK, embody this critical mix of both the established and the experimental.

"I always ask myself the question, 'Do you know you're living in something when you're in the middle of it?' Did the people who were hanging around in Greenwich Village in the sixties understand the time that they were living in? Same with Paris in the 1920s. When people ask us what Brave Berlin or BLINK is about, or this creative initiative or that creative initiative, that question always comes to my mind. We are living in the right place and the right time. You've got to get up and remind yourself of that all the time. It doesn't mean everything is perfect with every creative endeavor, but it's fertile soil for anyone with the least bit of ambition," Reynolds said.

McGowan added, "It didn't happen overnight. Of course we are going through a renaissance and it is the right time to be here, but Cincinnati has always had this sort of underground creative culture. I think what has happened most recently is that people are finding their voice. Their true, authentic voice. And they're realizing what they can offer the community, and the community is more open to it and celebrating it in many, many ways. It's a city where you can collaborate easily with other artists. We've even heard that from Emilio Estevez and others who have moved here who say you can't find that in LA. You can't find that anywhere else. We just have a certain kind of sharing attitude about our talents that we're able to riff off each other's ideas to make something bigger."

The team that pulled together to pull off last year's BLINK is illustrative of that point. The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, AGAR, ArtWorks, ArtsWave, and the Haile Foundation united to take the event and the region even higher.

Chamber President and CEO Jill Meyer underscored how Cincinnati's foundational identity informs so much of what we're experiencing. "We are a city that was built on creativity and the arts. So the moment that we're having right now is much bigger and is giving different, creative pieces a different platform. The classic move of our Fine Arts Fund becoming ArtsWave was to get more of this creative juice that has been around our community a bigger platform and opportunity. We're enjoying the momentum right now because the arts are so vital to who we have always been."

Meyer emphasized how the city's level of ownership is both essential and rare. Pillar corporations and the people who lead them are dedicated to building more than their businesses. That embrace coupled with the collective of artists and creators owning their particular vision combine for great effect.

AGAR's Andrew Salzbrun points to our deep pool of local talent. "It's a community that has incredibly strong foundational roots from the educational backgrounds with schools like Walnut Hills and DAAP. We have a strong pipeline of people who are from here building into our creative class. Also, some of our best creatives tend to focus on one key area or build one key thing because there are so many opportunities to build things here."

These perfect conditions have built a creative ecosystem that surpasses expectations for a midsize Midwestern city. Joshua Steele, Memorial Hall Manager, had this to say: "Cincinnati boasts a vibrant arts and cultural community that belies our city's small size. There are few cities in the country that can claim having dedicated, professional Shakespeare, ballet, opera, and children's theater companies, in addition to cutting-edge offerings like the Cincinnati Fringe Festival and Contemporary Arts Center."

Kristen Schlotman, Executive Director of Film Cincinnati, has been actively promoting Cincinnati to producers and directors for over two decades. She described how that conversation has changed over recent years. "Five years ago when I was at Sundance, I would introduce Cincinnati in a way like, 'I know you've never thought of this, so let me tell you a little bit about it.' Transition to five years later and I'll ask, 'Have you heard about shooting in Ohio? Have you heard about Cincinnati?' And most of them have now."

Award-winning director Todd Haynes has shot two films here, and New York's Killer Films is preparing to shoot their seventh. Like so many creatives in the city, Schlotman pointed to the power of partnerships. "It's not a coincidence that our trajectory took off when we partnered with Brave Berlin, who helped us establish a brand not just locally but internationally. That didn't just happen. We partnered with them, and they elevated us."

Scientists believe Pando is under threat and dying. Coordinated and comprehensive efforts are underway to preserve and protect the treasure. Our arboreal counterpart offers a lesson: intentional cooperation is crucial to strengthening Cincinnati's cultural ecosystem.

Melissa Currence, Senior Director for Communications and Marketing at ArtWorks, said it best. "Because [the arts community] is one organism in a way, if one piece of the arts is not doing so well, we all suffer, because we are all connected."

# FAZEL RUG GALLERY

Antique Decorative Rugs • Specialize in Hand Wash • Professional Restoration



Large shipment of new and antique rugs just arrived. Hurry in for best selection!

ART FOR YOUR FLOOR

Please Visit Our Showroom:  
Hyde Park Square  
2716 Erie Ave. Suite A1, Cincinnati, Ohio 45208

(513) 241-4004  
fazelruggallery@gmail.com  
fazelruggallery.com