

Report on the
ARTIST'S HOME OCCUPATION AND STUDIO FACT-FINDING TRIP
to
NEW YORK CITY
for the
TAMAQUA AREA COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
and the
RURAL LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORT CORPORATION (Rural LISC)
September 27, 2010 and October 1 & 2, 2010
by Daniel D. Schroeder

Attendees: Joseph Marioni – Artist
Stephen Bennett – Artist
Dina Depos – Artist
Dean Daderko – Curator, University teacher of the Arts
Christine Verdeer – aide to Senator David Argall
Dave John – former rental property owner
Tom Moroz – Stonchedge board member
Kim Hillegas – Realtor
Daniel Schroeder – Tamaqua Community Development Officer
Nicholas Schroeder – Consultant for the Upper Stories Study, Part One

September 27, 2010 – Christine, Kim, Dave, Dan & Nicholas visited the Tamaqua studios of artists, Joseph Marioni and Stephen Bennett. Mr. Marioni explained his reasons for locating his studio in Tamaqua. With his successful 40 year career, he had outgrown his New York studio in space and in scale. His New York studio consists of the second and fourth floors of a building located at 543 8th Ave., New York. Each floor is approximately 2000 sq. ft. (20' x 100'), the ceiling heights, stairs and door sizes were limiting the scale of his work. Although current laws limit the rent increases in his current studio, the high cost of rent and the continuing increases in rent in his area for new space was prohibitive. To find a suitable building, he and his assistant performed a systematical search of the areas surrounding New York, starting north of the city and progressing counter clockwise, searching for low-cost, spacious buildings with good natural north lighting. The north lighting is very important to his art. Joseph's assistant found Tamaqua by noticing an ad for the sale of the former Knights of Columbus building. When he visited the site, he was impressed by the large scale of the building, the low cost, and the "Great" light in the town. He recommended the site to Marioni, who concurred and purchased the building. The Tamaqua building allows Marioni to create larger pieces of art in a spacious studio on the third floor, store his extensive private collection and display his works to clients in a gallery type setting on the second floor, collect income from commercial spaces on the first floor, and live in the building. It is very common for Artists to live, (or want to live), where they work, as uninterrupted working when inspired, often through the night, is common. Tamaqua's location, within a 2 ½ hour drive from two important Art centers, (New York and Philadelphia), was extremely important, as was its perceived image as a "clean residential area", however, the low cost of suitable buildings was the most important factor in selecting Tamaqua as a home and studio location.

Stephen Bennett, another successful New York Artist and former neighbor of Joseph Marioni, was introduced to Tamaqua by Joseph. Mr. Bennett also explained his reasons for relocating to Tamaqua. He moved to Tamaqua for most of the same reasons that Mr. Marioni had described, however, Mr. Bennett does not feel that the natural North light is important. He likes painting with artificial light and feels that artificial light gives him a more consistent light source. The location of his studio space, in the basement of the former First Presbyterian Church on Broad Street is "perfect" for his work. Mr. Bennett utilizes the main floor of the former Church as storage and exercise space. The basement also contains his sleeping area, a relaxation area with sofa and chairs, paint and equipment storage, and a kitchen/dining area.

Artists with similar views about artificial lighting and other non-lighting dependent art and art-related businesses could be recruited for buildings which contain no North-facing windows or which otherwise may not be suitable for "typical" Artists.

October 1, 2010 - Joseph Marioni met the team at the New York Museum of Modern Art and provided an incredible, informative, guided tour of a special exhibit of the Artist "Henri Matisse".

October 2, 2010 - The team visited Joseph Marioni's studio/residence at 543 8th Ave. and were given a tour of the artist's space. The second floor consists of a large open studio space with large windows at the front of the building. A cooking/dining area, with counters, is located along the back of this space. A partition separates this front space from a bathroom, a bedroom, and a storage space which fill the rear of the floor. The fourth floor has a large open space with windows in the front. This space is utilized for mixing pigments, framing, storing paints, pigments, brushes, rollers, spatulas and other accessories. The rear space on this floor is used for an office and storage of paintings and other items. The partitions, cabinetry, shelving etc were all constructed and installed by the artist. Mr. Marioni stated that typical rent in his area was \$3 – \$4 / sq. ft. / month. Because of these rates, typical 1000 sq. ft. spaces are shared by 2 – 3 Artists. A typical one-bedroom apartment in this area costs about \$275,000. After leaving Marioni's Studio, we walked around his neighborhood, where he explained that many of the older buildings have been torn down and replaced with large office and apartment buildings. The prices paid for some of these old properties is about \$7,000,000.00, thus there is much pressure on the property owners to either sell or raise the rent, only current laws, which limit rent rate increases, keep rent affordable. Mr. Marioni noted that the City of New York has promoted the development of Artist Studio areas in blighted areas of the city to promote future development in those areas. It has been shown that when the art community moves into these areas, gentrification of the areas usually follows within 8 – 10 years. It was also noted that, once the Artists move into the formerly abandoned spaces, vandalism to the buildings is greatly reduced.

The team then traveled to the Greenpoint district in Brooklyn, where we met Dean Daderko at the GMDC (Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center), building which is located at 221 McKibbin Street at the corner of Greenpoint and Franklin Streets. The GMDC Building was a former rope factory, (another nearby Artist's building was formerly a pencil factory), was stripped down to the bare brick and restored only to the point that it meets all code requirements. Dean is a 1991 graduate of Tamaqua High School and is a Curator and College teacher of the Arts. Dean has many connections with artists in New York and has volunteered to help contact Artists and to spread information about opportunities which can be found in Tamaqua.

At the GMDC building we visited the cabinetmaking shop/ studio of Mr. Marioni's frame maker. The space was about 45'x36',(about 1600 sq. ft.), had a white painted insulated drywall ceiling between existing old heavy timber trusses but had no wall insulation. The space had a plywood floor and contained several gas space heaters, a 200 amp electrical service, a utility sink, and a sprinkler system. The walls and floor were painted by the tenant, as were most of the spaces we visited. The tenants also construct any partitions, cabinets, tables, etc. that they require., The drywall walls, doors and door frames were all fire rated. Shared bathrooms are located along a corridor in the building. Sleeping in this building is strictly prohibited because of zoning restrictions, although, it was told, that because artists often do their work at night and young and/or struggling artists often cannot afford the additional cost of housing, they often find ingenious ways of concealing a sleeping space in their studio.

We then visited Marcus Linnenbrink, a successful artist from Dortmund, Germany. Mr. Linnenbrink specializes in acrylic art and utilizes molten and carved plastic in his work. Routers are used to carve his sculptural pieces. His studio is the largest that we visited in the GMDC building, 2200 square feet. He has an 8-year lease, with rent of \$1.00/ sq. ft. with a 2% annual increase, and pays all of his utilities in addition to the rent. . He attributes the "low" rent rate to the fact that the owner is a non-profit Organization and receives several subsidies to provide affordable work space for small manufacturing and

artists. Mr. Linnenbrink lives "15 minutes" from his studio, was very interested in hearing about Tamaqua and stated that once we develop our plan, he would be "interested in looking at it". Typical (smaller) studios in this district cost about \$1100.00 per month (\$1.00 - \$2.00 / sq. ft. / month) and a 1 bedroom apartment is about \$1600.00 - \$2,000.00 per month, thus the interest in studios which allow a live-in occupancy. Mr Linnenbrink found this location on its website and by word of mouth. He stated that the Owner works with Artists and tries to provide more or less space as the Artists' needs change.

The remainder of our time was spent observing studio spaces and interviewing apparently younger artists. Some of the Artists we visited had spaces as follows:

- a 12' x 13' space with no windows for \$350.00 / month

- two 12' x 17' spaces with windows for \$425.00 / month

- (the costs for the above three spaces include approximately 10% common space fees)

- 5 partitioned spaces, 24'x11' each in one large room, 3 without windows and 2 with windows for total \$2000.00 / month (total).

- 400 square foot spaces for \$1.60 - \$2.00 sq. ft. (estimated current rates), most occupants who rented several years ago pay the lower rate.

- one studio pays \$1200.00 / 600 sq. ft. (500 sq. ft. usable space + 100 sq. ft. common space) + \$100.00 / month for electricity.

The GMDC building also houses Sculptors, Professional Photographers, Film industry related studios such as Soundmen, Film Editors, independent Film Makers, Small Documentary Producers, etc.

Recommendations for Tamaqua:

- make zoning inviting to this type of occupancy, (note that these studios, except for rare occasions, are not used as commercial sales spaces, sales take place at Galleries, online, etc.). Many Artists do not own cars, thus there will be little effect on parking. Tamaqua should look into the possibility of developing or attracting a low cost car rental service. Artists will need transportation to the Art Centers for display and sale of their works.

- Locate potential available Tamaqua spaces, identify potential sellers and sale prices, renters and owners with lease or rent rates.

- Explore the possibility of selling horizontal or vertical condominiums in existing buildings and the possible need to modify zoning and/or planning ordinances.

- Find Banks and/or other investors to help fund this project, similar to Paducha, Kentucky's program.

- Prepare informative Brochure about Tamaqua opportunities.

- Target successful Artists by sending information brochure to artists listed in Artist's Directories, such as the Sundance Artists, Directory

- Advertise in "Art in America" and other Artists' magazines.