



# arts INSIGHTS

A page about artists and The Arts at Work by the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District in collaboration with the Northeast.



James Brenner recently rendered the hydrologic (rain/water) cycle and the Mississippi River.

## Inside look at the art and business of sculpture

by Margo Ashmore and Josh Blanc

It's rare to find sculptures "talking to each other across a landscape," with the various elements serving functions other than decoration. One such place is in Northeast, the "Green Campus" of Edison High School and Jackson Square Park along 22nd Avenue between Jackson Street and Monroe Street, where James Brenner's latest creation celebrates the hydrologic (water) cycle in an abstract representation of clouds outside the Edison gym building.

Chains, 830 of them, look like rain even when there's no water flowing. The sculpture is plumbed and has pumps to recirculate water. It will be operated on special occasions. The corner is covered in steel into which a rendition of the Mississippi River is cut and lit. Grasses planted last year represent the Earth.

A recent international conference on public art toured the area, and a curator from China "saw the cohesion," Brenner said. She shared that she is putting together a series of light sculptures and found his work inspiring.

In fact, several entities have caught Brenner's enthusiasm and vision, seeing fit to fund different parts of the evolution since Brenner, then in Chicago, first started working with the Holland neighborhood about a decade ago. He moved here, his studio is in part of the flexible Casket "Factory" space shared with other public artists, welders and metal cutters.

Brenner's signature materials are corten steel which weathers to a rusty but stable patina, and hand-sculpted glass lit from behind or within with LEDs. He points out that the difference in price when art is integrated into the function of a building or landscape is "not all that much. It's the Greek idea of integrating arts into the everyday. Utilitarian can be beautiful."

The Edison-area sculptures did not start out as a master plan. For "In Flux," the first piece in the park,



a sliced orb with a helix of lighted glass running through it, Holland neighborhood engaged Brenner using Neighborhood Revitalization Program funds. He conducted workshops to develop the words that surround the piece in the concrete, and staged iron pours using molds that participants made. "Double Flux" later morphed "the same volume into two," representing holding onto heritage while welcoming the new.

Smaller balls with changing LED colors representing the amount of energy Holland residents pledged to save, were funded by Center for Energy and Environment; they grace the edges of Edison's parking lot.

The Minneapolis school district, park board and others got involved in the lighted monument sign for Edison and the Innovation backstop Brenner's team created for the field at Jackson Park. The latest work involved a grant from the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.

"I really like the problem solving," Brenner said. "Something unique each time." Commissions for cities across the region and country also present various challenges. He's working now on an overhead installation for the investigations unit in the new city of Minneapolis building, convex and concave shapes that represent different perspectives, an oak tree for the city of Eagan, five big hoops outside of the Hook & Ladder development, and commissions for the city of Edina and Salt Lake City, to name a few.

The sculpture business employs a talented crew of four associate artists, all of whom have master's degrees, in various fabrication and project management roles. Like any



business, they're mindful of completing jobs to make rent and payroll on time.

"I feel lucky and blessed," Brenner said, "but still scrapping."



In Flux and Innovation backstop, Double Flux with the weathered steel bridge that inspired the material choice. Brenner's crew reconditions a metal tree.

(Brenner & crew photos by Margo Ashmore, others courtesy of James Brenner)

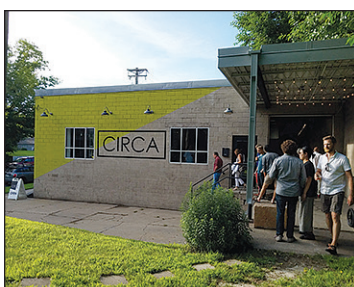
## Galleries surge and new art buildings emerge

To an audience of about 120, double the previous attendance record for an Arts District/Hatch PechaKucha, 11 presenters talked about their different reasons and models for galleries or art buildings July 23 at the Ritz Theater. (See page 8, July 31, 2019 Northeast.)

It was a celebration of variety. Some artists went into the gallery business because they couldn't get shown in other galleries. All have a desire to see artists succeed and get paid. Many have cooperative time-sharing models, or find other ways to not take huge commission percentages. Some subsidize the space through other parts of their enterprise.

It could be the start of more promotion coordination between the gallery owners.

• **Circa Gallery moves to Northeast:** Gallery director Krista Anderson-Larson told the PechaKucha group that they chose Northeast not only for good rent, but to be in a community of artists. They held a grand opening July 20 at 1125



Buchanan Street NE (shown above).

• **Grand Re-Opening for the Holland Arts Building** will be held Saturday, August 17, 4:00 pm - 9:00 pm at 607 22nd Ave. NE with 20 tenant artist open studios through the building and artists showing and selling their wares.

Mercury Trigger and Michael Hanna (of Ready Freddy), sponsored by Conduit Sound, will play throughout the evening on the back dock. There will be free root-beer floats and a raffle for those who visit all the open studios.

They are on social media at @hollandartsne and hollandartsne mpls.com.

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## Arts District's new website and 365 program

When the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District's "District 365" program is underway, we hope visitors (from out of town or local) won't be able to say "I went to your buildings but didn't find anything open."

That's because they'll be directed to one featured working artist's studio any day between noon and 5 p.m. The time frame emphasizes what's unique about this arts district—the fact that primarily, it's a place where artists work.

It's up to the featured artist whether they simply allow visitors to observe their process or give demos at specific times. It's even been suggested that this is an opportunity to have special guests or groups come in for arts-related discussions, or "office hours" for anyone looking for public interaction.

Meet Minneapolis, folks who staff the Visitors Center downtown, and the Northeast newspaper will be engaged to promote the newly-redesigned website, www.

northeastminneapolisartsdistrict.org, where featured artists will be highlighted in an easy to use calendar format, accessible from the moment they're posted, so that out-of-town visitors or even local groups planning programs far ahead can see who's doing what when.

District 365 will launch on Open District weekend, November 1, 2, and 3, assuming the calendar fills up sufficiently. Artists will be receiving promotional materials explaining the effort soon.

For occasions that don't fit the "working artist" model of District 365, the calendar is available for listing events so that visitors don't have to consult several sites to figure out what's going on.

Artists and interested public alike, for more info on the calendar and District 365, can visit the website northeastminneapolisartsdistrict.org.

—Margo Ashmore and Nicholas Harper  
District 365 planning committee

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