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The Voice of the River Arts District

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The Voice of the River Arts District Artists

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Abstract

The River Arts District Artists (RADA) is a group of more than 165 artists who make their studios in old industrial buildings near the French Broad River in Asheville, North Carolina. Over the last few years, the area has seen a surge in tourism as Asheville and the River Arts District have gained recognition as cultural hotspots. As the River Arts District grows, it is important for the many artists to project an image that is consistent with how they want to be perceived as a group.

How does one set forth a single, cohesive image for the many loosely associated artists? To better understand the working dynamics of the River Arts District, twenty artists were interviewed. Their perspectives were then analyzed to find common themes and consensuses. Environment, experience, community, and diversity were found to be its defining competencies. However, it was also found that the value of the neighborhood is not always understood by visitors, which leads to frustration from both visitors and artists. By clearly projecting their personality through marketing materials, the River Arts District could attract a self-selected group of people who have more accurate expectations of the experience.

A number of ideas were suggested by artists during the interviews that RADA might want to further explore. Those include the creation of a common showroom to display the work of artists in the district, having a system for peer critiquing artwork, and petitioning the city of Asheville to set rent controls in the district. These are beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on defining the value of the community as it is currently.

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I. Introduction, History, and Literature Review

The River Arts District, referred to by Asheville Mayor Terry Bellamy as “a crown in the jewel of Asheville” (River Arts District, 2012), is a vibrant art center, and its still-evolving history as a neighborhood and as a part of Asheville help explain what defines this community. First, it is necessary to examine the history of Asheville to see how this “jewel” fits into the larger “crown.”

Asheville is geographically characterized by the Blue Ridge Mountains and the French Broad River. It was the coming of roads, railroad, and industry that initially drew large numbers of people to Asheville. In 1828, the completion of a road alongside the French Broad River opened Asheville to the rest of the Southeast, and the sparsely populated town soon became a resort destination for the Southern affluent (Asheville NC, 2009).

In 1880, the railroad came to Asheville, bringing money, industry, and jobs. An industrial center sprung up near the railroad in the area that would later be known as the River District. Many people found employment and housing here, but the buildings were subject to flooding from the adjacent French Broad River, which floods on average every ten years. In 1916, the water rose fifteen feet in one hour in the River District, killing many inhabitants and damaging buildings. Flooding combined with the Great Depression

that hit Asheville hard in 1930 drove industry out, and much of the neighborhood gave way to a run-down series of scrap yards (Neufeld, 2008).

However, urban renewal began as artists were attracted by the low-rent plethora of studio space to be found in the old buildings. In 1985, a group of ceramicists started Highwater Center. The purpose of this co-operative was to provide artist workshops at a low cost in an environment where diverse artists could collaborate and educate the public (Neufeld, 2008). Two years later an artist couple bought a building nearby and named it Warehouse Studios. Over the next quarter century, more artists followed suit, buying up buildings to work in and rent out to other artists, and today most buildings are still artist-owned. A bohemian atmosphere defined the district, and as recent as 1996, “Parties and performances drew artists from other parts of the country and fostered Asheville’s ‘exotic’ population” (Neufeld, 2008).

In 2010, the half-square-mile area officially became known as the River Arts District after a five-year period of rebranding (Torno, 2012). Over the last few years, the number of tourists and artists in the district has increased substantially. Some outside established artists were drawn to the area, and two trolley lines now cart tourists down for visits. There are studios open every day, with the main events being the bi-annual Studio Strolls and more recently the monthly Second Saturdays.

Little literature exists on the working dynamics of art districts, but the River Arts District can be compared to a more famous area, Montmartre in Paris. Montmartre, situated in the outskirts of Paris, started attracting artists as Paris’s urban development program was tearing down low-rent areas and replacing them with Bourgeois neighborhoods. Initially artists chose studios in Montmartre for the low cost of living, but

soon the large artist community and the carefree lifestyle that it fostered was attracting others.

From 1860 to 1910, over five hundred artists moved into this district, which played a part in the art movements of Realism, Impressionism, the Nabis, the Fauves, Cubism, and Futurism. The factors of environment and community were so connected to the art produced here that Buisson wrote, “The chronology of Montmartre painting might be defined simply by plotting the changing fashions in artists’ drinking places” (Buisson & Parisot, 1996). The River Arts District is also a concentrated community of artists with venues for coffee, beer, food, and music. Its own flavor is influenced by the environment of the district and the community of artists who work in diverse media.

II. Thesis

As tourism to the River Arts District increases, the value of the district must be effectively communicated if it is to retain its character and draw a larger percentage of people who will both benefit the district and be benefitted by the experience. Some questions addressed are: What are the defining characteristics of the River Arts District? What do the artists have in common? What impression do visitors have of the district? What demographic of visitors should RADA target? What image should RADA project to attract those visitors?

III. Methodology

Preliminary research involved reading about the history of the River Arts District and gathering data on the Internet related to Asheville and the River Arts District. Next, the

investigator conducted twenty voice interviews with randomly selected artists in the River Arts District over Google Talk. A list of questions can be found in Appendix A. The questions were specifically designed to reveal the interviewees' perceptions of what the defining competencies of the River Arts District are. Conversations were recorded on my personal laptop with Audacity and then transcribed by hand into Microsoft Word. The transcriptions were subsequently entered into qualitative research software, ATLAS.ti, to further analyze the answers.

The results of the preliminary research, interviews, and ATLAS.ti analysis were then compiled into a suggested image guide for the River Arts District Artists (RADA), a self-governed association, to utilize at its discretion. "The Brand Book", recently published by The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, was used as a model for the River Arts District Image Guide (UTK Office of Communications and Marketing).

IV. Results and Discussion

From the interviews with artists, it is clear that some visitors do not have an accurate understanding of what the River Arts District is, or how to approach it. If the River Arts District is clearly conveyed to the public, then it could attract a more selected group of people, one that is prepared to better appreciate the environment and experience of the diverse artist community. I will support my points by listing all quotes from the interviews that pertain to each topic, beginning each artist's contribution with his or her assigned number. These responses are sorted by theme in the appendices. Quotes may be listed in more than one appendix if they address more than one theme.

Visitor Disconnect (Appendix B)

First, I would like to demonstrate that many artists notice visitors who are uninformed or misinformed about the River Arts District and how to approach it. Not only are some disappointed by a lack of standardized open studio hours, but some are even disrupting artists at work. It is only a minority of visitors who are causing frustration; indeed, only eight of the thirty-seven reviews on Trip Advisor rate the district as “poor” or “terrible,” (Trip Advisor: River Arts District) but this is still an issue that should be addressed to improve both the reputation of the district and the overall experience for visitors and the artists who host them.

Overall, the most prevalent misconceptions are that the River Arts District is a) a collection of polished galleries, or b) a continual craft fair. Upon seeing the district, some feel that it looks dirty or run down, perhaps because they do not understand the history or working studio aspects. Others treat it like a typical tourist destination and try to see and interact as much as they can without the intention of buying. While artists do not wish to dissuade tourists from coming, there is a need to attract serious art collectors.

It is also clear that the percentage of people visiting the district to those buying artwork is rather low (Appendix C). By attracting the right kind of visitors, those who will be appreciative of the experience and more likely to buy high-quality art, it is necessary to project an image that is consistent with the personality of the neighborhood. This could also help prevent the area from being seen as a tourist trap, which is a fear of some artists.

So what image should the RADA convey to visitors in order to communicate what the River Arts District has to offer? When asked to describe the River Arts District,

the main themes in the artists' responses were descriptions of the environment, community, diversity, and experience. Each is approached in turn.

Environment (Appendix D)

Artists usually began their descriptions of the River Arts District by referring to its environment. As mentioned in the introduction, the district's location within the city, being next to the river and railroad, and the industrial buildings all play defining roles. For the environment to be appreciated by visitors, it would be beneficial for them to understand the history of the River Arts District leading up to its present state. In this way, outsiders can understand that there is no inconsistency between the art produced here and the industrial surroundings.

More recently, new businesses, restaurants, and breweries are adding to the environment. They help to complete the neighborhood and contribute to its identity by making it easier for visitors to spend more time exploring and building community between artists who eat and drink together. Some artists also referred to an environmental factor that is not physical—the creative environment.

Some studios have developed from the original working studio model to include more polished gallery spaces. Marketing materials should prepare visitors for both possibilities, as both styles appeal to sectors of the population. Above all, the studios are run by individual artists who choose how to utilize the space, sometimes independently and sometimes in collaboration with other artists. This eclectic approach adds to the flavor of the environment.

Experience (Appendix E)

Many visitors come to the River Arts District for the experience. People have fun seeing artists at work, talking to them, exploring, and learning. The personal experience of seeing the processes that go into making art makes it easier for visitors to understand its value. The studios are welcoming and less intimidating than an art gallery, which requires previous art education to fully appreciate.

However, it can be logistically difficult to find open studios or sometimes even building entrances. Some artists say that the search for open studios makes the experience more special. The visitor that comes with an open mind and a willingness to explore will gain the most satisfaction from their time here. By feeling that they have discovered something unique and not readily visible, visitors can gain more excitement for the district and be more eager to promote it.

Another important quality in visitors is self-motivation. Since the area is not laid out for easy access, they should either be prepared to walk around and find new things or plan beforehand to target studios specific to what they are looking for, utilizing the website. The brochure could be contributing to the false idea that the area is neatly organized and consistently tourist-ready.

A big part of the experience is the educational aspect (Appendix F). True to the original mission of the Highwater Center group, many artists feel that part of the purpose of the River Arts District is to educate the public. Some of this takes place during scheduled workshops or demonstrations but on a broader level it takes place everyday when visitors see artists at work and ask questions. Many artists enjoy this interaction, and it provides a critical link between art and the public.

Community (Appendix G)

Overwhelmingly, artists talked about the community between the members of the district. In fact, sixteen of the twenty artists interviewed made some reference to community or communal behaviors. Artists feel that the community is welcoming, supportive, and that the aggregate value of the River Arts District is greater than the sum of its parts. Community contributes to the value of individual artists' work because they are able to get ideas from each other, critique each other's work, and sometimes even collaborate in the creation of artworks. They direct visitors to the studios of other artists based on expressed interest. The community aspect is crucial in creating a positive work environment and fostering pride in the district.

In fact, community is the single biggest factor that binds these artists together as a group. Friendships connect artists who work alongside each other, eat together, and share ideas. Some say that the community they feel in the River Arts District is stronger than any they have experienced elsewhere and that it is a very unique aspect. Such environments, of course, cannot be created, but must develop naturally from a group of people.

As a group, the River Arts District Artists can attract more press coverage, achieve marketing efficiencies, and be more easily recognized and remembered by potential collectors than artists can individually. Building the reputation of the River Arts District should be on the mind of every artist as they move forward as a group. Because every artist is an ambassador for the district, it is also important to establish a consistent image that will be called to mind each time the public hears or reads the words "River Arts District."

Diversity (Appendix H)

The single most marketable strength of the River Arts District is the great variety found in such a concentrated area. The over 165 artists represent different states and countries of origin, different mediums, different faiths, different ideas, and all express themselves in a way that is unique from every other artist in the district through their artwork. Unlike other artistic groups, such as the Young British Artists, that gained recognition through their expression of common ideas or styles, the River Arts District embraces and celebrates its diversity.

When asked if there was a common set of values connecting the diverse artists, the only one generally agreed upon was a commitment to art (Appendix I). It was stressed throughout the interviews that all the artists there are individuals running their studios as they see fit. Each building has its own unique culture as well, and some, such as Curve Studios, gain efficiencies by operating more like co-operatives with common showrooms. Each different way of doing art and doing business adds to the flavor of the district.

Because the visitors are diverse as well, it is thought that visiting art-lovers will be able to find something that appeals to them in the vast array of artwork. In fact, there is no consensus among artists on a specific demographic that RADA should target, except for people who love art and have at least some disposable income (Appendix J).

However, as more and more tourists come seeking an entertainment activity, the incentive arises for artists to gear their art toward low-priced items. The responses to whether RADA should target a specific demographic were mixed between a desire to target everyone and a need to target those with disposable income, some saying that they wanted everyone to come but that they really needed people who were going to buy things. It is clear that different artists appeal to different demographics and sell in a wide

array of price ranges, but there is a need for art collectors to come to the district in order to incentivize those who are selling high-priced art. Such artists add quality to the district, and should not have to look to galleries for the majority of their sales.

V. Recommendations

The River Arts District Image

Saying a bit about the history of the district in the Studio Guide and website would communicate the charm of the environment and explain that it is a naturally occurring artistic phenomenon. It would also help establish the bohemian roots of the neighborhood, which should not be forgotten as the number of artists and visitors increases. The story of the district could be ironically one of its best selling points and its best preservation against becoming too retail-oriented.

The website has a great list of ways to prepare for a visit on the About page, especially #4, which reads “Think of your visit as a treasure hunt”. This list could be modified to appear in the Studio Guide to prepare visitors for the experience and include a few tips on etiquette as well, such as, “Please be mindful of the artists who are working to create the art that you see in their studios.”

Most importantly, RADA should take a consistent approach to representing the district. One clear message should be put forth so that the public never has an unclear or confused idea of what the River Arts District is. For this reason, a new Image Guide is included for consideration just in front of the appendices. Over 165 artists joined together under common colors can gain great marketing efficiencies while still celebrating their individuality.

Controlling the Flow of Visitors

Currently, the River Arts District website banner and Studio Guide cover both feature the tagline “Visit Working Artist Studios OPEN YEAR-ROUND”. This gives the impression of an ongoing craft fair like Laguna Beach’s Sawdust Festival and does not prepare visitors for the fact that they have to explore to find studios. The capitalization of “OPEN YEAR-ROUND” especially creates a touristy impression. Although the district places high emphasis on making art accessible to those who may never step foot in a gallery, the River Arts District could benefit from the extra respect that would come from positioning itself as an important center of art production.

The welcome note from current RADA president Wendy Whitson in the Studio Guide takes a more crafted approach. First, she mentions the bi-yearly studio strolls, next the new monthly Second Saturday strolls, and finally she says that many artists are open every day and where to look for their hours. If “OPEN YEAR-ROUND” were not already on the front of the Studio Guide, then this could help to filter out barely-interested visitors who are looking for a quick activity and encourage art-enthusiasts to look up the studio hours of artists that may be of interest to them. Above all, working to promote Second Saturday more will help to draw in locals and give artists the luxury of hosting the majority of visitors in an open house setting.

Targeting Art Collectors

One option to consider is making a Collector’s Guide separate from the Studio Guide and geared toward higher priced art. New Mexico publishes such a book each April and galleries purchase pages within the book to advertise. The book also features maps and dining and lodging guides. Books can be ordered for \$12, or free ones can be picked up in galleries.

Investing in a Collector's Guide to put in galleries and hotels could be the next step up for the River Arts District and encourage patrons to plan their trips, get them excited about the art, and give them a more focused direction when they come. The main advantage would be the additional space available for pictures of artists' work. It could also help build the River Arts District's reputation as a place where serious art collectors can find quality art. A magazine format could be a lower cost alternative to a book, and thus distributed on a wider scale (The Collector's Guide).

Education Outreach

Educating the public about art was identified as one of the key purposes of the River Arts District, and there is also a historic precedent for art education in the area, with Black Mountain College, more recently Warren Wilson College, and Penland School of Crafts. RADA could consider setting up a mentorship program with Warren Wilson's art department to bring in fresh ideas and possibly recruit young artists as tenants.

For a more revenue-generating approach, RADA could put out a Workshops Guide to distribute in high schools to draw in teenage students. The Appalachian Center for Craft has a great workshop brochure that could be used as an example (Appalachian Center for Craft). Also, it should not be discounted that the parents of teenage students could become art buyers.

V. Conclusion

As the River Arts District gains popularity, it is important that it stay true to its defining competencies to retain its image as a high-quality art center. There is a diverse array of art to appeal to all different types of visitors, which must be self-motivated and

explore to find the gems that will appeal to them. The first impression that many visitors have of the district comes from the Studio Guide and website. Both have improved in presentation since last year, but still more could be done to accurately communicate the value of the River Arts District, and more publications such as a Workshop Guide and Collector's Guide could be made to bring in specific demographics. When designing marketing materials, RADA should carefully consider whether the image put forth by those materials is consistent with the personality of the district in order to attract potential patrons who will be appreciative of the experience.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

What are the *defining* characteristics of the River Arts District?

What are the shared *values* and beliefs among River Arts District Artists?

What impression do *visitors* take away from the River Arts District?

Is there a certain *demographic* that you think RADA advertising should be targeted toward?

Is there anything else you would like to point out about the River Arts District's *personality*?

If you could describe the River Arts District with one word, what would it be?

Appendix B

Visitor Disconnect

#8

There's a lot of people who really don't understand, they've made it down to the RAD but they're anywhere from surprised to mildly offended that there aren't regular hours for most studios, that it doesn't have a retail feel. Our shop has a gallery area but a lot of time we're mixing clay outside or it's kind of dirty, or we're moving things in and out, it's primarily a working studio. And the public is more than welcome, and we have a showroom where we show our finished works, but there are a lot of people who poke in the window and they see this finished work, and you can tell it's not what they're looking for. It's not that this particular work isn't but they're looking for something cleaner, slicker, and it's not so much that this particular work isn't but they're looking for something cleaner, slicker.

I've had some people express frustration like, oh, we finally found you guys, or, how do things work, it seems like no one's ever open, so I know there's some frustration from tourists and collectors on that scale.

Obviously, you can't come out straight and say that in marketing materials, but maybe there is a way to really convey that sense that this is a working area where you're trying to make a living, and just to be mindful of that.

#9

Very few people feel that it's kind of dirty or gritty or raw. Very few.

#10

I think a lot of people maybe because they don't understand what the River Arts district

is, don't really know what they're walking into.

...other people come in in their stilettos and look at me like they're going to get icky, and I don't think those people are benefiting very much.

#12

Many are surprised, those who just drive by and don't come in think, wow, it's kind of beat up and run down here. Those who come in the buildings are often surprised by the quality and the beauty of the galleries that are inside, because many of us are selling almost every day out of our studios...So those that come in are often surprised that, wow, I never knew this was in here, this is outstanding, these are really talented people, ranging in all kinds of crafts.

#13

Well I think a lot of people think that it's a community that was initiated by government funds or like someone started it but it was just a very natural, organic thing that happened to happen here, a couple of artists just I guess had the opportunity to buy buildings and then they started sharing it with other artists and it slowly grew to what it was.

#17

I think that tourists who don't have art very big in their life and don't know very much about it are a bit intimidated by the stereotype of artists and stand back and want to see a show, and they get that at some places...

People would just stand next to me and look, like I wasn't a person, they would just stand in my space. Those people were probably disappointed because I maybe said something to them like, hey, could you maybe step back a little bit? For the studio strolls a lot of times people have demos, and that's really cool for people, that's fun, if I'm ready for it.

#19

There are also people who are here in Asheville for different reasons...but I think when they get down here it can be frustrating for them. If they come Monday or Tuesday they may not find studios open. Some people are frustrated; they come to an entire building and find one person open.

I feel there's an expectation, from the brochure, from what people have told them, from hotels and what not, go down here and I think they expect all these doors to be welcome and opening, and sometimes they find that, sometimes they don't.

#21

I mean some people are really excited to see where people work, and have a lot of other people that just walk up look into windows and walk away. I think they're maybe disappointed, they think they're coming to see a gallery or something.

#23

I think people, mostly I hear positive things, some people get really frustrated because not

everybody's open, it's not necessarily a retail space down here. I think that it just depends on what you bring to it and what you're looking for.

#28

I think most people come here and see kind of a rundown looking area still kind of in transition.

#31

They're surprised that the river isn't obvious, they come to town and hear about the River Arts District they imagine something, but they always ask me, is the river over there? The river itself isn't visible, so that's surprising to people.

#35

But that's not the majority of people, I think the majority of people do the same thing they do in museums, they strap on roller skates and go through as fast as they can, and say, "I saw the river arts district", [like] "I saw the Louvre."

Appendix C

Need for Buyers

#8

But there really is a higher percentage of people who are basically looking to be entertained.

They're on vacation, they want to chat, and it's fine, but from a practical standpoint if the neighborhood is going to stay a place where you can actually work as an artist and not feel like a continual craft fair booth, which is what it feels like sometimes on busy days, then artists need to be strict on carting out time for them or maybe like you said, maybe marketing can play some kind of role.

#12

The range of people who visit is much larger than the range of people who purchase from us. We like them all, but we like those purchases.

#17

Tourists are a great part of this place, but we still need to work, and we need people to buy things, not just take all the chocolate out of the things.

#19

I've been in the district almost 6 years now, I've found during the studio strolls, that basically don't sell anything to anybody coming off the street in between those strolls. And my work is for contemporary so I think I'm looking outside of the district for gallery representation. The people who do buy my art are usually from the outside. They're psychiatrists and professors and definitely a well-educated, art-savvy, and usually have considerable buying power.

A lot of people can afford paintings at \$100, but how do you encourage artists like myself who's paintings are around \$1000, how am I enticed to stay down here?

#21

No seriously, a lot of people come and are doing the tourist thing and looking and there's a point where I have to say, what am I getting out of this? If I'm entertaining and educating people but not receiving any return, then it's taking my time away from work I need to be doing, and not really promoting any income or way of being sustainable here.

#37

I think that people generally that come through our space are looking for a good weekend activity and just want to have an experience. As for my purposes, people come in and get interested when I tell them about restoration, which is what I do, but I don't necessarily consider them to be customers.

A lot of people that are coming through at the moment are tourists coming just to have a good experience and then leaving. They're generally not paying customers, and they're coming in and wanting to talk, which is fine, but I don't really get paid for that time. For myself, the tourist population, as nice as it is, is actually harder for me.

Appendix D

Environment

#8

There are various artists that have employees selling their works for them and have that polished thing that some people feel takes away from the roots of the RAD which was much more just working artists, you know, doing it on their own, and other people want it all to be like that, so it really is much more of a tourist trap.

You can't have a vibrant, thriving, growing district when everyone has to show up at 8:30 and meet and greet and smile and make sure everything's in a nice, shiny blue and have all their tax receipts in order. I mean it's not realistic. I think it's important and it's a good aspect of it but I think it's really important to have people doing outsider art that are doing things that aren't necessarily retail oriented.

Our shop has a gallery area but a lot of time we're mixing clay outside, it's kind of dirty, or we're moving things in and out, it's primarily a working studio.

Maybe there is a way to really convey that sense that this is a working area where you're trying to make a living, and just to be mindful of that. That's really the trick of the marketing is, you don't want to come across as irreproachable.

#9

Well it is very creative and artistic and it has drawn that particular crowd to it.

Everyone seems to enjoy it just the way it is, whether maybe it's an old warehouse just retrofitted very simply, or maybe someone has taken the time to really improve their space beautifully, and it's all good, it's all effectively working toward making people very curious.

Asheville is drawing people there because of the climate, the mountains, and the artistic community, not only in the River Arts District, but downtown, the breweries, and other kinds of offerings, the scenic highways, the bicyclers, and people are finding that the art is the icing on the cake to the area.

#10

I've been down here for about six years and there used to be one café and one restaurant and now there's a brewery and several restaurants and it's just becoming more and more of an attraction.

Ceramics studios, particularly mine, is not the cleanest, most inviting environment.

#11

It is working studios, and also it is very unique buildings, older buildings that have been redone, and it's kind of like a village in some ways, it's a concentrated area of artists.

It has changed quite a bit since it started, and especially in the last few years. It started to get quite a few restaurants in the district, which is quite a new thing. And some people are a little bit afraid that it may become too commercial, and I think that the work of the association is to keep the focus, which has been on working artists studios, not just galleries, I think that is so important to the district, it's really the main attraction, the personality of the district is that real working artists are there. It's not professional curators, it's not professional galleries, it's a very down to earth, real kind of feel.

#12

A collective group of business owners, all engaged in the arts in some way, shape, or form, operating independent businesses. It is not sponsored, or organized or developed by any kind of government or political interest. It is all developed out of the entrepreneurs of the district. Most of the buildings are artist-owned, and then they're leased out to other artists. There's no big organization that founded the RAD, artists have just moved in and taken over these buildings and set them up as their own studios and leased out space to other artists. So it's kind of an organic type of situation that has kind of succeeded almost by the fact that it's all entrepreneurs and there's no paid staff at this point.

#17

There are lots of artists studios, a couple galleries, small gallery areas in the studios, and that there's a combination of the water on one side of the neighborhood, the city on the other side, and the industrial buildings in the middle of the studio artist buildings, and then of course bad sections of town.

It's colorful in terms of setting, artists, and the variety of work, and I'd say car-friendly,

not so much walker-friendly

#19

I would say, the creative environment open to any creative output. There are single studios, group studios, galleries, restaurants, there are businesses down here...It's become definitely a creative hub of individual and shared thoughts.

I think people want to be down here because it's a creative environment and there are artists here doing similar things.

There's good food down here, the Grey Eagle Music Hall has been here long before it grew into the arts district, wonderful music venue. There's still a lot of great quality down here, but there is the fear that if that kind of mainstream appeal takes over it's going to squeeze out that eccentric flavor.

I think it's a fantastic place and I hope it can retain its character.

#23

There's that feeling of existing in a part of town that has a lot of history and you really feel that when you're down here, so that becomes a part of the experience.

So I think the location is really important, it's along the river, which is very important to Asheville and the history of this area, and it adds to the unique quality of the RAD, and the history of what these buildings are. It has the trains going by too, so I think it's connected to everyday life in that way with the working trains. There's affordable housing down here that's subsidized by the local housing authority, which brings people here, there are people living here, living in this area, restaurants.

I think the district is more than just art because there's theater down here, there's the brewing company, there's Riverlink, there's restaurants and other businesses that aren't art related, and I think that sometimes people aren't aware of that, I mean a lot of people come down here to see the art.

Well I like it because it's funky. It's still not gentrified, and I think there's a hope that that won't happen. It's not all polished, there's still affordable studios. It has a real personality

#26

And the concept of being in old warehouse buildings is a nifty idea, rather than a mall where things are pretty sterile, and you may have different stores but everything's the same, and blah, there's the sense that each building is pretty much handled by the artists in each building, so maybe there's an interest there.

#27

Probably the use of the older buildings, the older buildings, that's kind of unique. The fact that it's an older industrial area and it's being transformed into a creative center is

probably one of the most defining pieces of it. Having the river right next to us is actually pretty special to me I think too. And being pretty close to downtown is also helpful, but also being separate from downtown.

I know for me it's helpful just to have that creative atmosphere around.

Well, it's just become more and more unique over the last few years. More and more businesses are investing in the community now, so we've got more and more restaurants and galleries and shops and bars and things like that, which just rounds out the area for people to come down here and have a complete experience. Now it's not just artists' studios, it's a bunch of other things too, and artists like to have that too, it's fun for the artists to have that and have a place to go, where they don't have to drive downtown or leave the district. I've been here nine years, and it's just been interesting to watch how it's grown and some of the growing pains have been interesting but it seems to be going in the right direction, but everyone seems to want it to succeed.

#28

[The defining characteristics are] the location, being near the train, the number of artists in a fairly small area...

I think overall people are impressed with the sheer volume of artists in the area.

I think people find a lot of inspiration with being subjected to other art forms and other artists, and just to see what kind of things are inspiring them and what kind of trends they see.

#31

I'm reluctant to institutionalize it in the sense of making it into a mall. We have to avoid making it into a mall. Which doesn't mean literally a structure, you know, it means that mentality.

But I like how it sprawls out along the industrial sector. I like how it's just growing by itself.

[Visitors] seem surprised that it's so diverse and large, there are over 160 studios and counting.

#32

A lot of people are really impressed by the area and how fast it's growing, and they seem to be really excited about the area, when they come into my studio.

#33

It has become a destination, so it is a good marketing, because people are advertising Asheville to go to the River Arts District, so that's good.

#34

I've been in the art business so long, this is not how it is in other art communities. This is so unique, it's crazy. I'm trying to make younger artists understand who are just coming into it, that this is not how it is across the country. This is so different, people try to create this, and you can't, it's this spontaneous thing that's happened through history. I think that the River Arts District, as it is right now, is Camelot, it's as good as it gets for artists. For artists to be able to make a living selling art and having this many people in this economy, it's insane.

#35

I have traveled throughout the United States and I always look for the arts district. I have never seen anything like this anywhere.

#37

One side is more interested in galleries and trying to be professional with hours and have a more of a business aspect and the other side is more of artists' studios and is a bit more creative. I would say that just in general walking through the district I feel that way as well.

Appendix E

Experience

#8

If there is a way in the marketing to convey both a welcoming sense for the public to come interact with artists while at the same time, in some way, at the fundamental level, cluing people in that we are down there actually working and trying to get things done.

I'm good friends with a couple of people who have regular hours and run a tight ship and I think they add a lot to the neighborhood, but honestly I think the neighborhood would lose a ton if everything was right there for the taking, I mean, anything that's worth getting to takes a little bit of effort.

I don't know how you would do this, but maybe conveying that sense that you have to be a little bit of a go-getter, this is not Gatlinburg, TN, you don't just roll up and there are funnel cakes and vendors and everybody's there waiting to show you everything they've got, that it's ok, that you have to poke around a little bit but that's good, there is a grittiness to it, it's a real neighborhood, it's a real evolving, changing thing, something like that might be good, something in terms of the character.

#9

I feel like ninety percent of them are fascinated and intrigued and will return and bring their friends, and they feel they are comfortable there.

#10

People can spend the whole day down here and not just an hour.

It's a much different experience than going to a gallery because you actually meet

the person, hopefully, that you're coming to see the artwork and learn about the process that goes into it and see what a working studio entails.

People have to really want to come in and want to explore, which is part of what the River Arts District is about.

There's a lot of stuff going on in here, so some people are really excited when they come in, they want to watch us make pots at the wheel.

There's a lot to see and a lot to do and a lot of events that go on down here, but it's kind of like a self-motivated program, so people can really get involved down here, but I think one of its characteristics currently is that as a visitor you have to want to seek it out. It's a lot different than going downtown where everything is there for you, you have to come in and ask questions and want to learn. And I think that that's what makes this area so special and so different from a lot of other cities, and I'm not necessarily sure that we want to change that, you know. I mean, I think we want it to be easy for people to come and visit and have a good time, but they have to be up to the adventure too.

It's a lot different than going downtown where everything is there for you, you have to come in and ask questions and want to learn.

#11

I think, what I've heard from the visitors, is they've never seen anything like the River Arts District before. They are able to walk in and talk to so many artists in one location, and I think that's what attracts them is being able to see the artists working. That is what influences visitors the most.

#13

Well I think it's a place that artists can work and you can come meet the artists and see how they work and that's the unique part about the district.

Well a comment I get a lot is they had no idea how much goes into making art and how difficult it is and stuff like that. So I think they gain a new appreciation for art and understand the value of it and stuff like that.

#17

If it's a family with kids I think it's an educational, fun thing with the family. I think it's really good for teenagers because they see a viable option for an occupation that's not necessarily encouraged by families that want their kids to have steady income, because they're not probably going to get it with art. I think people who are really into art or artists themselves enjoy seeing the variety of artists here and seeing them and buying something from them.

#19

[Visitors] love exploring, finding new things, sometimes they come down here looking for a specific thing.

#20

Oh, fun, they have fun. Always that's a big part of it. Sometimes they're having so much fun that it loosens their wallet and they buy something. People come here for entertainment, as I do when I go to a place.

And just the conversations you have with the artists, you sometimes catch them in the act of doing art. Anyways, it's a show down here.

#21

I mean some people are really excited to see where people work

#23

There's that feeling of existing in a part of town that has a lot of history and you really feel that when you're down here, so that becomes a part of the experience.

Mostly what people experience down here is, is, a lot of, there are a lot of studios open and people doing all kinds of things, everything from chair caning to glass blowing. And I think that that really presents to visitors a wide range of creative activity going on, and it can be educational, it can be entertainment, it can be commercial, meaning they come to buy, it can be all kinds of things and they build on each other too, meaning they might come to look once and then they buy something. The best thing they can bring is an open mind and eagerness to see new things.

#27

[Visitors are] seemingly like really impressed overall with the quality of the art, that's the feedback I've gotten in my studio, they're just overwhelmed with: number one the amount of artists down here and, number two, how good the art is. I've had several people tell me that they've been to similar type areas all over the country and it's unique in that it's an art community but the quality of work wasn't that great. And so they're just really impressed with the quality of work that's coming out of the River Arts District and the variety of art, and how professional as a community we all seem.

#28

I think overall people are impressed with the sheer volume of artists in the area.

#32

A lot of people are really impressed by the area and how fast it's growing, and they seem to be really excited about the area, when they come into my studio.

#33

But most people love it, I hear only good comments. And I talk to all kinds of people, a lot of artists, a lot of young people who want to hang around and check out the art, and maybe they are artists. A lot of artists come. A lot of people are just vacationing and wanting to go about the area.

You get inspired and go there, and when you go back to your house you'll probably

be an artist. You'll be inspired to work.

#34

I think visitors are impressed, people are coming here to meet the artists.

But people come here, they seek the River Arts district out, so that they can meet the artists, they can see where they work, how they work, and feel more a part of the work, kind of a small portion of what we feel everyday here. Hopefully, and for the most part I know, that the artists are friendly, at least the ones that are really open to the public, friendly, outgoing, receptive to having people come in, so I think people feel welcome when they come. They don't feel put off. I think a lot of people are afraid of artwork because they're afraid of art galleries. And I think they need to have a real art education to understand and talk the talk before they go into a gallery. And it intimidates people. And I don't think we're intimidating. I think people can come in and immerse themselves in art culture and what we love and just kind of feel a part of something. So, I think it's a good experience. I've never heard too much bad feedback from people.

#35

My opinion is that a lot of people come to be entertained. Some learn something about the art. I know if someone gives me an opening I will explain things to them.

#37

I think that people generally that come through our space are looking for a good weekend activity and just want to have an experience.

I think that for someone coming out of town, when there's more stops and there's a larger footprint for the River Arts District, it becomes more of this adventure and seeking out what's going on, and I think that at the moment it's at the very beginning stages of that happening because there's more work to be done, kind of making it more pedestrian friendly in general.

Appendix F

Education

#10

I think that most people around here view this as an educational area. A place where people can come not just to buy art but to learn about it.

I feel like for me and most of my closest peers, that's an important factor of it is being able to explain to people what exactly we do and what the value of it is.

#12

It is people who want to share what they do in terms of educating the people who are in there. People like to ask questions, people like to talk about what it is we're doing, how we do it, why we do it. We're always looking for ways to spread the message through the classes that we teach, so we're teachers, we're educators, we're salespeople, we're

independent.

#13

Well a comment I get a lot is they had no idea how much goes into making art and how difficult it is and stuff like that. So I think they gain a new appreciation for art and understand the value of it and stuff like that.

#17

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#33

I do workshops myself to pay the rent, and I know a lot of artists do that.

#35

That art is a worthwhile pursuit, that we need to educate people to the values of art, what art can do for an individual as well as a community.

My opinion is that a lot of people come to be entertained. Some learn something about the art. I know if someone gives me an opening I will explain things to them.

#37

I do want people to come in and I want to educate, but I also want to have my studio as a place of work where I can create what I need to create.

Appendix G

Community

#8

I would say, broadly speaking, that there's a critical mass of artists, craftspeople, and designers, enough that it's actually kind of an organism on its own rather than just a mass of people.

Well, I think probably the biggest bond is just the personal connections, I mean that's

what it is for me, rather than any abstract or ideological things. I mean it's really just that I'm really close friends with a couple dozen people down there and pretty strong acquaintances with a few dozen more. Um, and it's just great it's really fun to be able to work next to some of your closest friends and just grow and move through life together. That's the biggest connection for me.

I think the biggest common box is just the people and the relationships themselves.

[Visitors are] just really impressed with the quality of work that's coming out of the River Arts District and the variety of art, and how professional as a community we all seem.

#9

Asheville is drawing people there because of the climate, the mountains, and the artistic community...

That is the most interesting thing, that they are very sharing people, that they want a place where they can work and share with other artists and people who are coming to look at art exclusively knowing that they are in the genre of meeting an artist, seeing their studios, and that's the mindset of most of the people.

So they're very mindful of sharing and being attentive to everyone's needs. I don't see a whole lot of fractured areas, they just seem to be very cohesive, they talk well, act well, and play well with others. It seems like when there's something to do someone steps up to the plate. It's just an amazing, artistic, vibrant coming together; I've never seen anything quite like it.

We're real supportive of everyone's success and are excited when they have sales or offered shows in galleries or museums or whatever their goal is. It's a unique, symbiotic relationship of good people.

#12

We're all just working together and trying to do things that will help our businesses.

#13

I don't know I mean I think everyone here is super hard workers I mean it takes a lot of work to be an artist and there's a sense of comradery I think we can all sympathize with each other and kind of support each other and that way kind of know what each other's going through.

#17

I think most people enjoy that it's the artist community where people support one another

#19

I think people want to be down here because It's a creative environment and there are artists here doing similar things. They want to be around like-minded people not only to

further their careers and what they do, from ideas to comradery, and also, especially in this day and age, the more people you know, the better your business is going to be. I think there's this feeling amongst artists down here that the more you band together you're stronger both individually and as a whole as well. I think people really like being down here, meeting each other at the eateries, sharing ideas and sharing gallery information, and just helping both the district and their careers move forward.

I had a couple a few days ago, and obviously my style wasn't for them, so I gave them advice on where to go.

#20

Community is the basic one. Mutual support, even in the context of competition, we're always looking out for the other guy and referring clients and customers among ourselves and it's just a nice community.

#21

There's more of a sense of community now than there used to be, there's still a lot more that could be done I believe, but basically we all operate as individuals most of the time, we're individual businesses and only occasionally do we put out a joint effort to accomplish something together. There's some efforts to change that, there's a percentage of us that participate in Second Saturday, which are once a month efforts at promotion and have a more consistent shops that are open.

#23

A community of artists, working in all different kinds of media, a lot of them coming at it from a lot of different angles, it's a true community that way.

It has a real personality, the people out here are really community oriented, and it's a real nurturing place.

But shared goals or shared ideas are I think just a community and building support for art, and building support in a way that's sustainable and responsible, and also building community

The people out here are really community oriented, and it's a real nurturing place.

#27

And I think all the other artists are very appreciative of having that and being able to collaborate with other artists in the district and being able to embrace all types of art from other artists. It's been a really positive group of people as far as, no one really bashes anyone else's art. They may not like it, but they're still going to embrace it, and they're still going to embrace that artist as a part of the community. I think it's a lot about community and community efforts in general.

More and more businesses are investing in the community now, so we've got more and more restaurants and galleries and shops and bars and things like that, which just rounds out the area for people to come down here and have a complete experience.

The city is starting to recognize us as a definite force to be reckoned with, and that's good. It definitely has a voice to add to the community at large, and I think that's really exciting.

#28

I get a lot of inspiration just from seeing what other people are doing, maybe looking at shapes and colors, it really forces you to look at your own medium and see if you can incorporate other artistic things into your art.

So I try to incorporate some different artists into my own designs, I'm not sure if that's true of everybody, but that's kind of how I approach being surrounded by other designers.

#32

Just like other places I've been...they don't come together as a group, but at the River Arts District they do, and they work together. Most of the River Arts District. So that in itself is a defining factor that makes it stand out from other groups.

Sometimes it can be a little clickish, especially people who have been there a long time, they get kind of set in their ways and not open minded. Especially in bringing in new people.

Everyone's just really friendly to me, I enjoy it. Wedge brewery is right across the road and sometimes my friend and I will go over there and visit. It's just a very community feel down here, with the artists even.

#33

I guess, [a defining characteristic is] the ability each artist has to kind of be in the community and promote their own space without going to galleries, and having lots of visitors stop in. It gives the artists a little more freedom to sale their work without galleries. Is that good or bad, I don't know. It is a good opportunity though to have an entity and community with other artists.

It's just a very community feel down here, with the artists even.

...it's the artistic community that you have, that you're all creating and trying to make a living off your art.

But there is a real sense of community if you want to go out and meet people.

#34

Well I think the River Arts District is a unique community of artists that represents so many different styles.

I love the community aspect of it. RADA is just a group of artists getting together and

trying to decide what's best for the district and how to manage it and that kind of thing, it's not a business, it's not a company, it's just a community of artists.

I love the creative aspect of that, just being able to call on artist friends that can help me when I'm stuck for ideas or a painting or a color or anything like that. We're constantly going around and critiquing each others work and that makes us better as artist. We eat together, we, obviously being artists, we share the same passions, the same loves, there's just that common denominator that draws us together. The River Arts District is, it's hard to call it a job, it's really, just for the most part, become this extension of your family and everything you love about life. At least for me, that's how it is.

Well, I think some of the shared values and beliefs are community, and helping each other out to be better at a craft, whatever that craft is. We share the belief about the importance of art.

#35

To me it is a group of artists that have come together to pool their resources, both financial and ideas, well, so that we all can make a living, to help us progress in our careers, not only artistically but also financially, as many artists have difficulty with the financial end.

I have traveled throughout the United States and I always look for the arts district. I have never seen anything like this anywhere. And there is more of a cooperative spirit among the artists here than any city I've ever lived in, or any coop I've been involved in.

#37

What it's meant for us has definitely been a community of people that we were able to be immediately embraced by without having been here very long. I think that for other artists it's also that as well.

Appendix H

Diversity

#8

...there are a lot of different artists working in a lot of different ways and equally there's a lot of different people: visitors, collectors, tourists who are coming down looking for different things.

In terms of actual, anything, anything regarding attitudes about the RAD, the business of it or even the art of it, I don't know if there is any common denominator at all. I mean, I think that there are people who feel radically different from each other in terms of what they would like to have happen in the RAD. I've talked to people who feel 180 degrees from what another person I've talked to.

...there really is such a wide range in terms of what people are making and doing with their time

#9

There are people who prefer to be private with their doors closed and advertise certain days open and certain days closed and that's the beauty of it. They can have that and others who like to be open and entertain the idea of having customers with an open door policy can have that too. So everybody gets what they want; there's no set rule that applies to how you can run your business, which is everybody's desire to run it how they can see fit for them.

#10

Diversity, I guess I described it as just a conglomeration of artists in all media just working in rehabilitated warehouses.

#11

Well it is a pretty diverse group of artists

#12

We're all individuals.

...these are really talented people, ranging in all kinds of crafts.

And our personalities are so different cause we're so different, what we do is different.

#17

It's colorful in terms of setting, artists, and the variety of work...

#19

...there's such a wide range of what people do down here and what they're hoping for.

You want to be supportive of everybody, but there's a huge disparity between not only prices but quality and vision.

#20

Values and beliefs run the full spectrum of any small town, there is nothing, no one thing that all of us would share. There's nothing common politically, there's nothing common morally, ethically, like how do you treat each other as business people, there's no common element.

This is a very eclectic group, so we're all going to appeal to different demographic groups.

#21

It's a diverse group of creative people who do a wide variety of things. I don't think you could lump us all into one personality, there's a lot of differences.

#23

Community of artists, working in all different kinds of media, a lot of them coming at it from a lot of different angles, it's a true community that way. It's a lot of different kinds of people with a lot of different goals.

Part of what defines it is just the diversity, what exists, what has existed meaning the buildings and history but also who's down here now, the people.

I see a huge diversity...everybody has a different idea of what they want and why they're here.

Mostly what people experience down here is, is, a lot of, there are a lot of studios open and people doing all kinds of things, everything from chair caning to glass blowing. And I think that that really presents to visitors a wide range of creative activity going on, and it can be educational, it can be entertainment, it can be commercial, meaning they come to buy, it can be all kinds of things and they build on each other too, meaning they might come to look once and then they buy something. The best thing they can bring is an open mind and eagerness to see new things.

I think there's something for everyone here, all ages, all incomes, and all interests.

#26

I guess it's a place where people can come to find all different types of art.

[If you could describe the River Arts District with one word, what would it be?]]
Diverse.

#28

the huge number of artists and the varying mediums with which they work is pretty unique I think to the various artist communities across the United States,

I think everyone has their own artist statement.

I'd say it's pretty eclectic,

#27

And so they're just really impressed with the quality of work that's coming out of the River Arts District and the variety of art, and how professional as a community we all seem.

[If you could describe the River Arts District with one word, what would it be?] Eclectic

#28

The huge number of artists and the varying mediums with which they work is pretty unique I think to the various artist communities across the United States, and I think people find a lot of inspiration with being subjected to other art forms and other artists, and just to see what kind of things are inspiring them and what kind of trends they see.

#31

...a big mixed bag and styles and levels of sophistication from outsider, homegrown sort of art, to contemporary New York, hip.

They seem surprised that it's so diverse and large

#33

And a lot of other ways too, just ideas, and all faiths, all kinds of different eyes, it's really good.

Very eclectic, all over the map, it's fun, you can just find all kinds of things there.

#34

Well I think the River Arts District is a unique community of artists that represents so many different styles. I love that it's not just oil paintings. There's pottery and sculpture and painting and photography and caustic and fiber art and just about everything imaginable down here. Each thing adds to the vibe down here.

Just that it's so diverse.

I think that at this point, there's something for everyone down here.

#37

I will say that there's a variety of different types of artists.

There are differences in the buildings as far as culture goes.

Appendix I

Common Values

#11

It is dedication I think, the dedication to working as an artist. It's a commitment to doing your art, it certainly isn't for the money. I think the common thread is the dedication to being an artist.

#12

I think the entrepreneurial spirit, the fact that we all want to control our own destiny, the fact that this is an important tourist destination for Asheville and we work to make sure that everybody who visits our studios feels welcome.

We're all engaged in trying to make a living, or at least make some money, so we all have that in common, but we come to it from so many different avenues.

#13

I don't know I mean I think everyone here is super hard workers I mean it takes a lot of

work to be an artist

#17

I'd say, how essential art is to their lives

#20

The only thing we have in common is we know we're here to be artists and so we all help each other bringing each other to this area to see art. It has nothing to do with ethics, it's just that we're all in business and we support each other as business people.

#23

But shared goals or shared ideas are I think just a community and building support for art, and building support in a way that's sustainable and responsible, and also building community

I think it is support for the working community, those are the goals.

#26

It's a serious group of working artists that are trying very hard to produce good artwork for the general public to come and experience art in the making.

One is that art is important to life, and happiness, and a society.

#27

Well we've got such a big group, it's hard to say for sure, but I think that we all seem to be interested in being near other artists.

#31

That art is more important in life than mainstream society attributes to it. There's a post-modernist plurality that avoids dogmatism. I'm not sure if these are good answers for you. I think a kind of anti-establishment similar to the sixties that some of us experienced, the sixties and seventies, anti-establishment social views and political views probably shared generally.

#32

Well most of them are into art of course, and promoting art, and they want it to be quality art, far as I can tell.

#33

it's the artistic community that you have, that you're all creating and trying to make a living off your art.

#34

Well, I think some of the shared values and beliefs are community, and helping each other out to be better at a craft, whatever that craft is. We share the belief about the importance of art.

Asheville in itself is so different in that it celebrates art in all its forms, whether it's music or food dance or theater, or what we do, it's a necessity of life, it's not this thing that only the wealthy need, or a narrow view of what art really is. It's just this consumable, it's a thing we have to have to make life better, to enjoy, to enhance life.

#35

That art is a worthwhile pursuit, that we need to educate people to the values of art, what art can do for an individual as well as a community. American's don't generally understand the value of public art at all, they see it as a waste of money instead of something that brings people together. That we as artists have roles in helping to define our culture.

Appendix J

Common Values

#11

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#12

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The only thing we have in common is we know we're here to be artists and so we all help each other bringing each other to this area to see art. It has nothing to do with ethics, it's just that we're all in business and we support each other as business people.

#23

But shared goals or shared ideas are I think just a community and building support for art, and building support in a way that's sustainable and responsible, and also building community

I think it is support for the working community, those are the goals.

#26

It's a serious group of working artists that are trying very hard to produce good artwork for the general public to come and experience art in the making.

One is that art is important to life, and happiness, and a society.

#27

Well we've got such a big group, it's hard to say for sure, but I think that we all seem to be interested in being near other artists.

#31

That art is more important in life than mainstream society attributes to it. There's a post-modernist plurality that avoids dogmatism. I'm not sure if these are good answers for you. I think a kind of anti-establishment similar to the sixties that some of us experienced, the sixties and seventies, anti-establishment social views and political views probably shared generally.

#32

Well most of them are into art of course, and promoting art, and they want it to be quality art, far as I can tell.

#33

it's the artistic community that you have, that you're all creating and trying to make a living off your art.

#34

Well, I think some of the shared values and beliefs are community, and helping each other out to be better at a craft, whatever that craft is. We share the belief about the importance of art.

Asheville in itself is so different in that it celebrates art in all its forms, whether it's music or food dance or theater, or what we do, it's a necessity of life, it's not this thing that only the wealthy need, or a narrow view of what art really is. It's just this consumable, it's a thing we have to have to make life better, to enjoy, to enhance life.

#35

That art is a worthwhile pursuit, that we need to educate people to the values of art, what art can do for an individual as well as a community. American's don't generally understand the value of public art at all, they see it as a waste of money instead of something that brings people together. That we as artists have roles in helping to define our culture.

Appendix K

Demographic

#10

Well, yes, yes and no, a lot of us need people to come in and buy our work, it's a hell of a lot more expensive to rent a studio down here, especially as this area grows, than it would be to go somewhere else where we wouldn't get visitors. It's definitely a factor that you can't ignore. But the fact that we want everyone to come and be educated and that people of all types really enjoy art, and, this is Asheville, I don't know, I mean I can tell you what my personal demographic is for my medium, but because it's such a broad thing, I feel like it should just be directed toward everyone really.

#11

Predominately, it is tourists, people who come into Asheville, for recreation, for a weekend away, for vacation. That is the majority of the visitors. There are people from Asheville who come here too, but I've been surprised at how many of the tourists, and they come from all over the United States, and actually a lot of them come to Asheville for the arts district.

#12

In terms of income levels, maybe. Cause we're not selling 29.95 craft show stuff. We're selling artwork that's valued in the hundreds and thousands of dollars. So, we have to be after people with enough disposable income to make those purchases, in general, that's not so say that there aren't exceptions, but in general. That characteristic may limit our age and lifestyle type demographics. The range of people who visit is much larger than the range of people who purchase from us. We like them all, but we like those purchases.

Generally people in their 40's and up, often retirees and semi-retired, women, drive purchases most of the time.

#13

Typically like upper-middle class wealthier folk. But I think there are a lot of artists that are affordable in the district.

#14

I know that the main customers for my stuff, ceramics are upper middle-aged women with disposable income looking to shop, and they're shopping for Christmas and themselves, and maybe having a bit of a shopping competition with their pals coming through. Those are great groups, when they're informed and not just looking for an art version of, I don't know, Sax Fifth Avenue. I think it's fun when families are coming through for the strolls and Second Saturdays, I think it's great when events like that are promoted for crowds, but it'd be nice if during the non-party non-specific marketing days there weren't as many people here.

#19

I don't have a good answer for that, I think there are certain places down here who

benefit from the average tourist who comes to Asheville who will probably have some buying capacity, and I don't know how the district association, where exactly it's sending it's advertising around the Southeast. I personally have found, and I've been in the district almost 6 years now, I've found during the studio strolls, that basically don't sell anything to anybody coming off the street in between those strolls...I think I'm looking outside of the district for gallery representation. The people who do buy my art are usually from the outside. They're psychiatrists and professors and definitely a well-educated, art-savy, and usually have considerable buying power. So I don't know how, it's not that I'm going to liken it to a public school where the focus is to educate the most amount of people, where the brightest kids might have to go to another school to get educated. I think it's imperative for the district to hold on to both an artist who's very successful, even if their paintings are in the thousands or tens of thousands to still have that quality and even cutting-edge art, to keep that down here. If you appeal to the greatest common denominator then you're going to start losing artists that I think are vital to the flavor down here. How do you appeal to the greatest amount of people, which I think keeps a certain vitality down here in terms of energy and people. A lot of people can afford paintings at \$100, but how do you encourage artists like myself who's paintings are around \$1000, how am I enticed to stay down here? I would recommend that you read the Heinz Kossler article in the Mountain Express. He's been a ceramist here for years and is planning on moving back to Germany. The interview was wonderful, because he said if the city doesn't help out by putting a freeze on the rent and not only that but realize the value of the arts district for Asheville as a city. But he said there's a fear that there's less and less interesting, cutting-edge art and it's becoming more and more mainstream, and if the rents go up you're going to lose a lot of important artists, and then it's going to become the same stuff appealing to the tourist trade. So I think it's an interesting time for the district. You want to be supportive of everybody, but there's a huge disparity between not only prices but quality and vision.

#20

The visitors to my studio are so mixed, it's hard to say. We have students, young people, young professionals, a lot of people are solidly middle to lower income, and so they are looking for clear values that they are hoping they can afford to put on their wall or whatever. And then there's retirement age, so their income is also limited. I don't see many affluent people coming through. I've visited some of their homes, and those people are infrequent. Most people are middle income, middle to lower income. We want everyone in. This is a very eclectic group, so we're all going to appeal to different demographic groups. The demographic group that I'm familiar with here is going to be different from the heart of the River Arts District. We are still peripheral and less visited.

#21

Yeah, people who love art and want to spend lots of money with local craftsmen. No seriously, a lot of people come and are doing the tourist thing and looking and there's a point where I have to say, what am I getting out of this? If I'm entertaining and educating people but not receiving any return, then it's taking my time away from work I need to be doing, and not really promoting any income or way of being sustainable here. I've either got to change my product making to market to those people who are coming into my

shop, many of them are from out of town and not likely to order a custom. So one of my goals this year is to produce more product geared toward those people who are walking in and make those things available, and just test that market to see if that's a viable way for me to go. Because otherwise that's just a waste of my time, I enjoy meeting those people and talking to them but I'm not getting the work done I need to do or making the money I need to stay open, so that's my conflict. Some days I'll have 15, 20, 25 people come in during the day, and then other days nobody comes through, somewhere in between, like 4, 5, 6 people, sometimes it'll be 20. But it's been a couple of months since I've had a sale, you know.

#23

You know, I don't, I mean, I think it should be wide open. I think most people I know here in the district wouldn't want it to be targeted toward one particular audience. Part of that is simply from a business standpoint, there's not just one kind of work being done here, and so, speaking of art, to target one audience you might really do someone a disservice in terms of being able to bring people who are interested in their work. I think there's something for everyone here, all ages, all incomes, and all interests.

#26

Well obviously people who have money, but that's another problem. Me, my art, I kind of get put off by the whole gallery thing of prestige, I think anyone who appreciates art should have art. But, you know, that's not real practical in the world we live in, because I need to eat. In the River Arts District it seems like the people who are the most successful artists are the artists who are business people.

#27

Obviously everyone always wants to target to the higher end consumer, but I wouldn't want to limit it to that. Cause I think that working people seem to be interested in buying art too, maybe not as much, or as higher end pieces, but, you know, a lot of artists around here have very affordable art and it ranges so much, I think there's something for everybody. Definitely targeting higher-end consumers is key, but you want to round that out with some others too.

#31

Definitely. I think that it should be targeting art collectors. We want to attract serious art collectors to Asheville. One benchmark would be, routinely paintings, pieces of art should be selling for \$15,000, \$20,000, \$30,000. As opposed to attracting the masses, although I like that and it's really fun and people enjoy it, what we want to be attracting is serious art collectors and art dealers from all over, and we do attract people from all over, but you know, that's what I think.

#32

Mostly, maybe if they would emphasize, well they're already targeting the visitors, and the older, maybe the middle to older age group. I don't seem to see many young people come down there, like in the early twenties, they do come, but they don't stand out.

#33

So I would assume that it's mostly aimed at people visiting Asheville. But it would be nice to have the local people come. I'm sure they do. I've had people come in that say, I live here, but I've never been here.

#34

No, I wouldn't say so, obviously our target market is people who feel the same way we do about the way art is, but not necessarily, I see people come in and a lot of people don't strike me as the super-wealthy elite, they're young, they're old, they're everywhere in between. So that's kind of a tough question. Obviously it's good to cater to wealthier people when we can, but I can only go from my feedback and who I'm selling my pieces too, and often it's not the super-wealthy. Sometimes it is, but often it's a middle of the road person.

#35

For sales, middle class, middle income and up, middle age is a very good demographic for us, people who are feathering their nests finely. In other words, they're not going to pier 1, they want real art, they want something that means something to them.

#37

I find that hard to say. I will say I think it depends on which artist you're talking to. To be honest, for myself, I do a lot of commission work, and I do deal with people who aren't local necessarily, but I prefer to work with people that are local. A lot of people that are coming through at the moment are tourists coming just to have a good experience and then leaving. They're generally not paying customers, and they're coming in and wanting to talk, which is fine, but I don't really get paid for that time. For myself, the tourist population, as nice as it is, is actually harder for me. And I prefer people who are local who come for events who just didn't know I was there. So I've had more success when there have been shows or other events in the area that bring people who might not have come in contact with me and then realize that I do restoration, so that's my own selfish interest...most of the tourists coming through want to buy things in a really low price range and they don't necessarily want to spend more than \$50. And I would say something unique about the River Arts District is we're all making stuff by hand, and that means that a scarf is going to cost \$100, and it should cost \$100. So I think that some middle road for that higher end client is desired by some, I mean, it's not desired by all, for some people that's not their target market at all. There's lots of different types of artists in the River Arts District.

#8

Well, I guess if you're thinking of it in a sort of ideal universe. There is the archetype of people who walk in and are on vacation, they want to chat, they want to tell you what their son or daughter is doing in college. They're on vacation, they want to chat, and it's fine, but from a practical standpoint if the neighborhood is going to stay a place where you can actually work as an artist and not feel like a continual craft fair booth, which is what it feels like sometimes on busy days, then artists need to be strict on carting out time for them or maybe like you said, maybe marketing can play some kind of role.

Obviously, I'm fairly cynical of marketing's ability to only target people who are seriously interested in looking at art or buying it. I'm not sure how that would work. If there is a way in the marketing to convey both a welcoming sense for the public to come interact with artists while at the same time, in some way, at the fundamental level, cluing people in that we are down there actually working and trying to get things done. ...Obviously, you can't come out straight and say that in marketing materials, but maybe there is a way to really convey that sense that this is a working area where you're trying to make a living, and just to be mindful of that. That's really the trick of the marketing is, you don't want to come across as irreproachable.

