

NewCity 12/22/06:

Eye Exam

Giving Back

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The year is coming to a close, and many other arts reporters are taking the opportunity to do "best of" roundups. But in the past couple of weeks, as I've repeatedly plopped down the credit card to do my consumerist duty and buy brand new, shiny gifts for my family, I've increasingly watched my funds decrease and my ability to "give back" decrease as well. While I would like to nod to some of the artists and galleries that have rocked my world this year, the organizations that provide the support foundation for those exhibits to even exist are going to be receiving my 2006 tribute.

In my recent conversation with Eric May at Roots & Culture gallery, he mentioned that there aren't a lot of smaller nonprofit galleries left in Chicago, and that he aspires to bring his new gallery into the forefront of the resurgence of this movement. Organizations such as Threewalls, an entity that provides workspace and exhibition opportunities for emerging artists, are absolutely necessary to local artists who are not represented in the commercial arena and to those who may not *want* to dive into commercial art. All of my recent conversations with local artists and curators have resulted in the same basic conclusion: Chicago is on the verge of a grassroots movement to overhaul its arts scene. But these burgeoning young nonprofits are not going to stick around without some major financial support.

"Making money is important, of course--everybody has to eat--but it's not the prime reason why we're here," says Josh Reichlin, editor and motion-graphics designer for 3to1 Studios, which recently developed a Web site that will serve as a resource for artists in need of support or grants, as well as anyone who'd like to help out or donate to the arts community. Reichlin and his colleagues at 3to1 recently produced a public-service announcement that they hope will direct people to NoOneGetsHurt.org, which was developed with the acknowledgement that the arts community needs financial support in order to survive.

"We are artists who are in business, not businessmen who just happen to work in an artistic field," Reichlin says. "We're here because of our love of the creative process and the satisfaction we get from making something people can enjoy and appreciate." NoOneGetsHurt.org, which will launch in January, aims to provide information on model arts-support programs,

links to arts-related Web sites that accept direct donations, sources that provide arts grants and more. The guys at 3to1 originally planned to get their PSA aired on television, in order to drive traffic to their Web site. However, most networks will not accept a PSA from a for-profit company, even though their video was created as a not-for-profit venture, and NoOneGetsHurt.org will exist as a not-for-profit resource. "To [the networks], airing the PSA would be the same as giving us sixty-seconds' worth of free advertisement," Reichlin says.

Time will tell if NoOneGetsHurt.org is as successful as other artist resources, such as Chicago Artist Resource. Before CAR's existence, there was nothing of the sort in the Chicago area, even though similar resources existed in New York, Toronto and Seattle. In the past two years, CAR has really emerged as program that brings artists together and provides them with opportunities to find workspaces, galleries and arts-related employment. Between CAR and NoOneGetsHurt.org, local artists may finally be able to build the proper support community Chicago has been gasping for since the early eighties.

I myself am an artist who is part of a nonprofit organization in Chicago, so when I find out about a group of young artists who want to help the local community sustain and grow, such as those at 3to1 Studios, their cause is always near and dear to my heart. In my opinion, one of the saddest events in the arts community this year was the closing of the Jane Addams Hull House facility on Wilson Avenue. It was a sudden announcement and was necessary due to lack of funding. The facility is gone, and the space is now occupied by a bar. But there are hundreds of other nonprofit art galleries, education groups and performing companies that can be saved. So please, if you have a favorite nonprofit in Chicago, show your support. And no one gets hurt.