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# When the going stays tough, some metro residents study art

BY KATHERINE YUNG • FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER • FEBRUARY 22, 2009

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*"Life beats down and crushes the soul and art reminds you that you have one."* -- Stella Adler, actress and drama coach

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When Kimberly Kachadoorian lost her contract job at Ford Motor Co. in 2006, learning how to make Raku pottery at the Ann Arbor Art Center gave her comfort and peace of mind.

"For a day, I didn't think about résumés," the 46-year-old former project planner recalled recently. "It really changed my perspective to take a day without the monkey on my back."

As Kachadoorian and so many others have discovered, art can soothe the soul. And in these troubled and stressful times, there's plenty of soothing needed.

Despite the pullback in consumer spending, two major art centers in metro Detroit -- the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center and the Anton Art Center -- are seeing an increase in people flocking to their classes and workshops. And reservations have been pouring in for Artcenter Traverse City's weekly summer workshops, which start at \$350 each.

Interest in art classes is expected to rise -- along with church attendance and sales of comfort food and hard alcohol -- as people seek ways to cope with the losses and uncertainties rippling throughout the depressed economy. Cutbacks in travel have also caused some to look closer to home for things to do.

"In poor economic times, we take solace in entertainment," said Michael Bernacchi, a marketing professor at the University of Detroit Mercy's business school. "There is a tendency to look for these outlets. You can kind of be completely detached for a while."

Art centers aren't immune from economic downturns. In Michigan, these organizations are facing severe cuts in funding from the state as well as fewer private and corporate donations.

But the nonprofit organization Americans for the Arts has found that even during recessions, people who love art keep doing it. They also usually maintain their museum memberships. However, rather than going to see a Broadway show, they may attend a local theater production instead.



KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/Detroit Free Press  
Karen Kimmell of Ann Arbor paints a still life with acrylic paint alongside classmates at the Ann Arbor Art Center this month.



SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press  
Dora Laney of Bloomfield Hills works on a figurine during a ceramics class last week at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center in Birmingham.

PHOTO GALLERIES  
Finding creativity in misery

MICHIGAN ART CENTERS  
Interested in ceramics or painting? Here are some art centers in Michigan that offer adult classes and workshops:

Ann Arbor Art Center, Ann Arbor, 734-994-8004, [www.annarborartcenter.org](http://www.annarborartcenter.org)

Anton Art Center, Mt. Clemens, 586-469-8666, [www.theartcenter.org](http://www.theartcenter.org)

Art Center of Battle Creek, Battle Creek, 269-962-9511, [www.artcenterofbattlecreek.org](http://www.artcenterofbattlecreek.org)

"People aren't going to completely cut the art out of their lives," said Liz Bartolomeo, a spokeswoman for the group.

In recent months, the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center in Birmingham has seen strong demand for courses about jewelry making, ceramics, painting, weaving and fashion illustration.

"When people are watching their pocketbooks, they really want to do something that's meaningful," said Jane Linn, the BBAC's CEO and president. "Right now, things are very robust. We are definitely a bright spot."

Like other art centers, the BBAC knows it has to adapt to the tough times. Since September, it has been offering a \$5 drop-in, project-oriented workshop for people of all ages on Sunday afternoons. Recent topics: African drums and Valentine art.

At the Anton Art Center in Mt. Clemens, clay and landscape painting classes have been selling out, so courses have been added. For the first time, the center has registered enough students to offer a class about 19th-Century photographic printing processes.

"Despite the fact that it's doom and gloom, you still need to get out and do something," said Jennifer Callans, the Anton's executive director. "Art is very therapeutic."

To be sure, not all local art centers are experiencing a boom in demand for classes. At the Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester, adult registrations are down so the facility is providing more 3-week courses instead of 9-week ones for people on tight budgets.

Interest in art classes has also been softer than usual this winter at the Ann Arbor Art Center, though revenue from the fall term exceeded expectations by 25%, said Marsha Chamberlin, the organization's president.

The center, however, is attracting people who need a break from all the stress in their lives.

Three weeks ago, Martha Mackres, a 52-year-old financial adviser, started taking a weekly watercolor painting course, something she last did several years ago.

"I just needed some downtime," said the Manchester resident, who enjoys painting landscapes. "It's just something completely different from the rest of my day."

The center is also drawing people, like Karen Kimmell, who had found it difficult to squeeze creativity into their hectic work schedules. Now, thanks to job changes and other factors, they have time.

Kimmell finally got the chance to enroll in a pastel drawing class last year after she quit her teaching job in Ft. Wayne, Ind. and moved to Ann Arbor because of her husband's new job.

She now takes two courses in watercolor and acrylics painting at the center, a former carriage house factory.

"I am sort of smitten by art," she said. "I've always wanted to do art. I've always been fascinated by color and the play of light."

For Kachadoorian, art still keeps her grounded even though she did find another job. Today, she volunteers at the Ann Arbor center and loves to knit and explore other fiber art in her studio at home.

"When I'm stressed out, I do more art," she said. "It's my escape. For that little moment of time, the worries aren't there."

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**In your voice**

Artcenter Traverse City, Traverse City, 231-941-9488, [www.artcentertraversecity.com](http://www.artcentertraversecity.com)

Arts & Scraps, Detroit, 313-640-4411, [www.artsandscraps.org](http://www.artsandscraps.org)

Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center, Birmingham, 248-644-0866, [www.bbartcenter.org](http://www.bbartcenter.org)

Crooked Tree Arts Center, Petoskey, 231-347-4337, [www.crookedtree.org](http://www.crookedtree.org)

Depot Center for the Arts, St. Johns, 989-224-2429, [www.clintoncountyarts.org](http://www.clintoncountyarts.org)

Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, 810-234-1695, [www.flintarts.org](http://www.flintarts.org)

Ford Community & Performing Arts Center, Dearborn, 313-943-2350, [www.dearbornfordcenter.com](http://www.dearbornfordcenter.com)

Krasl Art Center, St. Joseph, 269-983-0271, [www.krasl.org](http://www.krasl.org)

Midland Center for the Arts, Midland, 989-631-5930, [www.mcfta.org](http://www.mcfta.org)

Nuveen Community Center for the Arts, Montague, 231-894-2787, [www.artscouncilofwhitelake.org](http://www.artscouncilofwhitelake.org)

Paint Creek Center for the Arts, Rochester, 248-651-4110, [www.pccart.org](http://www.pccart.org)

Shiawassee Arts Center, Owosso, 989-723-8354, [www.shiawasseearts.org](http://www.shiawasseearts.org)

Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, Grand Rapids, 616-454-7000, [www.uica.org](http://www.uica.org)

Sources: [art-collecting.com](http://art-collecting.com) and Free Press research

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