

How to Start your Career in the Arts: Making Community Connections

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by Fan-Ling Suen

GAC Staff

As an emerging artist, starting a career in the arts can be both exhilarating and daunting. Becoming a professional artist is tough. According to Statistics Canada, in 2016 only 35% of women aged 25-34 with a Bachelor's Degree in Art found a job that matched their studies.

One of the challenges of being a young artist today is often that your career path does not take a particularly conventional route. One of the potentials perks of being a professional artist is having more control over shaping your career path, but how to start begs its own question.



Amanda & Kiel (KIAM) Wilson-Ciocci

This is where mentorship programs can play an important role in supporting emerging artists in the beginning stages of their career. The mentor and mentee relationship formed between an established and emerging artist is not only an invaluable experience for both parties, but also an important



Gifting of KIAM studio to Abby and Ahmri. From left to right: Kiel Wilson-Ciocci, Ahmri Vanderborne, Abby Nowakowski, Amanda Wilson-Ciocci

piece in building and strengthening an intergenerational community of local artists.

To share first-hand experience of the important role mentorship plays in the arts, we asked KIAM –Guelph artist duo and business owners of Art in the Ward, to share a few words about their past experience as mentors in the Guelph Emerging Artist Mentorship Project – a joint program between Guelph Arts Council and the University of Guelph.

Q. Amanda & Kiel (KIAM) Can you share your experience as art mentors?

A. As mentors, we were given the opportunity to learn the importance of mentorship and of sharing our own lessons and learnings as practicing artists. For us personally, this experience highlighted the importance of sharing our tools and knowledge in a unique and effective way to support artists in our community.

Q. What role do you think mentoring has in the context of supporting emerging artists?

A. As young artists, there are so many directions to go, so many resources to look at, and so many things to learn about. Supporting these individuals through the mentorship program gives mentees a head start. They can learn from practicing artists about resources, tools, and strategies that will help them succeed.

They can feel supported by their art community and have a place to turn to when questions come up.

Q. The artist collective and recent fine arts graduates of the University of Guelph Ahmri + Abby are this year's Coordinators for the Emerging Artist Mentorship Program on behalf of the University of Guelph. As past participants of this program, they are coming full circle. Can you elaborate on your unique mentor and mentee relationship?

A. Our story is unique in that we developed a great relationship with Abby, one of our mentees. We maintained a connection and supported their art events beyond this program. Our mentee and her collaborative art partner Ahmri, who was also part of the program, have a passion for art and an involvement with the community that we highly respect. Recently, we moved our business and practice to another town and with the connection we made through the mentorship program we made the decision to gift these two recent graduates and past mentees from the University of Guelph, the materials, space, supplies, and connections needed to start their own art business.

Kiel and Amanda's decision to provide young artists with the tools and strategies to be confident and successful in their careers extend beyond the Emerging Artist Mentorship Project. Their business Art in the Ward supports artists with finding the tools they need to succeed. They have since moved their business online and now

offer [free online resources](#) for artists and how-to guides.

The mentor and mentee relationship between KIAM, Abby and Ahmri is just one of many success stories that can arise out of making community connections through mentorship. Through the Emerging Artist Mentorship Program, you too can have the opportunity to shape your career as an emerging artist or guide others in taking their first steps.