

Four artists cross Red River to break barriers faced by all creators



Arty Party attendees gather in an Austin backyard to enjoy local music by Lonesome Rhodes, Bat Forest, Good Heavens and DJ-Rossum.
Reagan Liddell

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Feb. 25. 2019

A home of nine women hosted an event dubbed the Arty Party on a recent Saturday night, gathering lovers of the arts and a myriad of Austin residents to combat the disconnect often experienced between a creator and an audience trying to understand.

“There’s a fear. There is a barrier...that needs to be broken because art is for everyone,” said Alexa Goetzinger, an artist and educative director for Artspace at Untitled, an art center in Oklahoma City, where the artists are from, that provides free community programming for artists.

Four artists, including Goetzinger, Virginia Sitzes, Mycah Higley and Emma Difani traveled to Austin from their home of Oklahoma City with the intention of presenting their work to the young and trendy community near the University of Texas. The event was organized by Virginia Sitzes, who also rallied three local bands and a DJ to perform during the Arty Party. After spreading the word among friends and

family in the area, over 100 people packed the home of Grace Sitzes, Virginia Sitzes's younger sister, for the impromptu gathering that grew out of a Facebook event.

"Everyone's fun and happiness is on me for the night," said Virginia Sitzes, an organizer of the Arty Party. "It's your fault if they do have fun, or if they don't have fun."

Virginia Sitzes and Mycah Higley, another artist involved in the event, had planned to travel to Texas to present their work in pop-up shows scheduled throughout the weekend of Feb. 23. While discussing the trip, they made the decision to invite fellow creators Emma Difani and Alexa Goetzinger to join them in arranging an event to promote the work of artists and local musicians in an environment welcome to all. The artists specifically left the doors of the house open to combat the disconnect they often experience with viewers who believe they are not qualified to enjoy art because they are not artists themselves.

"A bunch of them were in town just because of random things," said Grace Sitzes, owner of the home. "We decided to have a party. That's kind of how it birthed and here we are."



Attentive people and tables of artwork crowd the living room of young Austin residents, including the sister of Virginia Sitzes, an organizer of the Arty Party.
Reagan Liddell

Grace Sitzes' living room, shared with her eight roommates, had just enough space to allow for a showcase of all four artists. The open house was accompanied by live print-making of event T-shirts and bands located in the backyard where listeners crowded under messily strewn string lights. A variety of vibrant colors, sounds and encounters brightened this house accustomed to the routine of busy college students.

“I think it's really cool because you get to hang out, meet people and see art all at the same time, so there's a little bit for everybody,” said Gage Parsons, an attendee who heard about the event through his girlfriend.

All four artists showcased during the Arty Party are members of Artspace at Untitled and Art Group, a group which was founded by Virginia Sitzes and others to create a circle of sharing and support among young artists. Both organizations host events for members to display their work in an open and inclusive environment similar to the Arty Party. Through these organizations, the artists have become familiar with the exhilaration of the art scene and the organization of its events, but they agree Oklahoma City's art community has a lot to learn from Austin.

“It's small, but it's segmented,” said Difani. “It seems like if it's that small, we should be working together a little bit more, and hopefully that's the direction it's going to grow in.”

Events such as the Arty Party and those coordinated by Artspace at Untitled and Art Group bring artists to the level of their audience. As Higley explained, these shows provide evidence that art is everywhere, and viewers don't need to be trained to enjoy it. The age of social media has made this connection even more possible because of its widespread reach. On the night of the Arty Party, 895 people had been invited to the Facebook event.

“I think it's what makes this generation special...people that are our age to come together and be able to promote a small event and for people to get excited and celebrate what they're good at,” said Ross Morales, an Austin-based DJ who performed near the end of the event, encouraging people to dance and have fun before heading home for the night.

Although profiting from their work is a perk of an event, the artists agree they are content knowing they have stimulated new learning and inclusivity by bringing people together to enjoy art and themselves.

“Even though they're not going to necessarily be artists or pursue printmaking in the future, they're better positioned to appreciate the work that somebody else is doing,” Difani said. “Hopefully we shared a little bit of that last night.”