

SO WHAT'S IN THE WINDOW? ART! THAT'S WHAT!

Watch for Window Arts Malden in September

by Justin Wollenhaupt

All too often it seems that capitalism and art are forever at odds, waging a conflict fueled by two antithetical ideas - profit and enrichment of the soul. The standard argument is that art is not profitable - that high-minded ideals do not sell. Thus, it is a refreshing change when someone comes along and turns that notion on its head. In this case, that "someone" is actually two intrepid local artists: Naomi Brave and Kely Bird, Malden residents both and the founders and co-directors of Window Arts Malden (WAM).

The WAM project is a simple idea, but it demonstrates that art and business can collaborate to the benefit of both. In a nutshell, many of the businesses in downtown Malden will remove their wares from their windows for two weeks in September, and replace them with works by artists who live or have their studios in Malden. The theory is that the artwork will draw shoppers to the stores, where they will then part with their hard-earned dollars.

But will it work? If history is any guide, it should work like gangbusters. The city of Somerville has been running a similar program for years in an effort to boost foot traffic in some of their business districts. The most recent event in Union Square paired the window art program with additional local vendors who set up a market in the square, and the combination resulted in over \$500,000 in additional revenue reported by businesses in the area. Bird worked on the Somerville project, and its success was one of the prime motivating factors in the duo's decision to try a similar effort in Malden.

Malden's program will kick off on Saturday, September 16, with a festival at Malden's government center featuring music, video, art displays, and walking-tour maps of the locations displaying storefront art. It will run through September 30, with 39 artists already on board and over 35 businesses involved at the time of this writing.

I spoke with Naomi Brave about the project, the response to the project, and the future of Window Arts Malden:

MM: How has the project been received by local businesses?

Brave: "The response has been outstanding. The business owners, for the most part, think it's a great idea. Even the ones that didn't sign up for it are supportive. I'm extremely happy with the support that's come out within Malden for this project. I was not expecting so many volunteers and so much support from the city... and so many participants - so many stores are taking a chance. It's a lot to ask them to take their merchandise out of their windows. I've been pretty blown away by that."

MM: Why storefront windows instead of the standard gallery exhibition?

Brave: "We wanted to increase the foot traffic in downtown Malden, but we also wanted to promote the arts, so it seemed like an ideal way to do both."

MM: You've received significant funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the City of Malden. Did you expect such support?

Brave: "We thought of everything it would take to do the project and we put it all in there in our application for funds, but figured whatever we got, we were going to do the project anyway. But it's been great [to receive the entire asking amount]; it's going to allow us to do a lot of advertising. They were incredibly supportive. A couple of members of the arts council went to

the one in Somerville and they saw what it did there, so I think they 'got it.'"

MM: What can we expect from the artwork?

Brave: "It's mostly paintings, drawings and photographs, although a wide variety of other arts are featured as well, including quilt-making, metal sculpture, light sculpture, ceramic tile-making, dress-making, and film-making. I'm very pleased with the quality of the art. I feel I have pretty tough standards, and I think most of the entries are top-shelf work."

MM: Are you still accepting submissions?

Brave: "Well, I'm very excited about the video submissions, and in fact we would still take more for this year. The window art submissions are closed, but we are still taking video submissions because it's the sort of thing we can do more last-minute."

MM: What's the future of Window Arts Malden?

Brave: "There's been a really strong group of volunteers that have arisen around the project. We have meetings every two weeks, and they're there week after week after week, helping out. We're hoping that it will grow into something where we can do open studios in Malden or some other kinds of projects, but we're taking it one step at a time right now."

For more information on Window Arts Malden, visit www.maldenarts.com. For Malden residents interested in joining the WAM project as volunteers or to submit a short film, email info@maldenarts.com.