

([HTTP://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM](http://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM))

([HTTP://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/CATEGORY/NEWS](http://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/CATEGORY/NEWS))

HOME

NEWS

([HTTP://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/CATEGORY/NEWS/LOCAL-NEWS](http://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/CATEGORY/NEWS/LOCAL-NEWS))

LOCAL  
NEWS

Quebec (<http://montrealgazette.com/category/news/quebec>) •

National (<http://montrealgazette.com/category/news/national>) • World (<http://montrealgazette.com/category/news/world>)

# Art hives help bring creative Montrealers together



**MONIQUE POLAK, SPECIAL TO THE MONTREAL GAZETTE**

[More from Monique Polak, Special to The Montreal](#)

SECTIONS

[e  
://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/MONIQUE-POLAK-SPECIAL-TO-THE-MONTREAL-GAZETTE](http://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/MONIQUE-POLAK-SPECIAL-TO-THE-MONTREAL-GAZETTE)

Published on: March 6, 2015

Last Updated: March 6, 2015 6:00 PM EDT



Concordia art education student Kim Johnson at La Ruche d'Art St-Henri.

Allen McInnis / Montreal Gazette

## All over town, people are getting together to make art.

They are heading to community art studios, where everyone is welcome, there is no charge and most of the materials are donated or recycled.

At [La Ruche d'Art St-Henri \(https://www.facebook.com/pages/La-Ruche-d'Art-St-Henri/174341355959676\)](https://www.facebook.com/pages/La-Ruche-d'Art-St-Henri/174341355959676), behind an unassuming storefront on St-Jacques St. W., 19-year-old Bianca Gutman uses pastels to make a self-portrait. Like Gutman, the girl in the portrait wears glasses, but on

canvas they are blue, and her hair is pink.

“What I like about it here is the sense of community and oneness,” Gutman said.

Further north, at Studio d’Art Saint-Sulpice (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Studio-dart-Saint-Sulpice/554072474626783>), located in a social housing complex in Ahuntsic-Cartierville, 13-year-old Saintanno Demosthenes has taken apart an old folding chair, which he plans to turn into a toboggan.

“But it wouldn’t move because of the plastic feet, so now I want to add wheels and make it into a model of a car,” Demosthenes says. “Making art relaxes me.”

And in Centre-Sud, at Co-op Le Milieu ([https://www.facebook.com/cooplemilieu?\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/cooplemilieu?_rdr)), Doris Thompson, 60, knits a pair of slippers. “I like being with people who share my interests. Before, if I wanted to get out of the house, I had no place to go. I would go to a restaurant for a soup.”

\*\*\*



Bianca Gutman works on a self portrait at La Ruche d'Art St-Henri.

Allen McInnis / Montreal Gazette

Even in an artist-friendly city like Montreal, not everyone can afford to rent studio space. But these community art studios, part of a national grassroots movement known as art hives, offer such spaces for free — with the added incentives of companionship and snacks.

“It’s not a franchise. It’s not a business or a service. It’s about citizens interested in making the world a better place for themselves and their children,” said Janis Timm-Bottos, coordinator of Concordia University’s

## Art Therapy program and queen bee of Montreal's art hive movement.

Timm-Bottos prefers not to take credit for the project's success — even though she is responsible for opening La Ruche d'Art St-Henri, the city's first art hive, in 2011, and for training many of the art therapists and educators who work and volunteer at the city's three community art studios.

In Montreal, funding for the project comes from Concordia's Faculty of Fine Arts, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Gainey Foundation and Federation CJA. Thanks to that funding, there is no cost to participants, who can come from anywhere in the city.

“I think the time was right because people are seeking ways to connect that don't cost a lot of money and that are enlivening. We need to remember to use our hands for creation, because we are doing this all the time,” said Timm-Bottos, tapping on an imaginary tablet computer to make her point.

Timm-Bottos, who moved to Montreal in 2010 to teach at Concordia, was working as a physical therapist in Albuquerque, N.M., when she began dreaming about community art studios to give people a space to create art even if they couldn't afford it.

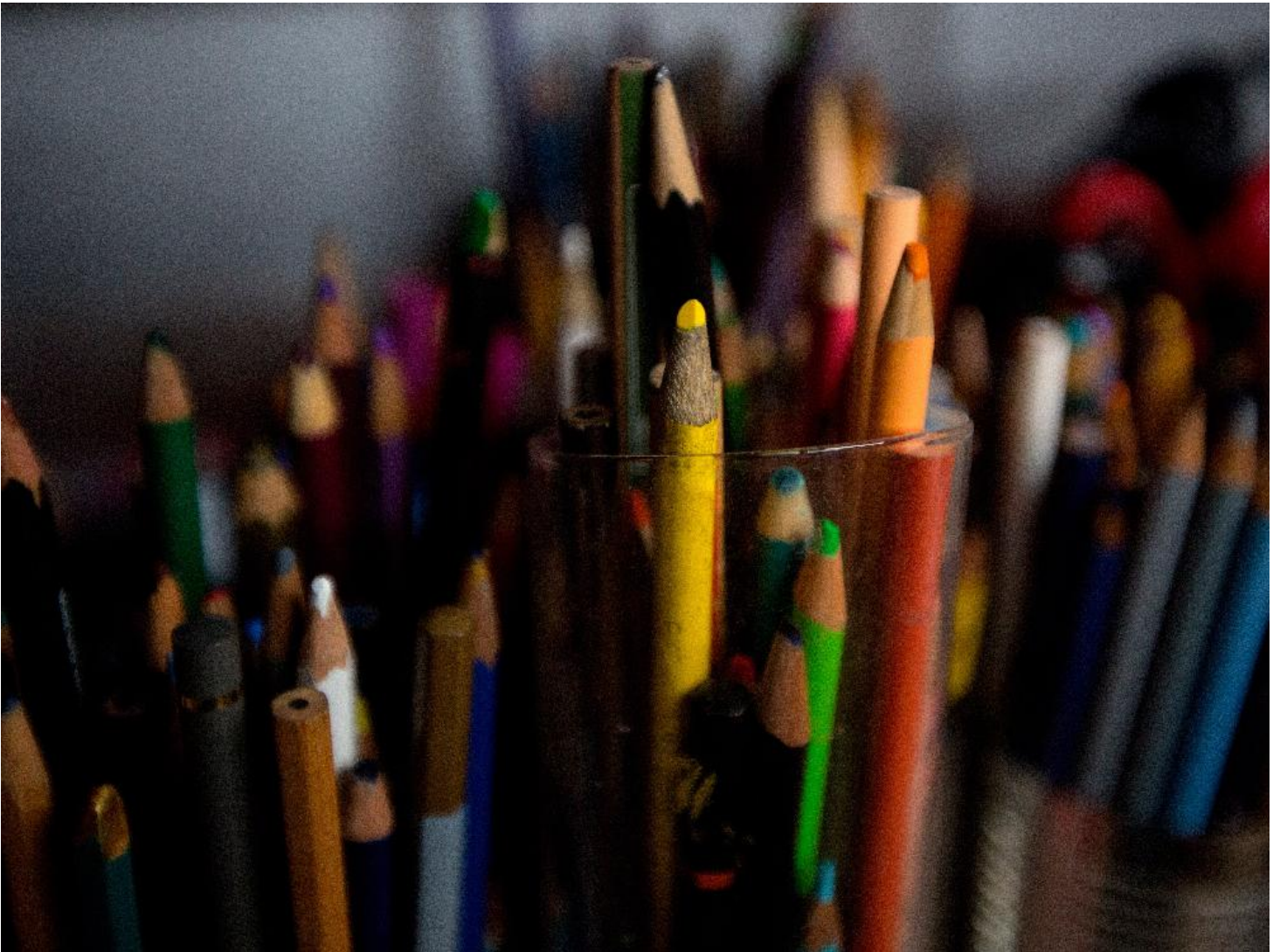
“I had worked with people dealing with issues of homelessness. I decided I needed more skills to effect change and I wanted to have more fun, too.”

So Timm-Bottos returned to university to study art therapy. In 1994, she opened Artstreet, a space in downtown Albuquerque where people from

all walks of life could get together to do art.

Timm-Bottos is responsible for coining the term art hives. For her, they are like nervous systems. “Each one has a different mood,” she said. And though some of the people who come to the hives may be in crisis, the focus is on creating art and building community. “It’s not a charity. It’s not trying to fix people.”

\*\*\*



Art supplies at La Ruche d'Art St-Henri.

Allen McInnis / Montreal Gazette

Suspended from the ceiling at the back of La Ruche d'Art St-Henri is a hive made from recycled materials. Like many of the artworks on display, the hive was a group project. The mood at this studio combines energy and calm. That makes sense to Stephen Legari, an art therapist who divides his time between art therapy at two local alternative schools and working as a facilitator at La Ruche d'Art St-Henri.

“When the hands are busy, the mind is calm,” Legari says.

On a recent Friday afternoon, Legari was on hand to help as Noémie Bardomiano and her two daughters, Isèle, 7, and Naomie Escalante, 5, worked on a giant mural depicting an underwater world. Isèle used pastels to draw a turquoise whale; Naomie added a multicoloured fish, and their mom contributed an octopus wearing a red beret.

For Bardomiano, a single mother and full-time student who came to Montreal from Mexico in 2006, spending time at the studio has many benefits.

“Doing art helps us de-stress. It’s a good way to show my daughters to express their ideas. And here, I learn more English and French,” she says.

Wednesday mornings, La Ruche d'Art St-Henri is reserved for seniors. Sarala Patel, 69, has been creating a postcard she will reproduce and send to relatives and friends. Patel, who was born in Uganda but has lived in Montreal since 1972, drew a Gujarati woman from west India and was adding an intricate border composed of Hindu good luck symbols —

an elephant with an upturned trunk, a swan, sunflowers, and a lotus.

As a child, Patel enjoyed creating art, but was discouraged by the harsh words of a high-school art teacher. “He said, ‘I’m giving you three zeros for your work,’ ” she recalls.



I believe we’re all creative. It’s a need. I found there was a lack of context to create if you’re not a child or a professional artist. -Rachel Chainey

When a friend invited Patel to take part in the Wednesday morning program, she thought she would knit and help out in the facility’s community garden, but instead, she began making art again.

Even icy sidewalks and a persistent ear infection did not keep Patel, who lives downtown, away from the studio this winter. The breast cancer survivor says art helps reduce her anxiety.

“When I come here, I see people, I do things and I feel like I have a new life.”

Sarah Tevyaw, the art therapist who facilitates the seniors’ program, has noticed that people are often reluctant to identify themselves as artists. A chance to make art at the studio can transform how they see themselves.

“When people come in the door — whether they feel isolated or have mental issues — here, they are artists,” Tevyaw says.



Art can have a transformative effect on neighbourhoods, too. Before Studio d'Art Saint-Sulpice opened in June 2012, its Louvain St. location was a second-hand clothing store and a frequent target for vandals. Ginette Dubé, past-president of the tenants' association of the housing complex where the studio is located, says she believes the art hive's arrival helped make the site safer.

“Around 2008, there were street gangs, kids smoked doped outside, there was vandalism and break-ins,” Dubé says. “It’s much quieter now. Kids can come to the studio and learn a lot.”



Coming together to learn and create at Studio d'Art Saint-Sulpice.

John Kenney / Montreal Gazette

The mood at Studio d'Art Saint-Sulpice is light and lively. Facilitator Meng Siow makes a point of involving youngsters when she prepares her specialties, which include a spicy red lentil soup. (Food plays an important role at all the hives, as snacks are provided free to participants.)

Demosthenes is one of several young regulars at the studio on Saturdays. He remembers that when he was in kindergarten, he rarely left his mother's apartment, except to go to school. "It was too dangerous in those days to walk in the neighbourhood. I once heard gunshots," he recalls.

While Demosthenes worked on his model car, Christine Bienvenue, 42, took a drawing lesson from Wendy Hayden, a Concordia art education student whose course work includes an internship at the community art studio. Bienvenue concentrated as she drew an egg and its shadow.

\*\*\*

The best proof of an art hive's health is when it leads to the creation of new hives, through what Timm-Bottos describes as "a cascading effect."

That is what happened in 2012 when Rachel Chainey, one of Timm-Bottos's art therapy students, co-founded Co-op Le Milieu in Centre-Sud. Here, on Robin St. just north of The Village, the mood is cozy and

effortlessly hip. At this hive, proceeds from the on-site café cover the cost of rent and utilities.

“I was finding that in Montreal, we didn’t know our neighbours,” says Chainey, a Plateau resident who co-ordinates a national project called the Art Hives Network.

“I was dreaming of a place that would be open to anyone. I believe we’re all creative. It’s a need. I found there was a lack of context to create if you’re not a child or a professional artist.”

While Doris Thompson knit slippers, Darien Hamedani, 19, perfected her herringbone stitch under the watchful eye of Kaye Noele, a textile artist and co-founder of Co-op Le Milieu who facilitates its Wednesday night knitting circle.

Hamedani, who moved to Montreal with her boyfriend last fall, has been knitting since she was 9. “I didn’t know anyone and this has been a way to meet people,” she says. Hanging out at the café and improving her knitting skills has had its own cascading effect. “It gave me the confidence to open my own business,” says Hamedani, who has begun selling her hand-knit creations online.

The Art Hives Network has provided mentorship support to fledgling art hives as far away as Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Anyone can apply to start a hive.

Nothing pleases Timm-Bottos more than the knowledge that art hives are thriving and growing. Despite her busy work schedule, Timm-Bottos tries

to make it to La Ruche d'Art St-Henri once a week so that she can make art, too. "Friday is my hive day. Even if I'm tired and cranky, I always leave with more energy than I came with."

To learn more about art hives in Montreal, visit [www.arthives.org](http://www.arthives.org) (<http://www.arthives.org>)

## **FIVE TIPS FOR STARTING A HIVE**

- 1.** "Dream big; start small," said Timm-Bottos. Consider taking a shoebox of art materials to the local library. Set up on a table and see who joins you.
- 2.** "Ecosystems thrive on diversity," said Timm-Bottos. Work together with people who have different strengths from yours. Get help from someone who is good at construction or repairing; enlist an artist, a therapist and an educator to help create a new hive.
- 3.** Don't worry about buying materials. "There is an abundance of materials out there. You don't have to buy stuff," said Timm-Bottos. Eighty per cent of the art supplies at the Montreal hives come from people who are cleaning out their garages or attics.
- 4.** Be warm and welcoming. "Welcome everyone who comes in as if they're guests in your own home," said Chainey.
- 5.** Put a pot of soup on the stove — or a plate of brownies on the table. "Food is a way of connecting people across cultural divides," said Timm-Bottos.

## This Week's Flyers



**IKEA**

Introduction SEKTION - The new IKEA kitchen

**Less More**

**HOVER FOR FLYER**




**Événement AUBAINES**

Métamorphosez vos planchers à peu de frais, en

**HOVER FOR FLYER**




**NAPA AUTO PARTS**

**179.99** **50% OFF** **114.99**

**HOVER FOR FLYER**



# Comments

We encourage all readers to share their views on our articles and blog posts. We are committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion, so we ask you to avoid personal attacks, and please keep your comments relevant and respectful. If you encounter a comment that is abusive, click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box to report spam or abuse. We are using Facebook commenting. Visit our FAQ page (<http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/story.html?id=7195492>) for more information.

 Also post on FacebookPosting as **Rachel Chainey** ▾[Comment](#)**Solania Dolores** · Concordia University

I have only good memories of my passage to La Ruche d'Art and Janis. She is the kind of person who makes you feel warm and happy. Montreal is lucky to have her and as Concordia student I have been inspired by her way of teaching, which is more sharing her insights as art therapist and humanist.

[Reply](#) · [Unlike](#) · [1](#) · [Follow Post](#) · 7 hours ago**Sanchita Rahman** · Works at Trattoria De mikes

I'm going la Roche since three yrs with my daughter "Marisa". I like painting and she like drawing .specially she is very popular there for her cat art and cat story...it's a great place to create and exchange ideas with others. Although it's bit far from my place but I never missed a day ...it's like my another home in Montreal .

[Reply](#) · [Unlike](#) · [1](#) · [Follow Post](#) · 14 hours ago**Darlene Goins** · Palm Springs

I am totally in LOVE with this idea..it makes me "warm and fuzzy"..I am going to spread the word here in PALM SPRINGS. THROUGH OUT THE VALLEY...SUCH AN INCREDIBLE IDEA..I WANT TO MAKE MY HIVE RIGHT NOW..

[Reply](#) · [Unlike](#) · [3](#) · [Follow Post](#) · March 7 at 11:58am**Joan Johnson** · St Patricks College

What an innovative approach to encouraging people to make art, destress and make new friends

[Reply](#) · [Unlike](#) · [3](#) · [Follow Post](#) · March 7 at 10:37am**Wendy Lees** · Université de Calgary

Great article! I founded a similar program in Calgary called create! in the East Village  
<https://www.facebook.com/createintheEastVillage>

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · 16 hours ago

Facebook social plugin

([HTTP://WWW.POSTMEDIA.COM](http://www.postmedia.com))

© 2015 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.

Powered by WordPress.com VIP (<http://vip.wordpress.com/>)