



# MIDWESTERN MATURATION

From the recent redesign of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation to a new High Line–inspired waterfront, St. Louis could be this year’s ascendant art capital. **BY ROBIN POGREBIN**



Adam Aronson Fine Arts Center. ABOVE: Joe Goode, installation view, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2015.

The St. Louis art scene might sound like a contradiction in terms. The city is not known as any kind of cultural mecca. But several signs point to a town on the rise in the visual arts. “There’s a lot going on in St. Louis,” says Ronald K. Greenberg, who opened his first gallery in Clayton, Missouri, in 1972. “We used to have one auction house. Now there are three.”

The Pulitzer Arts Foundation recently doubled its gallery space with a David Chipperfield renovation of its Tadao Ando building and hired Cara Starke from New York’s Creative Time as its new director. Last summer, the foundation, in collaboration with Ballroom Marfa and the Public Concern Foundation, brought to St. Louis the Marfa Dialogues, a program series exploring the science and culture of climate change in relation to art.

After its renovation, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation reopened in May with solo exhibitions of Alexander Calder, Fred Sandback, and Richard Tuttle. Emily Rauh, the founder and chair of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, says she sees why artists are attracted to the city. “It’s easy to get work space and living space and [there is] much, much more of it than you can find on either coast,” she says. “And there are students who are choosing to stay here.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID JOHNSON (GOODE); SAM FEINTRESS (ADAM ARONSON FINE ARTS CENTER). OPPOSITE PAGE: ROBERT PETTUS (FACADE); CARLY ANN FAYE (STARKE)

St. Louis is getting its own version of New York's High Line—an old commuter train trestle is becoming a new waterfront park that will connect Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch to the city. The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis recently appointed the New York-based curator of contemporary art Jeffrey Uslip as its new chief curator, and its new executive director, Lisa Melandri, took over three years ago, having come from the Santa Monica Museum of Art.

A grassroots art scene is growing on Cherokee Street, like The Luminary—a nonprofit forum for artistic research, production, and presentation—and Fort Gondo, a nonprofit group that offers small loans of time and space to artists. White Flag Projects, a nonprofit gallery whose founder, Matthew Strauss, also spends time in New York, is mounting strong exhibitions in the city's Grove section, and Laumeier Sculpture Park is presenting 60 works of large-scale outdoor works in a 105-acre park free year-round, attracting a whopping 300,000 annual visitors.

A number of prominent collectors have come out of St. Louis, including the Napa Valley vineyard owner Donald Bryant Jr., a former trustee of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Barney Ebsworth, who made his fortune in the travel industry and is now based in Seattle.

There are active galleries like the Bruno David Gallery, which opened in 2005 across from the Pulitzer Foundation; the Atrium Gallery in the Central West End, open since 1986; and the William Shearburn Gallery, whose eponymous owner in 2014 opened a new gallery across from Forest Park, having worked privately in Grand Center since 1992 while traveling for art fairs. And, maybe most importantly, a critical mass of artists now also live and work in St. Louis—including Amy Granat, who in September opened the new space Parapet Real Humans with a Jacob Kassay show. To be sure, the art scene has been strongly affected by the events in



FROM TOP RIGHT: The western façade of the recently renovated Pulitzer Arts Foundation building; Cara Starke, director of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation; longtime St. Louis art gallery owner Ronald K. Greenberg.



Ferguson, a boiling-over of social ills that many say the art world had already been trying to address. In 2010, the Old North Saint Louis Restoration Group, the Kranzberg Arts Foundation, and the artist and cultural activist Juan William Chávez joined in transforming a historic North St. Louis brick building threatened with demolition into a dynamic community art space, Northside Workshop.

"It's a place to interact with people, where open dialogue can happen and people can explore different issues," Chávez says, adding that during the Ferguson curfews, the workshop "became a sanctuary for people in the neighborhood."

It is in part these social issues, Starke says, that drew her from New York to the Pulitzer Foundation. "What I saw when I was coming out here was incredible potential," she says. "I'm excited to be here and to be working for an institution that has the opportunity to play a role in a dialogue on a national and an international level and to also be a real community member."

Indeed the foundation has been collaborating with the architecture and design units of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University of St. Louis on the second of PXSTL, a national design-build competition to revitalize an empty lot in the Grand Center cultural district of St. Louis. The second iteration was launched in August.

"There is a kind of energy about being in an urban environment, but it being affordable and accessible," says Carmon Colangelo, dean of the Sam Fox School since 2006. "When I first got here, it seemed like everyone felt pretty much like they needed to leave—looking to go to New York or LA. Now more young artists are staying in St. Louis and starting things up."

Uslip says he was drawn to St. Louis because he is an "Americanist." Doing a show earlier this year on Joe Goode, for example—an Oklahoma-born artist who moved with Ed Ruscha to California and came to the fore as part of the California Pop art movement—was enriched by its St. Louis location. "If I had done a Joe Goode show in California, the umbrella of Ed would always be looming," Uslip says. "But if you bring the work back to the milieu in which it was made—the Midwest—it kind of hits the reset button on Joe. You start to see the work outside the pressures of New York and LA."

Uslip is organizing the second Great Rivers Biennial, which identifies artists working in the greater St. Louis metro area and features three winners in an exhibition at the museum. And he says the Ferguson events have only made art more urgent.

"We're one of the cities in America that's really at ground zero in terms of looking at these very charged social politics," he says. "I really believe in art's ability to have a sense of social agency and to create social change."

He adds that St. Louis has the potential to foster that change. "You can see the sky, you can see the horizon," Uslip says. "There's a real sense of openness and possibility." **ABMB**