

A CENTER IS BORN

KICKSTARTING THE FULCRUM ARTS CENTER IN BRATTLEBORO

FULCRUM ARTS CENTER
485 WEST RIVER ROAD
BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT

Picture this: two women create art from dirt; they reach into a cloud and make it rain money. In the past, this would be surrealism. Today, it's a Kickstarter campaign for the new Fulcrum Arts center.

Natalie Blake is a ceramicist known for her tiles that ripple and fold into three dimensions. Randi Solin uses ancient glassblowing techniques to create painterly contemporary sculptures rich with layered color. They have a lot in common. Both are successful, established artisans working in silica-based media. They are mothers, and they had studios in The Cotton Mill, Brattleboro (Vt.) Development Credit Corp.'s business incubator.

About seven years ago, they began talking about creating their own art center to house their studios, space for classes and workshops, and a gallery to welcome collectors. This would be Fulcrum Arts.

"We both have teens and we both see what an incredible opportunity it is for them to get their hands into a material. To us, that's such an essential part of being able to discover who they are," Blake said. "That's the core of why we wanted to be in a place where we could interact with the community." Location was important. They wanted to be close to the heart of the Brattleboro arts community and, at the same time, accessible to people from outside the area.

After considering buildings in and around Brattleboro, having their hopes raised and dashed, they found the perfect spot: a large metal building at 485 West River Road (Route 30). They call it their "ugly duckling." With the help of Nick Marchese of Hand of Man Artisan Builders, work began to transform it into the Fulcrum Arts Center.

Heat is always an issue in New England, and heating 11,000 square feet of mostly

open building is an expensive challenge. But creative people have creative solutions: an innovative heat reclamation system to capture waste heat from Solin's propane-powered glass furnace and glory hole will heat the building. This green solution will be capable of heating clean air to be distributed by ductwork throughout the building, and it may heat water as well.

Blake and Solin were already investing a lot of their own funds into renovating the building. The heat reclamation system would be another expense, and they also needed to purchase additional equipment for teaching.

"We have so many friends who've been doing Kickstarter," Blake said. "We got inspired." They went to Kickstarter.com, an online crowd-funding site for creative projects, and set up their Vermont Chicks Charge Up campaign.

Kickstarter has a catch, as Blake explained, "It's all or nothing. You set your goal and have to meet it, or you don't get any of the money." They decided to set a minimal goal of \$27,000 and gave themselves a month to reach it. To their great surprise, they hit their goal within the first week. "So many collectors, friends and family showed up and donated in exchange for a piece!" said Blake. The campaign continued, and as of this writing, more than \$29,000 has been donated.

The campaign also inspired Solin and Blake to try something new: collaboration. They have created a piece together, the limited edition "Time Shifter," which is both ceramic and glass.

Fulcrum Arts will be open to the public "as soon as the door hole is cut," said Blake, in time for the holidays.

They are considering several options to make the outside of the building as interesting as the inside. Perhaps local teens

will cover it in graffiti. Or Blake could create a ceramic "Swiss cheese" framework that would serve as the base of a living wall, planted with edible vegetation. Or the building could hold an LED scrim that would play a changing array of shapes and images. For now, the outside of the building will have to wait. But can another Kickstarter campaign be far behind?

| Marcia Santore

TOP: Fulcrum Arts staff.
BOTTOM: Sahara, Atlantis and Persimmon Emperor Bowls (Custom)

