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Creative collaborations

By Chelsea McDougald, Correspondent

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You probably didn't know you were in the midst of something so historic. Something maybe you thought you'd only see in movies, in upscale New York settings featuring couture galleries and industrial workshops. Furthermore, you probably didn't know all this was a 10-minute bike ride from anywhere on campus: Graphicstudio.

Like many other students, senior Nate Ryan and junior Brett Kuhlman are unfamiliar with Graphicstudio.

When asked to hazard a guess, Ryan speculated it was "some sort of graphic design studio" or "advertising think tank."

Kuhlman, on the other hand, said this was the first time he'd ever heard of it.

"I would guess that it is a place for graphic design and computer stuff," Kuhlman said.

Oscar Chavez

Graphicstudio has a publishing program as well as an educational component that provides workshops, conferences, tours and lectures. MONTAGE PHOTO/OSCAR CHAVEZ

Oscar Chavez

Studio manager Tom Pruitt makes a print. More than 400 limited-edition works of art have been created at Graphicstudio during its 38 years of existence. MONTAGE PHOTO/OSCAR CHAVEZ

For a studio that generates approximately $1 million in revenue annually, Graphicstudio isn't at all pretentious. Though one might feel out of place in the IKEA-esque modern gallery, those feelings are quickly expelled as soon as one of the employees smiles and offers a warm welcome.

Director Margaret Miller showed off the Graphicstudio in two ways: From the perspective of a person walking in the door to view artwork and the hard work that goes on behind the scenes involving students collaborating with artists.

"No other university has a contemporary museum and professional artist's workshop working together in such a synergistic way," Miller said.

Since Graphicstudio's founding in 1968, more than 100 artists - Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist to name a couple - have come to the studio create works of art and lecture. When the artists' and students' work is complete, the Graphicstudio and Museum of Contemporary Art will put together an exhibit open to the public. Artists receive 50 percent of the profit on the sales of selected pieces, but the money Graphicstudio receives from museum buyers and collectors is all used to fund other endeavors.

It's hard to imagine collectors and famous museums buying up artwork produced in a small studio in Tampa, but Graphicstudio has many international buyers.

"We have something to offer that no other university does, and that sets us apart," Miller said.

So how exactly does the Graphicstudio decide what artist they should sponsor next?

"Artists are selected because of their value to the educational environment and their current significance in the art world," said Kristin Soderqvist, director of Sales and Marketing.

Miller referred to the Graphicstudio as "an experiment in education," because the studio does not select artists based on how much money it can make off of their work.

"While Graphicstudio must have revenue from many sources to continue its research and education programs, the opportunity to sell the work published is not the primary criteria for selecting the artists," Soderqvist said.

There is also a protocol involved when selecting new artists. Soderqvist said though Miller makes the final decision, "she consults the School of Art and Art History and the IRA (Instructurally Related Activities) Advisory Board - specifically curators, artists and critics."

In addition to this, travel is involved to visit exhibits, art fairs and studios.

For example, artist Janaina Tschäpe has long been using females in costume as water goddesses (mermaids) to inspire her photography. Upon seeing her artwork, Graphicstudio immediately thought of Weeki Wachee Springs, where girls are employed to dress and act like mermaids as part of the Springs' allure. Tschäpe created costumes for these modern-day mermaids and created three new prints using an underwater camera.

Senior Lesley Brousseau is an art history major who also works for Graphicstudio. After going to New York to attend art exhibitions and returning to Tampa to see the same thing shortly after, Brousseau said it is "not as fun elsewhere." At the Graphicstudio one can meet the artists, work with them and "see it all in one place."

More than anything, Soderqvist feels the experience and knowledge gained at Graphicstudio is a necessity for any student studying to be an artist.

"The background or degree in studio art or art history is an excellent preparation for a number of careers in the art world," she said. One of the best features of Graphicstudio is that "students can stop by and watch the master printers and artists working."

Many students and recent graduates are working at Graphicstudio, making $10 an hour for their experience in printmaking and sculpture fabrication. Once again, more crucial than the pay is what Miller referred to as "an experiment in education."

"The philosophy of Graphicstudio is to give students or recent graduates that have interest in working with contemporary artists a chance to have a professional experience in a well-known workshop," Soderqvist said. "This work study/internship opportunity will give them something substantial for their resumes."

Admission to the Graphicstudio is free, including the parties at the opening of each exhibit, and group tours are available. To gain your own perspective or better understand the Graphicstudio, Soderqvist

strongly encourages students to stop by.

"Don't graduate without finding out about what is going on - no other university has a contemporary museum and professional artist's workshop working together to research, show and produce the most important art of our time," Soderqvist said.

Graphicstudio is located at 3702 Spectrum Blvd. Ste. 100, and is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. For more information about Graphicstudio and the museum, visit their Web sites at Graphicstudio.usf.edu/index.html and Cam.arts.usf.edu/museum.html.