

The logo for LISC Twin Cities, featuring the letters 'LISC' in a large, white, serif font with a decorative flourish underneath.

Twin Cities

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COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATIONS



The next step: JXTA lab Preparing Northside youth for creative careers

Ten students at a room-sized table lean over large sheets of paper, drawing boxes of gradient shades with pencils: the faintest gray to light charcoal to black. Teacher Nate Young inspects one young man's work. "It's supposed to take a long time," he tells the impatient budding artist. "It's not supposed to be something you can do quickly."

These students comprise the latest Visual Arts and Literacy Training (VALT) class at Juxtaposition Arts, a non-profit organization that offers free arts and entrepreneurship programming to North Minneapolis youth. High-school sweethearts DeAnna and Roger Cummings launched the program in 1995 with 15 students. Last year, 200 kids took part in their intensive, 10-week courses, and "JXTA" reached another 700 through art events.

The JXTA approach: art and empowerment

The JXTA approach is based on four pillars: art making, art history, art critique, and art exhibition and sales. Students practice art in what DeAnna calls a "real-world" atmosphere, serving real clients and growing with the program from learners to apprentices and even teachers before venturing well-prepared into the world of professional art. JXTA teaches in five categories: graphic design, textile and screen printing, environmental design and landscape architecture, photo and digital media, and studio fine arts.

Juxtaposition alumni have gone on to higher education (including Harvard) and professional success, like running a design firm. Twenty-five of their teacher-artists are former students returning to pay-it-back to the next generation of students, 90% of which come from the under-employed North Minneapolis neighborhoods surrounding JXTA.

"We want to provide an opportunity, a space, and a connection to resources for low-income kids who are at-risk," says DeAnna. "Kids of color who grew up like we did: to connect to their creative voice, to connect with the resources of the arts community, and to not only become talented art-makers, but to become ... functioning, working artists."

In just his second week in the VALT class, Brian gets the idea. The 20-year-old tattoo artist is going “back to basics” to learn the fundamentals of drawing and art history. Later in the program, he’ll focus on graphic design and textiles in hopes of forging a career as a designer.

Going Big

Having laid a strong foundation of education and empowerment, Juxtaposition is expanding its reach with an ambitious strategic plan, begun in 2010, to formalize its educational program and become a larger presence in the community.

“We’ve recognized that art and culture have the power and ability to have broad community impact,” says DeAnna. “We started asking ourselves how our organization could make a positive contribution to our community as a whole.”

The result of that questioning is JXTA Lab, a bold new direction that includes an ambitious physical expansion. They aim to build a multi-building campus anchored by a colorful four-story education center, to be completed in 2014.



A rendering of the new JXTA building

This expansion will include new labs for textile and graphics, a retail boutique that features those products, a dedicated gallery, a gift shop and much more classroom space. It will also triple the size of the education and job-training program. JXTA is launching an internship program and hopes to find employment for 100 students a year as professional artists at some of the organizations and firms that make up Minneapolis’ strong creative economy.

“Kids in North Minneapolis have really had real limited access to that,” DeAnna notes.

More to art than meets the eye

Roger highlights the importance of professional experience in addition to training in the arts. To be successful in life, you have to be able to creatively solve problems, he says. “That’s really what being an artist is,” Roger continues. “It’s not just creating paintings and getting in a great gallery show; the artists that are successful ... they teach, they do commercial work, and they do art. That’s the entrepreneurial path, and that’s the crux of what we’re trying to do.”

You can see that spirit in JXTA’s students, like 20-year-old Adrienne. DeAnna describes a shy young woman who found her place in Juxtaposition’s ongoing art programming and moved up from the beginner’s class to more advanced work, like collaborating on a graphic design contract for a client.

Standing in the current graphics lab, Adrienne shares some exciting news with DeAnna: she has decided to pass up full scholarships at two local community colleges to attend the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, where she has received a \$32,000 scholarship.

“I wanted to go there, but I didn’t think I could do it,” she says of the full-art-school route. “Then the last [JXTA] session I did with studio arts showed me what I could do.”



JXTA students making printed invitations to an event previewing plans for JXTA Lab.