



**Lower
Manhattan
Cultural
Council**

EMPOWERING ARTISTS,
INVESTED IN COMMUNITY

ARTISTS SUMMER INSTITUTE

Artist as Entrepreneur – March 2015

ARTISTS AS ENTREPRENEUR PROFILES

QUESTIONS FOR MATTHEW DELEGET

LMCC: Did you set out to begin an organization or a company or endeavor like the one(s) you are operating now? Can you briefly characterize the motivations and beginnings that, directly or indirectly, led you to where you are now?

Matthew Deleget: No, my wife, Rossana Martinez, and I started a project to facilitate community-building and dialog for our community of practice (i.e., visual artists making reductive abstraction). We conceived MINUS SPACE as an online project back in 2003. Around 2006, two things started to happen. First, we began to be invited to organize “MINUS SPACE” exhibitions at various venues around the country, as well as internationally. This included non-profit, university, and commercial galleries. At about the same time, we also started receiving a lot of email inquiries asking about the “location of our gallery”. After more than 50 inquiries like this, we launched our first project space in Gowanus, Brooklyn. MINUS SPACE has continued to develop from there.

LMCC: What is one of the most important things you learned along the way -- a key moment of seeking advice? And how did you find that advice or help?

MD: Define the mission and goals of your project very specifically. Start small. Do one thing and one thing only. And do it exceedingly well. Grow your project slowly and incrementally over time. And make sure your growth aligns with your mission. If it doesn't, either don't start developing new initiatives or revisit and redefine your mission.

LMCC: Are there any "mistakes" you made along the way you think other artists could learn from?

MD: Yes, we've made many mistakes, probably all of them. I think the one mistake we continue to make is undervaluing our own time. Time is a non-renewable resource. It needs to be spent wisely. We are constantly dealing with time management issues between MINUS SPACE, our own studio work, and our family. In a pinch, we tend to sacrifice the later, which we are never happy about.

LMCC: What is your current business structure, e.g. unincorporated, sole proprietor, LLC, 501(c)3. How and when did you decide on that structure and why?

MD: We are currently structured as an S Corporation. Our main motivation to incorporate was to protect our personal assets. Once you start organizing exhibitions that are open to the public, liability becomes an issue. In addition, we have fiscal sponsorship through the New York Foundation for the Arts. This is exceedingly helpful for fundraising purposes, when needed.

LMCC: What is a key area of business advice you would share with others?

MD: Start your project first, then figure out later what kind of business structure, if any, you need to have. So many artists are interested in starting a non-profit to do X, Y and Z. The world doesn't necessarily need more non-profits and running a non-profit is a long-term commitment. Also, funding sources are more limited now than any time in the past decade. During economic downturns, funders generally become more conservative, funding only what they know, what they've previously funded, and usually at a lower \$ level. You will be hard-pressed to find funding from traditional sources as a new non-profit right now.

LMCC: If you could ask other artists or arts organizations one thing about their financials what would it be?

MD: I am now running a hybrid gallery space that is increasingly relying on the sale of art works. My question would be directed at other commercial galleries and would be simply this: Does your gallery business solely survive on the sales of artwork? I am curious to know. My understanding is that most galleries are either backed by people of wealth or are founded/directed by people who have personal wealth. This is not a judgment by any means. It would just be interesting to see what the gallery scene in NYC would look like if it solely consisted of actual profitable businesses. In other words, what would the art world look like if you removed wealth from it?

LMCC: If money were no object, how would you spend your time? How would this be similar to and different from what you are doing now?

MD: I would take on additional exhibition space to mount more shows of underknown artist on the national and international levels. I would spend my time doing more art historical research, critical writing, conducting interviews, and publishing catalogs about the artists I exhibit. I would also spend more time with my family.

LMCC: In your experience, what do you think is a key thing artists can learn from the practice of business? What do you think business can learn from the practice of artists?

MD: Artists are generally very good with money. They can realize very ambitious projects with practically no financial resources. I think businesses can learn from that. The goal of most of the artists I know is simply to make their work and to generally do good. This is at the center of the artist mindset. It is a good thing, but challenging to sustain for the long term. The goal of many of the business people I know is to make as much money as possible. Doing good is a lesser priority. The divide is profound.

Matthew Deleget is an abstract painter, curator, and founder of MINUS SPACE, a platform for reductive visual art on the international level, based in Brooklyn.
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