

COMMUNING WITH

DANIELLE URSCHEL

WATCHING
THE BEATS

BY K.D. SELF



photo by K.D. Self

Printmaker Danielle Urschel

In December 2017 and January 2018, the Bloomington Print Collective (with other local printmakers) exhibited a group show at the Vault on West Sixth Street. I chatted with one of the participants, Danielle Urschel (who has a BFA and MFA in printmaking from IU and is a 30-year Bloomington resident). Danielle has volunteered with various local arts projects, including the now-homeless performance space, The Void.

DANIELLE: “I’m a member of a cooperative called the Bloomington Print Collective. This group has existed for almost seven years. It started because there are a lot of artists in town who don’t have workspace. Especially if you are a printmaker, you need room and heavy equipment.”

“So many talented people leave Bloomington because, after being at IU, there is nowhere to continue to do work. I have family here, so I chose to stay. The Bloomington Print Collective began when local printmakers pooled equipment and rented a space. In the beginning, we had nothing, but we made a yellow light room and drying stands, all with the spirit of ‘we can do this.’ Over the years, members have come and gone, and things have changed. At first, we had open workshops where people could learn how to make prints. But, it was a lot of work for artists to volunteer and teach in addition to paying rent. From the start, amazing, really powerful people have helped.

We also tried to get outside assistance to keep workshops going; twice we applied for grants from the Bloomington Arts Commission. We didn’t get either grant. The process of talking with the council was kind of humiliating. Maybe the people on the board didn’t really understand what was involved with printmaking. In the end, we didn’t have enough people using the space to compete with performance groups and bigger events. It is as if we were too small to matter. When you have a handful of volunteers, you aren’t going to get hundreds of people, but we thought the teaching component was valuable. Anyway, we were trying to create a community project, but that didn’t work. Finally, about three years ago, we stopped doing workshops and eliminated the volunteer/educational aspect. Now, the collective is simply a group of printmakers who share space.”

DENEISE: You are also involved with the volunteer-fueled performance club The Void. Tell me about that.

DANIELLE: “The Void is another of those spaces where there was a void, hence the name. The club has been on South Rogers Street for two years. I’m just a volunteer, and it’s 100% volunteer run, nobody gets paid anything. One of The Void’s goals has been to support the music scene—local as well as touring bands. Truly an all-ages venue, in terms of both volunteers and audience—one soundman was in his 70s, one was 16—people attended events or worked there just because they loved music. But, The Void is closing. The building is going to be bulldozed so the city can build a parking lot. We’ve looked for other spaces but the search is problematic because the growth of the university and the growth of unaffordable housing seem to be consuming downtown.”

“When you have community spaces, artists are able to communicate about and work on their work, otherwise people can be so isolated. Artists and musicians need to feel they are part of a community. Things like First Fridays, that’s cool because it gets people out. And, the I Fell Gallery is also providing place for some artists to work and exhibit. All artists really want is to have space to work and to have people look at their work.”

“Something that really concerns me is the city of Bloomington’s approach to the arts includes branding, which seems a surface thing. To me, it’s like selling an idea where you don’t have to invest in the actual substance of the thing. It’s not informed by what’s actually happening, it’s informed by what you want to present to people. I am concerned about whether the city has any interest in retaining artists in the community or helping with resources for artistic development. City assistant director for the arts, Sean Starowitz, was quoted in *Bloom* magazine as saying: “I want to make sure that arts are brought to the table... as a creative approach to solving issues in the context of economic development.” Is that the vision of the place of art in the city—to ‘solve problems of economic development’? Is that the purpose of art? Art is about many things but I never think of it as a way to solve economic issues. And if that *is* the city’s vision for local art, I see why things are going the way they are going in terms of lack of resources allocated to emerging and pre-emerging artists.”

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"Creating art can be why you get up at five in the morning and work on something. It's this drive that comes out of you. Whether you are a musician or writer or painter or printmaker. At 50, I've seen this pattern over and over of art trying to swell up and come out and the question arises both as an individual and with the local artistic community, are you going to suppress that or are you going to encourage expression? That's what it comes down to, for me. I don't mean to disrespect what the city does. I like public art. But, I think the kind of art the city is funding does not represent the full picture."

DENEISE: *Not all art is 'pretty'; the dangerous can be beautiful. Do you envision a solution for emerging, seasoned, and status quo-challenging artists who struggle to find space?*

DANIELLE: "What would be wonderful is collective space where artists could learn from each other. There are communities that do support art studios and pre-emergent development. The word incubator is a word not really used much anymore, but an incubator could be a place where art might hatch."

DENEISE: *Artists of all ages—youngsters through seniors—might benefit from such a resource.*

DANIELLE: "Having volunteered for different things, I believe the impulse is there, but what it comes down to is property and money. Having space (especially downtown) means occupying property that tends to be more valuable as rental units than as an art space collective."

DENEISE: *The gentrification of downtown has definitely displaced artists over the past thirty years. In the 1990s, Second Story was a place for experimentation and showcasing original local music, not unlike what was happening at The Void. During the 1980s, artist studios and cheap apartments where artists lived were available downtown, especially in the Allen Building and Fountain Square. There was daily, lively conversation between artists about their work, just walking through the hallways of those buildings. That sense of community seems now gone.*



Ouroboros in the Poppies
(by Danielle Urschel; wood cut and lino cut print)

not loud and not challenging. A lot of the places we looked at for The Void were not suitable because you couldn't be loud. I have many artist friends who have moved away. What is here for them? Bloomington is an awesome community. But, is it getting less awesome because what we value as the character of the city is getting washed away? It feels as though Bloomington may be becoming 'Anytown'."

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DANIELLE: "Over the years, artists *have* tried to carve out community places, with different upswells--like there was the Art Hospital. People put a lot of time and effort into that, but it only lasted a couple of years. I believe the creative energy is still here, but it's underground; there's just no space."

"I would like to be optimistic and encouraging, but all these parts add up to artists being pushed out of town. People living in downtown areas don't want any controversy, everything has to be clean and