Artscape Youngplace: A new cultural and artistic hub

Artscape's newest space is dedicated to fostering creativity in West Toronto

It's a situation that happens again and again as cities grow: artists populate an area of town with low rents, bringing it to life with their creativity and artistic projects. The area becomes attractive to others as galleries, cafés, and other businesses start to move in, attracted by the burgeoning creative scene. People want to live there, and the increased demand makes rents go up, often pricing artists out of the area whose cultural cachet they can take credit for.

The West Queen West neighbourhood — roughly squared between Bathurst, Dufferin, Adelaide, and Dundas — may have gone this route if not for the works of art organizations like Artscape. In 1995, Artscape opened their first building in the area with affordable work and live/work studios for artists. “Our interest in 1995 was really about being a catalyst,” said Tim Jones, CEO and president of Artscape, “Certainly serving the space needs of the arts community, but also being a catalyst for the revitalization of the area.”
Art and the people who create it can do wonders for a neighbourhood: “They’re powerful agents of change in the community,” said Jones. He elaborated: “When artists move into a neighbourhood, they bring all kinds of interesting things. First of all, they get engaged more than other people. They tend to get involved. They volunteer; they’re community activists. The public around them starts to change: everything from graffiti, to public art installations, to community gardens — all kinds of things. That kind of energy and vibrancy attracts other people.”

In West Queen West, this has led to a creative explosion and turned the neighbourhood into one of the most well-known and best places for art in the city. Artscape is dedicated to providing affordable spaces that allow artists to remain in the area and continue to contribute to its growth.

On November 20 of this year, the doors opened to Artscape’s fourth initiative in the neighbourhood, Artscape Youngplace. Named for the Michael Young Family Foundation, who provided the lead donation that made the building possible, Youngplace is housed in the century-old Shaw Street School. The historic school was shut down in 2000, due to decreased enrollment, but has now been revitalized and repurposed with studio space and offices for a wide variety of not-for-profit arts organizations and independent artists.

“The entire building is filled with phenomenal arts organizations and artists who will be, I think, making a huge impact,” said Natasha Mytnowych, University of Toronto alumna and managing director of Artscape Youngplace. “From Luminato, to SKETCH, to Small World Music, to the many individual artists. I think there’s going to be tons of creative events and activities and all kinds of things happening here that people can take part in.”

Space in the building is below market value, keeping space affordable for artists at all levels. The first and second floors include

- Artistic codes of silence
- Threading our cultural roots
- Throwing Open the Barn Doors
- The cultural revolution will be digitized
- U of T’s most artistic bathrooms
a number of Flex Studios, which can be rented out by individuals or community groups. The public can use the space as well, by spending time in the Urban Living Lounge and Café, or by browsing the art exhibitions in the hallways and stairwells.

The spirit of the school is retained in its new life; for instance, the Urban Living Lounge features the original classroom clocks on the wall, all frozen at 8:30 — the time at which they stopped when the school ceased operations.

Community members were actively involved in the creation of the project, with the use of a Community Advisory Committee during the design and construction phase of the project. Now, they are embracing the building. “They’re very excited,” said Mytnowych. “It’s actually been really tricky in the past couple of weeks to stop people from coming in.”

Visit Artscape Youngplace at 180 Shaw Street or artscapeyoungplace.ca.