

THE UP SIDE OF

# I FELL GALLERY

## WATCHING THE BEATS

BY K.D. SELF

*The I Fell Gallery (at Fourth & Rogers, beside the Rainbow Bakery) has become an impressive exhibition space for established as well as emerging local artists. In an effort to learn more about their expanding mission, I chatted with I Fell founder, artist and architectural preservationist Cynthia Brubaker.*

**Cindy:** My involvement with the I Fell building and gallery grew from my obsession with architectural preservation. I have been involved with numerous preservation and rehab projects, mostly in Bloomington, and my favorite kind of architecture is industrial. In 2010, I was put in touch with someone looking for a ceramic studio location, and this former auto showroom, the 1930s I Fell building, was available. Real estate is expensive downtown, but our long-term lease arrangement, which included doing a lot of rehab work ourselves, has allowed us to stay.

In terms of space usage, we had a pretty good vision from the beginning. The ceramic studio moved, but individual artist studios are situated around the perimeter of current gallery areas. We never envisioned the gallery space to be so large, but in late 2012, after Jeremy Sweet's devotion show was a hit, Dale Enochs encouraged me to do monthly shows.

Since then, despite having no paid staff, every month we provide space for different exhibitions, including shows by I Fell resident artists every January. A gallery committee makes decisions on what gets shown, and a resident artist—

Angela Caldwell—is the first contact for rental space. We also have a number of wonderful gallery assistants/interns (mostly undergrads from Ivy Tech and/or IU). In addition to the larger main gallery, there has been a lot of interest in the smaller "pop-up" space; artists can rent that area for First Fridays (or, occasionally, for a full month). Previously, nobody seemed to know we were here, but that is changing. And, I want people to realize we are expanding usages. Beyond the visual arts, we have video, poetry, and film performances.

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For example, the Cicada Cinema folks rented space to screen *The Florida Project*; they previously showed films at the Void. With the loss of the Void, there is some discussion about allowing musical performances here. However, we try to be sensitive that usage involving loud volume levels is timed in collaboration with our resident artists' needs. The way the I Fell is funded is basically through gallery space rentals; commissions from gallery sales; and resident artist studio rentals. But we *are* open to new uses. Nevertheless, the most exciting thing right now is increasing interest

in the art gallery. We have a lot of great material coming from artists wanting to show and perform. And, I am always happily surprised at how much great art there is in this town.

**Deneise:** Since you will be across-the-street neighbors, how do you think the (coming in April) FAR Center for the Contemporary Arts will affect the I Fell Gallery.

**Cindy:** The difference between the FAR Center and the I Fell Gallery is that we are very much a ground-up entity. We have slowly evolved to this point, and I have always looked to the people around me to be part of that process. I have had a strong vision—this is an industrial building, and I want to keep that as part of how we deal physically with the space. However, I don't have money; we have created this gallery by doing work ourselves. Unlike several other galleries in town, we do not sell products, and we have no subsidy. By comparison, across the street, one day they are going to open the door and it will be all ready. Folks who do have resources have undertaken a very intense spatial restructuring. It will be nice, upscale. And, the fact that it is there should attract people to this corner who might not come otherwise. On a marketing level, this is a good thing. Also, it will mean the I Fell will no longer be alone on the edge of the downtown arts scene; now there will be two art centers at Fourth and Rogers. How great that there is such arts diversity in Bloomington?

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