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Collective Goal

With six new members, Little Berlin is poised to reinvent the Philly art scene.

By Roberta Fallon

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Eight is enough: The members of Little Berlin's collective (pictured here with owner Martha Savery's husband) already have an ambitious schedule.

Forging ahead in the art world when sales are down, galleries are closing and even major museums are laying off workers might seem counterintuitive. But **Little Berlin's** Martha Savery and Kristen Neville-Taylor are doing it anyway. After a year of running their alternative warehouse space in Kensington, Savery and Neville-Taylor are expanding their two-person enterprise into an eight-member collective with an ambitious lineup of monthly shows. The new Little Berlin launches this month, with a group show by Savery and Neville-Taylor as well as the six new members: Robert "Tim" Pannell, Tyler Kline, Masha Badinter, Alex Gartlemann, Beth Heinly and Sam Belkowitz.

Savery is excited about the group's potential and hopes Little Berlin will become a destination for art lovers in Philadelphia as well as those from outside the city. "We don't want to be a traditional collective," she says. "The members aren't expected to do the usual show-and-tell artwork, but will have a say in what we do as an organization."

After the members' debut show, which opens this week, Little Berlin will organize shows for other artists. Since membership fees are only \$25—which won't even generate enough money to print promotional show cards—the group will have to work cheaply in order to run a successful business. As with many DIY collectives, donations from members, exhibiting artists and supporters will help supplement membership dues and cover costs. Labor and materials will be donated, and for some shows, like Tim Pannell's upcoming May show "This Is the End," applicants who want to participate will be asked to pay a \$5 entry fee.

Savery says they're filing the papers for 501(c)3 nonprofit status in March, a process that can take up to 12

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months to complete but will ultimately make it possible for the organization to receive revenue from foundations and government groups.

Savery's goal is to have the eight collective members—coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, from glass art and sculpture to comics and animation—expand and enhance Little Berlin's programming by reaching out to unknown artists. New members Alex Gartelmann, Pannell and Beth Heinly echo this sentiment.

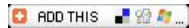
Gartelmann—known for his shows at the South Philly's My House gallery that he co-founded last year—brings a large roster of names and enthusiasm for collaboration. Bringing people together to make art is what it's all about, says Gartelmann: "It's going to be great for the city." The sculptor is also excited about working within Little Berlin's space, whose high ceilings and concrete floors are perfect for experimental art. "It's an amazing space," Gartelmann says, adding there's a great outdoor courtyard available for art as well.

Tim Pannell has been impressed by the "good vibe" of the members. The group is getting acquainted fast through marathon weekend meetings in preparation for the March show. They'll be collaborating together on something that will represent the group, says Beth Heinly, adding only that the work in progress is growing organically. Heinly, a drawing artist and Philly Comix Jam member, is organizing October's exhibit, which features Gabriel Boyce and Preston Link. (Full disclosure: Heinly is the ad coordinator for my blog.)

Little Berlin's plucky determination isn't unlike other alternative art groups in Philadelphia. Vox Populi, Nexus, Muse, Highwire and Third Street Gallery have sustained their enterprises through hard work, drive and ambition. Outlets like Space 1026, Padlock and Pifas have survived without nonprofit status and without any visible means of support. My House turned one last month and seems viable. FLUXspace, barely a year old, just received nonprofit status and hopes to become a community art center for the neighborhood. Meanwhile, Tiger Strikes Asteroid, another artist collective, opens this month in the Vox Building in Chinatown.

While the alternate scene might seem scruffy, groups like Little Berlin can produce classy, cutting-edge exhibitions, which are great for the city.

For more on the Philadelphia art scene go to fallonandrosos.blogspot.com.



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