

were doing as one of inevitability.

In form and design, The Sideshow emulated the Goloka art shows, but benefited from its key location in the Cannery and pieces in the *Dayton City Paper* and *Dayton Daily News*. In the end, it drew an audience of more than a thousand.

And had you been in attendance that night, you would have surely noticed Dayton artist Leigh Waltz. On this occasion, he sported bright orange coveralls, attire as loud and odd as his personality – an appealing combination of world-weary insouciance and childlike enthusiasm. A charismatic man, Leigh is less likely to talk than to hold forth.

An adjunct professor at Sinclair Community College and a director of the Dayton Live Art Network, Leigh is also an Iraq War veteran and currently has a solo exhibit, "Taking Exception," at the Dayton Convention Center running through April 30.

Last May, I spoke with Leigh about his feelings on the Sideshow and Goloka events. While he told me he thought they could be evidence of an emerging scene, he was reluctant to call it a movement.

"It's just what artists do," he said. "They like people to see their work. The scene is flexing its muscles, but for the sleepy herd in Dayton, it absolutely is new. The city hasn't necessarily paid attention to them yet or realized how the community benefits by having real artists make real art, but think of it not as a movement. There's no organization. There's no manifesto. There's no leader. We don't have an Andre Breton or a Dali."

For Laurana, the public's overwhelmingly positive reception of the Sideshow indicated something rumbling near the surface. In fact, at the time, The Sideshow seemed to be a sign of something new growing in the downtown scene – if not exactly a movement, then, at least, the potential for one.

"And it makes it more organic, and more stable when it happens in a natural way," she told me. "There's something brewing in this town, and it's going to pop."

Then came The Circus. Laurana saw it as the next logical step after the success of The Sideshow, but – though Laurana is a member of every committee and has been elected chair of the board of trustees – don't call her a leader.

"It makes me feel a little bit weird," she said. "I understand that I started it and I got all these people together, but if it weren't for them this project would be going nowhere."

To be frank, I didn't expect much.

Let's face it. Artists aren't known for their great administrative skills. And when you think of an artist, you're not likely to picture a reliable, down to earth sort. The last word that springs to mind is "conformist." No, you're more likely to think: Individual – with a capital "I" – the kind with a volatile, unpredictable – one might even say flaky – personality.

So who could blame you for assuming that a collection of such individuals would be incapable of working together to achieve a common goal? I mean, really, how could that not be a complete disaster?

But you'd be wrong all the same – at least in this case.

Last month, I finally found the time to visit Patricia Kambitsch's studio at Front Street Building Co. for a general membership meeting. It was a bit of a shock. I had pictured something romantic and cool, but naive, just some artists hanging out in a studio, drinking coffee and talking big. What I found was quite different.

The meetings were in fact conducted in a rather dry, formal manner, and much of the time was devoted to laying the groundwork for the organization. Who would have thought that starting an artist collective would be such a tedious, time-consuming process? Meeting after meeting, it was the same: bylaws, discussions of the decision-making process, membership qualifications, trustee nominations, a detailed business plan, et cetera, et cetera.

This was hard work, and these people were responsible. They actually knew what they were doing.

"We had to figure out who we are and what we're about," Laurana later explained. "Not only did we have to go through all that to become a legal entity, we need to know who we are as a moral entity, because without that it's too easy to lose sight of what's important down the road."

As it stands today, after four months of administrative tedium, The Circus is on its way to incorporating as a not-for-profit. The bylaws have been written, a board of trustees elected. And even though much work still lies ahead, the upcoming benefit show, more than just being the organization's first public outing, has come to represent a sort of collective sigh for the members.

We're artists, after all, and we're all about the art. And now, at long last, The Circus is about the art too.

Recently, Jenn's '93 Oldsmobile, after having been broken into 14 times and set on fire once, finally gave up the ghost, leaving her without a ride. So one night, when she needed to make copies of the flyers that she and others had designed to promote the benefit show, I drove her to Kinko's in Centerville, the suburb where we both spent our high school years.

During the ride, we talked about how, after living downtown for so long, the suburbs now seemed to us so desolate and strange – these wide expanses of pavement with its un-peopled streets – and how it was all relatively shiny and new, despite the fact there was something sterile and unpleasant about it.

Once we arrived under the sickly fluorescent lights at Kinko's, there were 19 types of flyers that Jenn was obsessed with getting copied and cut just the right way. It cost too much to make them all color copies, so she made only a few and then copied the rest onto a variety of colored paper.

When it came to collating, she was a tyrant. The color copies had to be mixed in with the colored paper copies, and the designs had to be varied.

When I placed a flyer on one stack, she stopped me, saying, "No that's the same color as the one beneath it!"

I shook my head, doubting such attention to detail was really necessary.

"What does it matter?" I asked her.

"The designs and the colors have to be different, because we're a collective of individuals – not some hive mind."

Only Jenn, I thought, could read so much into collating flyers.

My friend Jenn – she's not what you would call a "normal" person. Then again, neither am I. But who is really? As far as I'm concerned, none of us are normal.

And neither are you.

Join The Circus.