Anya Klapischak walked aimlessly. Her footsteps were muffled on the dark wood floor, her voice reflecting off of her taffy-pink walls. The 26-year-old conversed with her sister, conversation as unmemorable as the countless faces she passed every day as she walked out of her house. Always anxious, Klapischak's mind was far from her call. She was thinking about her dream.

Sixteen months later, the bright walls are adorned with paintings, the dark floors occupied with racks of antique clothes, every piece of space filled with the fruition of Klapischak's goals.

The Hosting is a gallery and artist residency program started and run by Klapischak at her 207 N. State Street home. She hosts art shows, galleries, workshops, and Generous Market, a place for artists and people in the community to sell art, clothes, and a myriad of other items.

"It's an ever-evolving space that's malleable to the needs of the artists that I'm working with for the respective event," Klapischak said. "I ask the artists what their needs are and then I act as a facilitator and producer to meet those needs." She believes in The Hosting not only as an important factor in the community but as a small spark of rebellion.

"The government and larger institutions don't like it when we come together in the spirit of creative generosity and creative endeavors, and I try to promote a space and promote a philosophy in which that is something we can center a community around," Klapischak said. "The moments that we're in here and we're supporting each other are moments that we're not playing into what's happening in the news. It's political by focusing on art rather than on politics."

Artists who participate in events at The Hosting are benefited with a community of friends. The welcoming atmosphere of Klapischak's home allows people like Shingo Brown, a 27-year-old artist, to support their creative endeavors.

"You need money to survive, and the more money you have gives you more freedom to do art projects or be able to dedicate more time to it," Brown said. "It's not just the creative process, it's figuring out how art and being creative fits in the lifestyle that you're trying to create."

The Hosting is an important part of that lifestyle for Brown. He has been able to join Klapischak's community to sell vintage clothes, using the profit to support his art, which varies in medium from illustrations to murals to silversmithing. He's learned many of these skills from his own friends and mentors, but doesn't feel that his two years at The Art Institute of Atlanta, from which he received no degree, helped him along his chosen path.

"I wanted to do graphic design… but my focus was making money, and that ruined my whole creative process," Brown said. "After two years I got an internship at ABV Gallery in Atlanta, and that changed my life. I don't want to be a graphic designer. I see all these people that we're working with at the gallery pursuing a passion for creating and art."

After moving to Ann Arbor, Brown has continued to find opportunities. "I've worked with this dope skateboard company, I've done t-shirt graphics and skateboards," Brown said. "It's not just the artwork, they're supporting the scene, and I feel like that's really important."

Ethics is important to Brown, and it's often a way that he finds people and businesses that he wants to work with, and a way that he knows when to turn down offers. Brown has previously taught youth summer camps at the Ann Arbor Art Center. Angela Lenhardt, the ceramics studio manager at the Art Center, thinks that it is an important part of Ann Arbor's creative community.

"The Ann Arbor Art Center is a great resource for artists," Lenhardt said. "We have monthly meet-and-greets where we invite artists to come and listen to a topic, usually something related to the practice of art and the business of art. We also offer exhibition experience. You can apply to different exhibitions or even curate your own show." All of this provides both professional and amateur artists a venue to grow their creative skills.

Lenhardt feels lucky to be working where she is. After graduating from the University of Michigan, Lenhardt found it hard to find work in her chosen field, ceramics. "I worked for 10 years as a florist," Lenhardt said. "You wouldn't think of it as something in the arts, but when you get down to it it's all design, color, and pattern, just like we use for everything else. My art training really helped me with that experience and it made it an easy thing to choose. I would have liked to have been doing more clay at that time, but I had small kids and had to make different decisions."

Lenhardt feels that the value of art in our community isn't as strong as it should be. "I have big pieces where I'm really exploring my craft and what I consider my art, and working very hard on them," she said. "For me to put a price tag on that to sell it is quite high, and at that point it becomes prohibitive." Because many people are unwilling to spend hundreds of dollars on pieces done by complete strangers, Lenhardt has found it nearly impossible to support herself with those pieces.

But, like Brown, Lenhardt has found ways to support her creative pieces. "I also make a lot of smaller things that I don't necessarily consider all of what my focus is, but I'm able to use those smaller things to then inform the bigger things that I do," Lenhardt said. "Those smaller things, those $20-50 price points, that's what sells. That's what gets really hard is finding that balance between the things you know you're gonna sell and the things that drive your passion."

Education was important to getting Lenhardt to a place where she was able to find balance and stability, but coming out of school, making money can be difficult. Alison Franco is an art major and oil painter who is graduating from Eastern Michigan University this year with a BFA. She works as a gallery assistant at the Art Center and is searching for a career.

"I'd like to be a practicing artist," Franco said. "I know that I also like working in galleries and I like working with other artists because I enjoy the community of it. For me, in addition to needing income as an artist, it's a very solo activity, so I need the social aspect of it, and I think that's why I like the gallery work."

Although she's able to support herself with her work at the Art Center, the path to selling paintings to make a living has been hard to find. She's never successfully sold a piece, but she's currently working on a commission for a mutual friend. "They asked for a specific style, which I was fine with, but then they were also like "whatever you want," so it's finding that happy medium of their style and what you do," Franco said.

Despite struggling to find people to buy her work, Franco enjoys the artists that she meets at the Art Center. “I like meeting people that are local [or not local], and they come in and everybody’s got a unique story,” Franco said. “It exposes you to a whole bunch of different kinds of artwork, and it’s important to stay on top of not only the medium that you work in but what everybody else is doing.”

Working as a gallery assistant has also given her a unique view of the way that the Ann Arbor community values art. She often hears comments like “why is it so expensive?” from customers looking at the art’s pricing. “You have to realize that the Art Center itself is a nonprofit,” Franco said. “They need to earn money to keep the programs going and keep their staff, and then also the artists need to make a living, so that’s how that pricing is based. Sometimes I try to convey that to customers, and a lot of people will be very understanding.”

Even artists coming right out of high school are able to find a place in the Ann Arbor community. Poet Kyndall Flowers, a 2017 Pioneer graduate who dual-enrolled at Community in her senior year, is Klapischak’s assistant at The Hosting, and an artist in residence. She works on the Hosting’s website and plans events. “Ann Arbor is really great with mentors and role models and people that are already doing it, already made space [to make art],” said Flowers. “It made it easy for me to come in and try things out.”

Ann Arbor provides many opportunities for artists to live their most creative lives; from Klapischak and Flower’s The Hosting to Lenhardt and Franco’s Ann Arbor Art Center, art, although not necessarily valued highly by the community, has been allowed to flourish. Artists surround themselves with effective teams of friends and peers and utilize side hustles to support their work. Young or old, educated or not, the passion of Ann Arbor’s artists has created a vibrant, powerful group that influences the culture of the city and supports the creativity of those brave enough to choose it.