The Red Currant Business Plan:
A Reflective Blueprint and Prospective Roadmap for my Art Practice

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Abstract

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This thesis will reflect upon and create a plan for the future of my art practice, Red Currant. Red Currant, an art and tech company, creates devices for connecting people and tools for art making. The structure of this paper will be a hybridization of a formal thesis paper and a business plan to properly reflect on the milestones achieved thus far in starting this company and to plan for future developments. This structure best suits the companies present position as it begins to take on fruition into the outside world.
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Executive Summary

Company Description:

Red Currant was founded in 2018 by Dan Winter who wanted to create better, up-to-date, and cutting-edge tools and conceptual devices for artists and beyond. Red Currant makes devices for human connection, tools for art making, and open source plans for greater accessibility. Red Currant is “Fruit for Thought”.

Red Currant Manifesto: These are the guiding principles of Red Currant.

• Work exoterically- Red Currant creates with the everyday person in mind.

• Bring humans together.

• Create and develop art making tools that chain art stores do not, will not, or cannot carry.

• Share.

• And most importantly—HAVE SOME FUN!

Products and Services:

Red Currant’s focus will be on creating conceptual devices that bring humans together and designing art making tools. These tools and devices are open sourced to allow ideas to spread and be adopted more rapidly. Some of these objects are serious in solving art making problems, some are reflective in asking users to think about certain
topics, and some will be ridiculous in creating entertainment value. The aim is to have an equal mix of the three types of objects.

Red Currant’s website, www.RedCurrantTech.com, will serve as a resource for entertainment, open source art-making developments, and regularly updated information on the company’s movements, including future forays into event planning. In addition, visitors will be able to download open source plans to recreate a variety of Red Currant’s projects and be able to contribute towards these projects.

Target Market:

Red Currant’s target market will be artists and makers while remaining accessible to the everyday person. This target market was chosen based on the nature and intended use of the devices.

Marketing and Sales Strategy:

Red Currant will utilize the social media platforms Instagram and Youtube by posting video and photographs to reach and promote its devices and tools. In addition, Red Currant will use its website as a platform to distribute open source plans. Regularly updated videos, documentation photos, and news will be available for browsing. Users can sign up for a quarterly newsletter sent through Mail Chimp.
The Competition:

Red Currant does not see itself in competition with other artists and companies. Seeing others working in similar areas will be taken as opportunity for collaboration. While other entities could technically steal Red Currant’s open sourced ideas and profit from them, this company will spend its time focusing on creating new and improved versions of objects and working with those who see the market in a mutual manner. Red Currant will rely on its ability to adapt and overcome problems to quickly prototype and invent in uncharted waters to overcome toxic companies that may see open source companies as a way to steal designs for profit. Red Currant will be not hindered by this type of competition.
Introduction

A good education, conversation, adventure, or anything worth doing—starts from a deep place of not knowing. Although I am starting my own small tech company, I still find myself sneaking out to go to the woods. My favorite type of woods are those that still have the opportunity for getting lost. Freeform trails, thin brush, and the minimum of a few square miles are the essential ingredients in my ideal forest. I start on the existing trails. If it is an unmarked trail, we are off to a good start. I walk for some time until my curiosity is piqued like a child who has run off from their parents for the first time. I lean into this freedom, break from the trail, and will wander for miles until I am definitely lost. At that point I feel the most relaxed and at peace. It becomes an empty space for thoughts to be laid out and formulated into new architecture. It is my favorite place for thinking. I usually find what I am looking for and begin to figure my way back or pick a direction and walk until I hit a road.

This is largely the reason why as an artist I wanted to found my own tech company. It is a new and exciting wilderness to explore. It is a space that I am lost in. Technology is a territory I have grown up alongside. It has been pushed in my face since adolescence, and now it is my turn to push back. Working in an exoteric, open source manner, Red Currant creates solutions for problems and non-problems that range from simple art-making desires to more complex interconnectivity issues.
Company Description

Legal Structure:

The summer of 2019 I will be turning Red Currant into a Limited Liability Corporation. The LLC will be key as it releases me from personal liability. With plans to make larger runs of reproducible art works for the general public and combine that with planning events, it will be beneficial to have that layer of protection. Furthermore, after visiting multiple DIY art spaces in Baltimore and having seen many in Pittsburgh, it seems to be the best structure for these pop-up activities that I would like Red Currant to be participating in.

Product Overview:

“Rat Nest”, my thesis exhibition, was used as a showcase to display the products in development by Red Currant. When planning the exhibition, I was inspired by trade shows in what that might look like in a gallery to display what I was doing with Red Currant. I displayed some of my works utilizing airplane wire and suspended them from the ceiling. This gave them a new presence that allowed viewers to walk around and look at them from different angle and pushed some of them off of walls/tables to be freely interacted with in the space. A zine was also available to guide viewers through the space and explain each piece.
Fig. 1. Panorama of “Rat Nest”

Fig. 2. Exhibition Guides
Graphic posters were utilized on the gallery windows to promote the various lines of products being shown. The line up of products shown were as follows:

* **Mega-Brush 1.0:** A six-foot long brush with a flip top that shoots paint canisters at high velocity. This device will eliminate any feelings of monotony an artist may be feeling.

* **Vibe Rings (Beta Version):** An electronic ring device used for connecting people. When users fist bump each other while wearing *Vibe Rings* the glow-in-the-dark finger accessories vibrate creating a positive connection between people. A DJ set is performed in conjunction with this piece in order to create the proper environment.

* **Glitch Cam 2.0:** A digital camera that has in-camera effects, unique to digital photography.

* **Underground Art Market:** A space for artists to trade art for art outside of an art market that is typically fueled by monetary gain.

* **Elsie Cam 1.0:** A camera that does not shoot selfies, but only group photos. This is an extraterrestrial concept in a space that is becoming rampant with selfie-taking.
Fig. 3. Posters in gallery windows during “Rat Nest”

Fig. 4. Posters in gallery windows during “Rat Nest”
Development Stage:

Red Currant will be operational by the end of the summer of 2019. It will roll out one or two finished products to start, a few open source projects that users can go onto the website and build/contribute to, and a series of videos for entertainment. Finished products will go onto the website’s online store. However, Red Currant will also open source the plans to these products. The main goal is to build a web and public presence in the development stage. Open sourcing finished products aids in this goal. This reason is outlined by Github’s online *Open Source Guides*. They state, “Open source is powerful because it lowers the barriers to adoption, allowing ideas to spread quickly”.¹ Red Currant constituents can purchase an object at the luxury of not having to build it. One could also build their own and even modify it if they like, allowing larger access to Red Currant’s ideas. Videos will be key for gaining web presence and putting together events will garner public engagement. To further spread and develop ideas, Red Currant will be looking closely for partnerships.

Financials:

The initial research and development, events, and all other startup costs for the first couple years will be funded by the founder using savings and working other jobs. Red Currant intends to self-fund. Kickstarter, investors, and other such sources will potentially be utilized when developing and working on certain projects. However, Red Currant will largely avoid taking loans and taking on debt, with the exception of supply

meeting demand tasks. For example, net 30, 60, 90 day payments for batches of my projects could restrict cash flow, crippling the business for that period of time creating a justifiable reason to operate with debt for that period of time. When Red Currant begins to hit profitability, the owner intends to avoid profiteering and rather reinvest these funds into the business to create growth and potentially job opportunities. Red Currant will begin taking losses against the company after the LLC has been secured.

Leadership:

So why would an artist want to start a tech company? It is an expansive wilderness I have been neighbors with since birth. I have grown up with electronics yet have known little in how they function. My early childhood goals exemplify these early interests.

Fig. 5. Childhood goals
I completed my BFA in photography and became a photographer, utilizing technology to create my art. However when I came to George Washington University to complete my Masters in Fine Art, I took classes like “Art of Innovation”. We explored art inventions and the strange world of Chindogu and had access to manufacturing technologies. It rekindled my early fascinations with creating my own technologies and became the new direction that I came to grad school searching for. Rather than using available consumer tools to make my art, I decided to create my own. I started hacking instruments and other devices such as cameras to exploit new possibilities hidden within their circuits. It was a way for me to begin to understand how electronics work.

Fig. 6. Hacked keyboard
Fig. 7. Hacked voice changer

Fig. 8. Hacked keyboard
As the founder of Red Currant, I will own and operate the company as my artistic practice. This allows me to experiment extensively on projects that aid in art making, create exoteric value, and most importantly bring humans together. Beyond running Red Currant, I will keep producing music under the moniker, DJ Danimal, allowing Danimal’s influence to mix with Red Currant occasionally. Seeing live music events as a space for people to release animalistic impulses, I utilize coarse and primal sounds made from hacked and DIY instruments, sampled pornographic and animal videos, and other experimental recording techniques to create the instrumentation in my house/techno influenced music. This coincides with projects such as *Vibe Rings*, which require a DJ set to create the proper environment whenever they are exhibited or given away at an event. In the future, I will be looking for other DJ’s to collaborate with on this project through Red Currant.

Red Currant’s Target Audience:

When making my work, I think about what my close friends would think, most of whom are not artists. They work as welders, mechanics, construction workers, and technicians. I ask myself if my art would be something they would understand. Would they participate in it? Would they think my work is cool in the same way I think their work is cool? They are some of my best critics.

The nature of Red Currant’s art making tools are more experimental and DIY. These projects are aimed to be shared with artists and makers who would find the most value in partaking in such projects. Red Currant’s target audience will be artists, makers,
and the everyday person. When creating devices for connecting people, I want the devices to be more humanity based. It is most important to focus on a broader goal of getting people to interact and making these devices physically and conceptually accessible to the everyday person.

Products and Services:

I question the art store. For the vast majority of artists, a trip to the art store is magical. While these storefronts are filled with fetishistic items we love, I cannot help but see aisles of constraints. Why is a paint brush designed the way it is? Why can it not have bristles on both ends? As a partaker in skateboard culture, I know there are contests. However, if one skates to win contests, the entire point of riding a skateboard has been lost. If rules are being applied to the raw tools and materials before the conception of the art work has even started, there is a loss of potential energy or perhaps a stock pile of energy we have yet to discover.

Arte Povera exists. Bricolage exists. A long lineage of artists and contemporary artists use all sorts of free-spirited materials that do not come from the art store. There are even those that blend experimental materials with commercially available materials. The rampant experimentation with materials and techniques interests me the most about these art movements. These artists typically use found materials, which at first glance may appear limiting. However, in this excessive world, even high end luxury items such as Dubai supercars get abandoned. As owners try to escape strict debt laws, they leave their supercars behind in parking garages and airport parking lots. Over 3,000 turned up in
2011.2 The world’s waste provides an extensive range of available materials, from soiled paper on the sidewalk to Ferraris in Dubai parking lots. That discovery in using unconventional materials motivates me in designing my own art making tools and wanting to share them with others. Open sourcing these tools allows for others to outfit them for their needs. I look forward to viewing how others might remix my ideas and seeing an entire toolbox of applications form. I imagine a world where paint brushes not only disperse paint but shoot laser beams, style your hair, and build your sculptures.

Glitchh Cam:

I got into photography in high school and pursued it for my undergraduate degree. I have had the opportunity to shoot with a vast array of film and digital cameras as well as other experimental processes. Out of all these gadgets and techniques, the Holga remains my favorite photographic device. Holgas are cheap, plastic film cameras known for their red and orange light leaks, the inspiration for some Instagram filters. However, the rapid acquisition of digital photographs, cost effectiveness of digital shooting, and digital editing capabilities give digital photography advantages over film. I wanted to create a digital camera that has in-body camera manipulations much like the Holga, but I did not want just a filter. I wanted something that was authentic to what a digital camera is.

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There are two iterations of the *Glitchh Cam*, both of which employ a technique called circuit bending. This hacking technique employed by a subculture of individuals involves finding short circuits on toy instruments and other noise-making and visual devices, then manipulating them by soldering in their own buttons, contact pins, and other modes of connections. Flipping the switch on these connections then triggers the found short circuit, creating a glitch. Reed Ghazala is credited as being circuit bending’s originator. In an interview with *Motherboard* he said, “When I came up with the term circuit bending it was actually based upon the idea of mind-bending, a mind bending experience, this is what we talked about back then”. Circuit bending is a form of manipulation that someone with even little knowledge of electronics can take part in.

*Glitchh Cam 1.0* is a is a hacked Nikon Cool Pix. I utilized a micro controller and an array of transistors to act as switches that turn the short circuits on at random. With four different short circuits, I had four glitch effects with an occasional outburst of a random effect. The 1.0 version allowed me to perfect this part of the circuit.

*Glitchh Cam 2.0* was built around a basic digital camera circuit with an added recharging circuit, LiPo battery, shutter switch, power switch, and my glitch controlling circuit. The glitch controlling circuit was a breakthrough for me in terms of circuit creation and coding. The hardware was then housed in a laser cut, acrylic body.

I have made multiple attempts at a 3.0 version where I design my own digital camera circuit rather than relying on another company. By doing this I could have the

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circuit boards printed with the bent connections and my glitch circuit together on one board. This would make it more reliable, more compact, and less likely to fail over time, something I have noticed can happen with hacked electronics. However, the digital camera is complex. One of the major contributors to digital imaging, Victor M. Tyler, exclaimed in a lecture he gave at Yale that there are more car companies than there are camera companies, and it is easier for one to design a car than it is a digital camera.4 What happens when the art-making tool becomes so complex due to the vast majority of people contributing to its design that it is no longer accessible to the individual? That question is where Red Currant has landed.

Presently, I feel as though I have come to a fork in the road on the 3.0 version of this project. One idea that has formed from the complexity of this problem is to create a digital camera so simple it would read less data than a camera with a single pixel by utilizing a photo resistor. A photo-resistor is a component that determines allows electricity to pass through it based on how bright its environment is. This component controls lights that come on when it gets dark outside. Feeding the analog data of this component through a micro controller gives a reading from 0-255 based on the brightness. By reading this data over a period of time, I could then store that data set and use it to form some type of image or print. This would be an extremely minimal form of digital photography utilizing only one characteristic of light, brightness, to create the image. This an entirely new project will become a future Red Currant exploration.

I see another path to completing the 3.0 version in improving upon what I have managed to accomplish so far, my glitch controlling circuit. Rather than trying to create essentially just to hack it, it would make more sense to design my glitch controlling circuit to be easily adaptable to other cameras. It is very easy to find test dummy cameras at thrift stores, Letgo, and Craigslist for low to no cost, due to the quick obsolescence provided by consumerism. I imagine the 3.0 version to be a small 3D box holding the glitch controlling circuit that would be attached to the outside of the camera and the wires to control the points could be run through a drilled hole in the camera body. Users could easily create their own *Glitchh Cams*, or I could quickly make small runs of them.

In my thesis exhibition, I used the camera to shoot part of the video that went with *Mega-Brush 1.0* and had the *Glitchh Cam 2.0* on display on a pedestal in an acrylic box. I chose to show this delicate camera in this way so people would understand it is not an object for handling. Rather than just display it on the gallery’s white pedestal, I took the pedestal and painted it. I utilized stencils to give it a more industrial-manufactured look.

![Glitchh Cam 2.0 on customized pedestal](image-url)

Fig. 9. *Glitchh Cam 2.0* on customized pedestal
Artist Sarah Lucas influenced this personalized pedestal. When talking about *Still Life*, 1992 and her decision for the way it was displayed, she stated,

> I thought if I built a plinth, or even if I built a mantelpiece, it would be formal in a way that might take the lightness and the humor out of the photos. That’s when the idea of the bike came in. It was just knocking around. I could have put them on something else but I wound up putting them on a bike because it was handy. The bike’s obviously very lively and sort of busy as an object, and that left all the life in the photos.\(^5\)

Her use of the bike was a genius anti-commercial move. In the present and future, I will create my own methods of display to avoid other languages that standardized display methods carry. In the future Red Currant plans to add these new display methods to its repertoire of open source projects.

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I believe the 3.0 version and future of this project lies in the glitch controlling circuit I developed. I will experiment with a solder-less method of connecting the wires to make it more accessible for people. Also, I will experiment with changing the glitches based on sound rather than time delay, making it an effect that is triggered by environment. This will also make its effects more dynamic for cameras that also shoot video. I will then release the circuit by the end of summer 2019.

Fig. 11. *Glitchh Cam 1.0* self portrait
Vibe Rings:

*Vibe Rings*, an electronic device designed to connect humans in the same room as one another, come in three different sizes to fit a wide variety of fingers. When users fist bump, they magnetically connect, completing a circuit that makes them vibrate. The simple circuit consists of a battery and small vibration motor. The electronics are housed in a 3D printed ring I designed. They are packaged in a small cardboard box accompanied by a zine that acts as an instruction manual informing participants how to use the rings. I used a special glow in the dark PLA filament to print the rings so other users could identify others wearing a Vibe Ring. The rings pair with my DJ set to create the proper environment for users to activate them.

At the opening reception of “Rat Nest”, I prepared fifty rings to be given out, and succeeded in giving out over forty. I had a table where the rings were given out by a volunteer. The volunteer’s duty was to size the rings to the participants fingers, give them their *Vibe Ring*, and assist with any questions they might have. The rings given out at the reception were deemed a beta version as they did not vibrate due to two bad batches of batteries I had ordered. In the future, I will be more conscious of the manufacturer I am ordering from and pay more to ensure they are from a reputable dealer. Having the vibration undoubtedly heightens the experience. To my surprise though, having only the magnetic connection was enough for my viewers to participate and for me to get some feedback. Viewers enjoyed the glow in the dark effect. Two UV lights were placed on the *Vibe Ring* table for viewers to charge the glow in the dark properties of the rings. From
where I was DJing, I saw people routinely going over to charge up their ring. Many of my friends even wore them to the club after the reception. Having interest in a rave setting is essentially the best I could hope for. The gesture of this fist bump also seemed easy for people to understand.

The original version of *Vibe Rings* however did not utilize this common gesture. The initial design was a slap bracelet. Rather than fist bumping, users had to touch the insides of their wrists to one another to engage the circuit. This turned out to be awkward as everyone had to wear the bracelets on the same wrist based on how the circuit needed to connect. After a series of user tested experiments and feedback. I decided to make the switch to the 3D printed rings.

![Glitchh Cam example photograph](image)

Fig. 12. *Glitchh Cam* example photograph
I often look at Nam June Paik’s *Electronic Superhighway* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum for inspiration. In an NPR discussion with Betsy Broun, a past director of the Smithsonian, commented on the piece, stating,

One of the things I love most about this piece is that it really does have some reflection of everybody's experience all across the country. It's more emotional. It's very affecting. In some ways, we worry that contemporary art has gotten to be a conversation among a very small subset of Americans, but not this work. This work really is here for everybody. And I think people deeply love it.\(^7\)

When designing *Vibe Rings*, I had this idea in mind. The fist bump became extremely important, because it is a gesture many people are familiar with.

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I came up with the idea for *Vibe Rings* when I got multiple comments in critique that my work is happy. This was not said in a positive or negative way, rather just something to note. I came across an article on Harvard University’s “Science in the News” website about how our interactions on social media are addictive. In describing the pleasure and reward dopamine receptors in our brains, the article states, “Cognitive neuroscientists have shown that rewarding social stimuli-laughing faces, positive recognition by our peers, messages from loved ones-activate the same dopaminergic reward pathways”. The article also goes on to state, “Every notification, whether it’s a

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text message, a ‘like’ on Instagram, or a Facebook notification, has the potential to be a positive social stimulus and dopamine influx”. After reading this and having the critique of my work being happy, I figured I would lean into these two influences and create an art work. I wanted to experiment with what would happen if you utilized this dopamine causing effect to do something more productive and positive, such as bringing humans together. The vibration of the ring is meant to simulate the act of receiving a notification on your cell phone and as a metaphor for creating good vibes. I cannot scientifically state whether the dopamine receptors are triggered in the brain when Vibe Rings are activated. At least not yet. However, I have currently accomplished in creating an electronic device that connects people at the same social gathering, rather than long distances like a cell phone. One ride on a subway, walk through the city, or outing with friends and it becomes apparent many of us are buried in our phone screens. My aim is not to convince people cell phones or any technology is evil. When Vibe Rings are present at an event, I aspire for them to act as catalysts to bring people’s attention back into the present moment and to those around them. Vibe Rings are the opposite of social media, connecting people in real life.

Sharing this fist bump gesture with other people is also influenced by rave culture. In rave culture, many participants trade Kandi -homemade, plastic beaded bracelets. A ritualistic handshake is performed known as the PLUR handshake, and the colorful bracelets are traded between people. According to an LA Weekly article about this phenomenon, New York techno DJ Frankie Bones is credited with being an originator of

\[10\] Ibid.
this movement when he yelled into the mic after a fight broke out, “You better start showing some peace, love and unity or I will break your fucking faces!”\textsuperscript{11} He was referencing a movement he was starting in Brooklyn. This movement became the PLUR handshake which stands for peace, love, unity, and respect. Each bracelet traded acts as a metaphor for the memory and experience you shared with that person.\textsuperscript{12}

While developing the rings, I was also looking at Dan Steinhilber’s work, specifically his show that took place at G Fine Art, \textit{Interface}. An article in The Washington Post described the interactive sculptures in the show as being “draped on the wall, some resemble avant-garde clothing or free-form sleeping bags. The saggy yet airtight sacks come in various colors and shapes, but their full forms are not revealed until small fans (designed to cool computers) inflate them”.\textsuperscript{13} Viewers can stick their heads in the objects. Some contain one head hole whereas others contain two.\textsuperscript{14} An article on the Philips Collection’s blog describes \textit{Interface} as a, “Riff on our addiction to the Internet, instant yet remote communication, and virtual reality. The wearable aspect of these works-visitors insert their ‘talking-heads’ inside the sculptures while their hands


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
remain outside-offers an estranged and disembodied experience”. The colorful air bag atmospheres are a fun way to get viewers to engage in his work. When looking at pictures, I cannot help but to be jealous and desire to stick my head in one, feeling the air running through the sculpture. By creating a rave atmosphere, I am making a similar move in creating an engaging environment, a space where people would likely be interested in participating in my project. I would like to show future iterations of the project in nightclubs and galleries alike and continue to do DJ sets in conjunction with the project. House music’s “four-on-the-floor” drum pattern is an accessible form of music for most to engage with as it is easy to dance to. The fun atmosphere creates a space where my viewers can then engage with each other through the positive vibes radiating throughout the Vibe Rings. When showcasing these at future events, I will choose spaces where the gallery and or club will provide a budget to make and give these out so that all in attendance can participate.

Fig. 15. *Vibe Ring* beta version

Fig. 16. *Vibe Ring* glow-in-the-dark charging station
Fig. 17. Vibe Ring help desk

Fig. 18. Vibe Ring beta version with packaging and manual
Underground Art Market:

The *Underground Art Market* was a space where people could trade tiny artworks for tiny artworks. It took the form of an immersive installation in the video room of the gallery. To enter the market visitors passed through a door and then a dark curtain into a small, constructed alley way. Most of the components in this space were constructed from found materials. The walls were painted on projector screens found in the trash. I also utilized a breaker box and some found wire to enhance the feel of the space. One light was used in the room above the *Underground Art Market* box to give the feel of a lone street light. In addition, there was footage I collected from alleyways with the *Glitch Cam 2.0* to create a kind of surveillance camera visual on the TV screen behind the market box. I collected audio from the alleyways and mixed that with a deep ascending bass I created on a synth. This minimal bass line utilized a Shepard tone, an ascending scale seemingly rising infinitely. I created this audio piece to give sensory feel to the space and to build suspense as users approached the market box to receive directions on how to use it. The market box was constructed from found wood and given an urban camouflage look with spray paint. The box has four small gallery spaces in it each with white walls and 3D printed garage doors to create a DIY gallery space. The rules for the *Underground Art Market* played through the telephone attached to the piece. Viewers were prompted to pick up the phone and press the button which played the deep-voiced audio:

*Greetings, welcome to the underground art market. In this market all are welcome to partake. In this market trading is artist to artist. In this market one art equals one art. Feel free to browse the different exhibition spaces by lifting the garage doors. If you see*
an artwork that you would like to collect, you may trade for it by replacing it with a small artwork of your own. Perhaps though, you have traveled from afar and forgot to carry your tiny art works today. Perhaps then, you will have to pull out the divine artisanal powers deep within your soul and deem a pocket trinket a readymade. If you come upon the underground art market and it appears to have been ransacked, restocking the market counts as one line of curatorial experience on your CV. Welcome to the Underground Art Market. Happy trading.

Ultimately, I wanted to create a space that existed free of the art market for artists and non-artists alike to participate in. This idea came from seeing little DIY lending libraries around D.C. and Pittsburgh where a book is traded for a book. I thought giving artists a space where art was worth the value of art could be a pleasant escape from the way the art market typically works. I did not want to assign too many rules to the little gallery space. I wanted to make it accessible for many people to participate, so I pushed the idea of trading readymades that people could concoct from what they had in their pockets. Since it was shown in an art school, people would see the show and come back with tiny art works to trade, but mostly visitors traded pocket junk such as parking tickets, Altoid tins, receipts, and other various found trinkets were being traded. Overall, objects were traded, and I think the trading of receipts with strangers is an interesting concept I would like to explore. To get more crafted objects traded and less found objects, I think it would have to be marketed in a manner so artists would come with work to trade. I aspire to try this again, marketing it in that manner to see if I get different results.
On the other hand, trading found objects made it less intimidating for non-artists to become involved.

The more we include our viewers in the art world, the more support we gain for artists. When being around other photographers in school and on professional jobs, I constantly heard fear in their voices when talking about iPhone photography. Many believed it would ruin everything for serious photographers who used professional equipment such as DSLRs. In a BBC video discussing his exhibition of his Polaroids, the renowned film director and photographer, Wim Wenders claimed photography was dead due to phone photographers. He stated, “The trouble with iPhone pictures is nobody sees them. Even the people who take them don’t look anymore and they certainly don’t make prints”. However, I see those individuals as dedicated hobbyists who may not become so involved in the craft as those who invest in DSLRs and photography schooling and shell out money to make expensive prints on fancy papers. Perhaps they will gain enough interest and care for the craft that they admire and support those that do, widening the collector base for professional artists. Matt Conboy, a professor from my undergraduate program, has a project that was influential in this process. His project, Start With Art, gifts newborn babies in Pittsburgh hospitals signed prints from local artists. The Start With Art website states its mission is to “promote artists in the Pittsburgh region and build a culture of collecting by gifting original, signed photographs from local photographers to newborn babies. Because with the gift of art, a City of Champions can become a City of

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Culture”. The art market may be seen as a series of gatekeepers. However, artists can expand the support for their work by inviting the outside world in to participate. Rather than telling people their phone photographs are not ‘real’ photography, let us let them in and teach them.


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Fig. 19. Underground Art Market
Mega-Brush:

The MEGA-BRUSH 1.0 grew from a feeling of monotony. I have an overflow of ideas I want to bring to fruition. The pressure to constantly be working at them makes me feel guilty for taking breaks or wasting even a few minutes watching television. Working long days in the studio continuously becomes taxing and feels monotonous, even though making art is something I greatly enjoy and find to be fun. I worked as a house painter for a couple years, applying white paint to white walls day after day. It was a good job that I was thankful for, yet I dread the idea of being in a space of purgatory like that again. So, when that feeling was creeping in, I decided to blast it away by creating a paint cannon. The hefty beast of a cannon is a hair-spray fueled potato cannon that shoots canisters of paint made from card stock and hot glue.
The Gutai movement inspired me in the development of this piece. The Gutai movement was largely about individualism and each artist experimented radically with materials; painting with feet, rolling in mud, running through paper, and so forth.\(^{18}\) I feel the energy when I look through images of these artists working and at their artwork. This group of artists largely relied on utilizing published writings to disseminate their work with the rest of the world. This influences me to open source plans to my projects. I will be posting plans on how to build a *Mega-Brush* on my website. The translated version of the Gutai manifesto, contains descriptions of how Shimamoto Shōzō and how he had “focused on mechanistic methods for the past several years. When he threw a glass bottle filled with lacquer, the result was flying splashes of paint on canvas. When he packed the paint into a small handmade cannon and ignited it by an acetylene torch, the result was an instant explosion of paint in a huge pictorial space. They both demonstrate a breathtaking freshness”.\(^{19}\) In searching for that freshness, I found familiarity in a potato cannon from my high school activities.

In addition, artist-vandal-hacker, Katsu, compelled my research. He pioneered the use of fire extinguishers in graffiti to write on a massive scale. He experiments with different digital technologies for making art, now creating drones with attached spray cans to take graffiti to places that cannot normally be reached.\(^{20}\)

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Making a cannon in D.C. was tricky because I did not want to be seen carrying anything that may resemble a device for launching projectiles. I decided to disguise it as a giant paint brush with a flip top to allow the bristles to go down and the cannon to shoot the paint canisters. The object took on a humorous scale much like Bob Ross’s giant paint brush from the introduction of his TV show. It took on the aesthetic of a prop. I then used this prop to create a video.

The video is a narrative video that depicts canvasses as the main character’s bosses. The materials that go into making the work are in charge of the artist, always demanding to be sculpted, painted, performed with, etc. When I look at the materials I make my work with, they instill new ideas into my head that must be completed. They create tasks for me to carry out. I shot the video within the place I am currently making my work, George Washington University. This space instills monotony in my daily routine. The film does not necessarily take place in the school but metaphorically in the artists head. The soundtrack for the video, a song I wrote and produced titled *Nonstop Ubiquitous*, uses a ‘four-on-the-floor’ house beat which gave the song a relentless feel that keeps building up, breaking down, and coming back for more. Many of the sounds in the song were created from coffee cans, tools, moans, grunts, scrapes, and other various sounds that could potentially be heard when I am creating art. I used the *Glitch Cam 1.0*, a Go-Pro, and a DSLR to shoot the video.

When scripting, editing, and shooting the film, I was thinking of Nick Zedd and The Cinema of Transgression. In The Cinema of Transgression’s manifesto there is a line that reads, “We refuse to take their easy approach to cinematic creativity; an approach
which ruined the underground of the sixties when the scourge of film school took over. Legitimating every mindless manifestation of sloppy movie making undertaken by a generation of misled film students”. Since I was shooting with three different cameras, I pulled motivation from this manifesto and decided to take an experimental approach. I chose not to make the video source’s frames the same size like the video classes in my undergraduate taught me, but allow them to be different sizes and overlap at times. This gave me a more dynamic screening when projecting on the wall as the rectangular frame was constantly changing size as the film played through. This gave the film a raw look and multiple windows for the viewer to peer into the loose, humorous narrative.

The video opens with me dressed as a cartoon-like, artist character wearing a red beret and paint overalls bringing a painting to life. I am pumping its chest and giving the character painted on the wood panel mouth to mouth. The painting knocks me out and leaves the room to go acquire more paintings. These paintings are the boss figures. A new artist replaces me. She is also wearing red beret and overalls. As she wanders the school, one of the bosses follows her around. Poking its head from behind corners, peering through windows, and wearing disguises to watch her as she goes about her routine. The video then cuts to a scene in a boardroom within the school. The bosses are partying, doing cocaine, having sex, and throwing around stacks of money. It is a *Wolf of Wall Street* moment and a satirization of the high art market culture. The video then cuts to the artist as she works in her studio. She becomes tired and goes to sleep. When she awakens,

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she is in a room made of painters’ plastic and encircled by all of the bosses. At this point, I come back into the film. I connect *Vibe Rings* with the artist, powering her up as we fade to a white screen. The film comes back in with a heroic shot that pans up with her suited up in a paint suit, paint mask, and goggles holding the *Mega-Brush 1.0*. The scene uses chiaroscuro lighting and fog machines to enhance the drama. She turns a knob on the paint brush from 0 to 11.5. The remaining two minutes of the film are filled with the artist shooting the bosses with the *Mega-Brush 1.0*, killing their desires to be finished paintings.

Within the gallery space, I hung the brush from the ceiling just out of reach of viewers, giving it a dramatized and weighty feel. Across from the brush, the paintings were attached to the wall, allowing the bottom of the paintings to rest on the ground. These objects, considered less as paintings and more as characters in my film, stood on the floor. The video played on loop on the other side of the wall, and the sound track was played throughout the space.

In the future, I will create a cannon that runs on pressurized air. It will be safer and easier to use with the ability to control how hard it shoots. This will allow me to be able to extend the experience to my viewers, allowing them to break any monotonous feelings they may have.
Fig. 21. Mega-Brush 1.0

Fig. 22. Actor from the film
Elsie Cam:

The Elsie Cam was an attempt to create a camera that would not take selfies in an art space. The concept of not taking selfies in an art exhibition space is an alien concept. With Yayoi Kusama installations, New York’s Museum of Ice Cream, and other environmental exhibition spaces being created for and/or hijacked for social media purposes, I question if these spaces give viewers an experience or just a photo opportunity. In an article on Wired where they debated the effects these “selfie factories”, Piera Gelardi, a digital media brand owner, said that, “I was noticing that exhibitions like Yayoi Kusama’s ‘Fireflies on the Water’ were all of a sudden garnering these big crowds. I thought that was interesting opportunity for us to expose people to new types of artwork
and concepts, but also create a space in which they could kind of be the star of the show.” When thinking about this in relation to my work, I want people to experience my work together through camaraderie rather than being the star. Selfies can be selfish, and I want to push people to come together to interact together. In a Washington Post interview about the Kusama show, Hirshorn curator Melissa Chiu, stated that, “With the opinions of a younger generation, especially millennials, who actually see contemporary art and the work of artists living today as an opportunity to participate and engage and interact”. She also states that it is the museum’s business “to some extent understanding how the public behaves”. Rather than guiding my viewers to take selfies, I want to encourage them to take group pictures. I want them to come together and share the experience as a whole. Rather than setting up an Instagram-worthy backdrop, I left the gallery wall blank, marking where viewers should stand with a crop circle made from red tape on the floor.

While the prototype was glitchy, designed to take people’s photographs when more than two people gathered in the crop circle outlined on the floor. The camera itself was an OpenMV camera housed inside a 3D printed alien hand I sculpted on the computer using Sculptris. The OpenMV camera is a hardware device specifically made


24 Ibid.
for makers to utilize machine learning through Python, a common computer coding language. I was using it in conjunction with the Haar Cascade algorithm to accomplish facial recognition to determine when the camera should take a picture. The camera communicated with an Arduino which ran a TV giving the users instructions on where to stand, letting them know whether there were enough people to take the photo, and notifying people when a photograph was taken.

In the future, I would like to get this piece running in a more stable manner as its concept enhances my other work. The choice of using the OpenMV camera was flawed as it is more of a device for prototyping robotics and using machine learning to study visual situations through a camera. It is less suited for creating a finished, streamlined object. Using a webcam connected to a laptop that was running the Python code would have been a more reliable option or even an X-Box Connect, which artists making this type of work are commonly utilizing. I was nervous to leave a laptop unattended in the gallery space, so I thought the OpenMV Camera would be a solution to this issue. However, I did learn the importance of having a back-up device when making this type of work. In the future, when I show work that has the ability to be touchy like this, testing in the space and having back up components ready to go will be key.

Cardboard Speaker Stands:

Cardboard speaker stands are a low-cost solution to achieving better audio monitoring at a more affordable cost for home recording studios. This project was not apart of the “Rat Nest” exhibition, although it is an example of a Red Currant project that
solves a more serious art making problem. Setting up a home recording studio is expensive. Most people setting up a home studio do not have large enough funds to build a proper studio from scratch, but rather are trying to make every dollar count to achieve the best sonic environment to work in. According to an article on InSync, a music news and equipment review resource, studio monitors should be positioned with the tweeters at ear height to avoid problems that can occur from the directionality of sound. The common way of achieving this is by placing stands underneath one’s monitors. These also reduce vibrations that go into the desk obstructing the listener’s ears when mixing and mastering. Speaker stands are often simply blocks of foam. However, they cost upwards of one hundred dollars. This price could be reduced greatly by using stands made from a cheaper material, and the rest of that money could be spent more effectively on other equipment.

The stands I that have created are made from laser-cut panels that are rubber cemented together to give them extra strength. However, these panels could also be cut out with a razor blade. After performing a test with a contact mic to measure vibrations on my desk, I concluded that the stands greatly reduced the vibrations going through the desk and hold up monitors in a sturdy manner. I moved the contact mic to multiple positions on the desk, all of which produced the same results. I am currently testing designs for bigger monitors and reaching out to audio engineers to get more professional testing done. When more conclusive testing is completed, I will upload laser-cutting.

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templates and hand-cutting templates to the Red Currant website for users to download.

Templates will be made for a variety of monitor sizes.

Fig. 24. The graph reading to the right of each speaker image corresponds to the level of vibrations picked up in the desk

Future of the Company:

Although the tech industry is a highly competitive space, Red Currant will find its hold by developing art-making tools through its ability to work outside of a rigid engineering headspace. By working in a more free, artful way, Red Currant will utilize the Blue Ocean Strategy. Harvard Business Review has an Explainer Series of videos that define the Blue Ocean Strategy as a concept created by European Institute of Business Administration professors W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne. This idea describes the business world of having two landscapes, red oceans and blue oceans. Red oceans are industries that already exist and are crowded with competition turning the water bloody,
whereas blue oceans are about creating and implementing new and undiscovered markets. The video explains that in blue oceans, “Demand is created rather than fought over”. Red Currant, for example, utilizes this technique by creating electronic devices that connect humans occupying the same room, whereas major tech companies create cell phones that are primarily designed to connect humans that are distanced from each other.

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27 Ibid.
Strategy and Implementation

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:
- Creating a tech company through the scope of art allows for alternative and wacky solutions to problems and non-problems that would not be on a typical company’s radar.
- When certain ideas end up being unattainable, the alternative and wacky solutions that follow can still result in something of value or interest.
- By creating open source tools and products, Red Currant’s projects become more accessible, thus creating a higher potential for user adoption.

Weaknesses:
- Red Currant is currently run by one person.
- Red Currant is currently lacking manufacturing tools and must rely on other entities for access.

Opportunities:
- Most tech companies are focusing on bringing people together that are far apart. Red Currant focuses on the landscape where people are in the same social setting through devices like Vibe Rings.
- By creating open source tools for art-making, an additional layer of conceptual thinking is added to the process that is not allowed by rigid, overused, and overly consumer-focused art-making products.
- Visual arts lacks a diversity of tools and devices like the music industry, which is full of small companies creating small runs of unique products for art creation.

Threats:

- Depending on the types of devices Red Currant makes in the future, getting FCC Testing and Certification will most likely be necessary. These processes can get so expensive that they become cost-prohibitive. Most electronics sold in the U.S. are required to undergo this process. If this is not required by the specific device, they are then often required to go through some sort of testing and certification process through an accredited laboratory.\(^{28}\)

Market Implementation:

Red Currant will focus on the U.S. specifically as this is the only market it is currently participating in. Most visual artwork is inaccessible to the larger public in terms of price. This contrasts with the most popularly accessible art form: music. With digital streaming services on the rise over physical and MP3 sales, I am going to focus on streaming services alone. According to the Recording Industry Association of America’s 2018 research report, 50 million US consumers paid for streaming services.\(^{29}\) This does not include vinyl, CD, and MP3 sales. With almost one-sixth of the US population (327.16


million in total according to the US Census as of February 2018)\textsuperscript{30} using music streaming services, a case can be made that the general public values an art form. Perhaps with the right platform, selling more reproducible art works without putting an edition size on them could make a visual artist an equivalent money with greater accessibility for the general public. This is a strategy I would like to explore with Red Currant in terms of the art making devices.

Social Responsibility Goals:

Creating and dispersing projects through open source means is a way of enhancing how many individuals can gain access to Red Currant’s ideas. I plan to create ways for projects to be built from found materials as much as possible, allowing individuals to recreate projects at a much more affordable cost and saving electronics from turning into e-waste, a major environmental problem. According to a 2009 study from the Environmental Protection Act, “US consumers and businesses discarded televisions, computers, cell phones and hard copy peripherals (including printers, scanners, faxes) totaling 2.37 million tons. Approximately 25 percent of these electronics were collected for recycling, with the remainder disposed of primarily in landfills, where the precious metals cannot be recovered”.\textsuperscript{31} Material and component choices are key. When creating electronics and manufacturing small to large runs of objects, a disastrous


amount of waste can be put out into the world rapidly. For instance, according to an article on Vice by Caroline Haskin, Apple’s AirPods last approximately 18 months before they lose their charge holding capabilities, cannot be fixed nor recycled due to the method of construction, cannot be disposed of as the batteries can start fires in trash compactors, and will take a millennia to decompose due to the plastics used.\textsuperscript{32} When developing Red Currant’s products, I want my projects to contain the most responsible use of rechargeable batteries. I notice my own personal use of rechargeable batteries in my instruments is a bit pricier up front but actually produces enjoyable cost and waste savings over time. In terms of plastics and creating shells for objects such as the rings, I have been 3D printing using PLA plastic, a corn based plastic. An article on Scientific American’s website about the pros and cons of PLA plastics compared the decomposition rates in various forms of disposal. In an industrial-grade composting facility the plastic can decompose within three months and if sent to a landfill it could take anywhere from one hundred to one thousand years to break down. PLA plastics were also cited as being carbon neutral.\textsuperscript{33} Thus this rate of decomposition is more manageable than a millennium. I am developing plans to make a composter to deal with plastic waste. Directions on properly recycling of Red Currant devices will be included.


Development and Future Goals

Goals: A five-year plan addressing where Red Currant wants to be at a given time.

3 Months:
• Website completed and launched with content
• Start LLC paperwork

6 Months:
• Complete *Glitchh Cam* circuit and speaker stands

9 Months:
• LLC acquired
• Obtain studio space to run Red Currant out of
• Complete a collaboration

1 Year:
• Have each aspect of the business functioning fully
• One show completed with Red Currant

3 Years:
• Complete a residence and/or larger public installation with Red Curran

5 Years:
• Business is sustaining itself financially
Conclusion

Red Currant creates solutions that address a range of problems and non-problems from simple art-making issues such as affordable audio monitoring to more complex troubles like peoples’ lack of engagement with one another. At times non-problems will be addressed such as the *Glitchh Cam*, where the creation of a new hardware device fills a void in art-making that did not exist prior. These types of devices create a more diverse range of art-making tools available than a chain art store carries. After completing my MFA, I will move to Pittsburgh and start Red Currant officially through acquiring the LLC. I will begin working towards obtaining a studio space immediately from which I will run Red Currant. The five-year goal-plan will act as a frame work for my movements with the company. At George Washington University, I learned how important user-testing is when creating my art work and that it often takes many prototypes before an object is ready for public consumption. Persistence is key and research is invaluable. I will keep these lessons in mind as I move forward. Red Currant calls upon artists, makers, and all others to join in following the company’s movements and its open source projects, creating and contributing towards them.
Bibliography


