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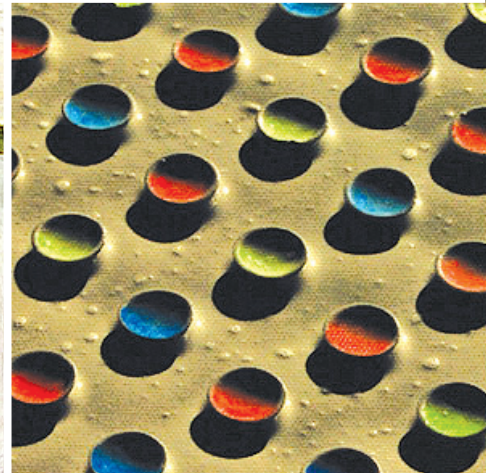
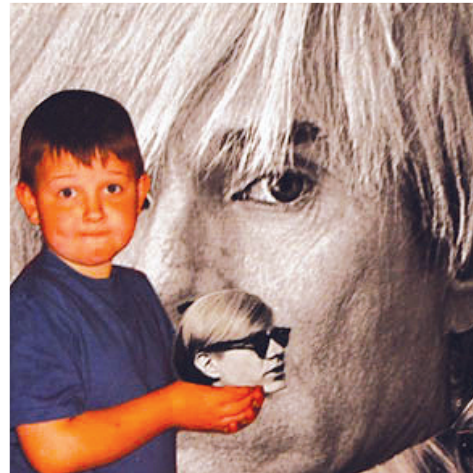
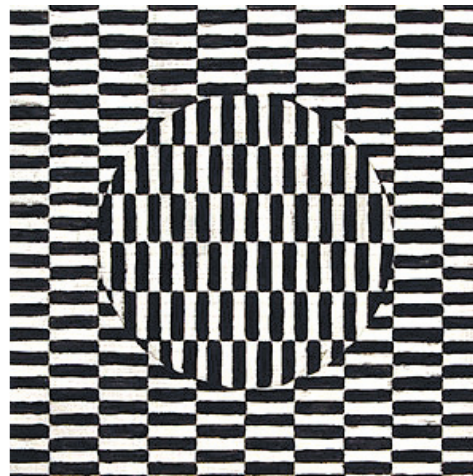
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Works in the "Imagination Squared" exhibit include those by artists, top row, L to R: Amanda K. Campbell, Carole Mehrrens and Tony Allegretti. Bottom row, L to R: Katherine Morrow, Jim Draper and Gary McElwee.

Square Roots

Local artists tap the region's creative spirit in the community arts project
"Imagination Squared"

IMAGINATION SQUARED: THE CREATIVE RESPONSE EXPERIMENT

Opening reception on Wed., Sept. 1 from 5-9 p.m.
Museum of Contemporary Art
333 N. Laura St., Jacksonville
366-6911 imaginationquared.com

A whisper turned into a roar over the past few months, and the epicenter of the din was an art studio on King Street in Riverside. Inside Dolf James' studio, an experiment in art and community, titled "Imagination Squared," was launched. The effort, which grew out of casual conversation and was spread by word of mouth, is a collaborative art project that invited anyone to embellish a 5-inch-by-5-inch square, with the promise that it would become part of a public exhibit.

James, who jointly came up with the idea with artist Christina Foard, recalls the project's inception. "We were sitting here one day, talking about art, and I have these wooden boxes laying around," says James. "Christina picked one up and said, 'You should have paints out for artists when they come by your studio and make it part of the deal — that when you come by the studio, you have to paint a box. And then you could collect these over a period of time and hang them on the wall and as it grew, it would become more and more interesting.' I thought that was a really cool. I thought that we could speed up the process: 'Let's make a bunch of them and give them to our friends.' That was the seed."

From that conversation, "Imagination

Squared" was born, a random idea that became a full-scale viral marketing community art endeavor. The pair began with 200 boxes distributed among a few drop-off points. It was the only point at which they had to explain to anybody what the project was. From there, word of mouth and a Facebook profile page carried the effort. Essentially, anyone who wished could go by James' studio, pick up a square (with a \$1 donation to go toward supplies), create something on the 5-inch squared surface and return it for a public exhibition.

"Within 10 days, we knew it was going to go," says Foard. "We could tell that there wasn't going to be any confusion; that it was sparking fast. We were finding through our own social networks that it was building momentum. Then there were a couple key factors, like Douglas Anderson asking for 100 [squares] and then Jacksonville University asking for 50. It was being driven from kids to their teachers. And so, all of a sudden, we felt the pressure to produce more."

James says interest in the project spread well beyond Northeast Florida. "People would contact us and say, 'I own property close to Jacksonville, does that qualify me?'"

James' studio went from art production space to square production facility. "I make these boxes all the time," says James. "I know that I can make 50 of them in less than a day, but making them and having them laying around and ready for me to do something turned out to be significantly different from

making them, sanding them, shellacking them, gesso-ing them twice, and labeling them." As production increased, the numbers became almost staggering: 10,000 nails used, 2,000 boxes made and some 32,000 pulls on James' radial arm saw.

The culmination of the project is on display Sept. 1 during First Wednesday Art Walk downtown, at the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville (MOCAJax). James has constructed a wall of boxes 50 feet long and 8 feet high that has more than 900 squares. A composite of the squares is available on a website James and Foard created for the project (imaginationquared.com), but this is the first live viewing.

In addition to the monolithic-like piece, there are a number of related items on display at MOCAJax, including a video presentation dealing with the project, audio interviews with some of those involved and a 16-foot poster the artists will sign.

"I'm the luckiest guy in town," says James. "It was great to meet all these people. I've had hundreds and hundreds of creative people walk through that door in the last three months and I got talk to them. This wasn't just a passing in the street. They handed me something that they had done. I got to talk to them about that; there was a communication with virtually all of them. Sometimes," he adds with a laugh, "some of them come back just to hang out." □

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