

## Art in the digital age: New artist-in-residence program primed to push innovation

By Melissa Tait, Record staff

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WATERLOO REGION — Replace the paintbrush with a computer, and the canvas with a 3D projector, and you have the tools of a digital artist.

Now put that digital artist to work inside a state-of-the-art 3D projection theatre, and who knows what sort of ideas for new high-tech gadgets and gizmos could arise.

At least, that's what engineers at Christie Digital are hoping, as they partner with local artists on a groundbreaking artist-in-residence program at the Hive in the Communitech Hub.

"Our technology is both a canvas and a palette, and we're basically giving the access to both, as well as providing them the mentoring to close the gap between artistic output and technological input," said Charles Fraresso, senior manager research and development at Christie.

The residency program is a collaboration between CAFKA (Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener Area) and Christie Digital, and it's unlike anything else in the country, according to Sarah Kernohan, CAFKA artistic co-ordinator.

An artist — chosen by CAFKA and Christie — will be given desk space, a computer, and access to the 12 high-definition projectors at the Hive (Hub Interactive Virtual Environment).

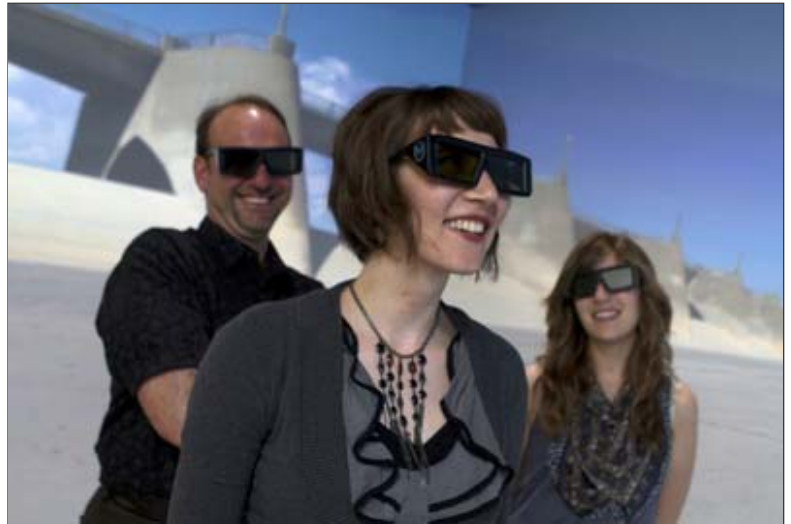
Kernohan said Christie Digital has shared a long partnership with CAFKA, a non-profit organization that supports artists and curates free art installations.

Christie, a leading digital projection company with 700 employees in the region, is fully funding the program by offering their technology, supporting the artist with travel costs, rent costs and a living stipend.

Jenn E. Norton is a Guelph-based artist who inspired the program by collaborating with Fraresso and Christie on her upcoming project Tesseract at the Hive.

"Basically, I'm like 'can I do this? Can I do that?' and (the engineers) will kind of think about it," Norton said.

"Maybe no one has approached the Hive in that way before and I think that's opened up new questions and new ideas for what can be possible there."



**The Hive.** Artist Jenn E. Norton (centre) gets a tour of 3D digital space, The Hive in Kitchener's Tannery Building recently. She was welcomed by Charles Fraresso, senior program manager, research and development at Christie Digital Systems (left) and Sarah Kernohan, CAFKA Artistic Director. Christie Digital is teaming with CAFKA (Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener Area) for a new artist-in-residence program. Janek Lowe/The Record Source: The Record

Tesseract — which is a geometry term for a cube — is a 3D immersive environment that will allow viewers to “enter the stage, and look around the scene that goes a step beyond the 3D you would see at the movies,” Norton said.

Fraresso said it’s part of Christie’s research and development goals to push their technology in these directions. He hopes the artistic brain working with the engineer brain will bring about new innovations.

“The creative arts inspire people to look at things creatively and perceive things very differently, and so our engineers who are very familiar with the technology don’t behold the technology in the same way as an artistic person,” Fraresso said.

“While you might say this is an altruistic goal — and it really is about supporting the arts community — it’s very innovative in its own right.”

Norton said the chance to work in the Hive, beside the people who built it, is unlike anything she’s heard of before.

“This is really important this is happening right now, especially with some of the cuts that have occurred in the past couple years to the arts,” Norton said.

“It’s really amazing that a company wants to invest in its creativity and understands how valuable that is for everyone involved — it creates content and it reaches new audiences.”

In September there will be an international call for submissions for artists to submit proposals of whatever they can dream up using Christie’s technology.

There will be two programs over two years, from two-months to 12 months in length, depending on the artist.

Kernohan said both projects will hopefully be a part of the next CAFKA biennial exhibition in 2013.

“The very fact that we can invite the best artists in Canada here, and eventually be able to open the door to the best artists in the world to Canada’s technology and introduce them to the community here is what’s most exciting,” Kernohan said.

The 10th edition of CAFKA’s biennial art exhibition will run Sep. 16 to Oct. 2.

[mtait@therecord.com](mailto:mtait@therecord.com)

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