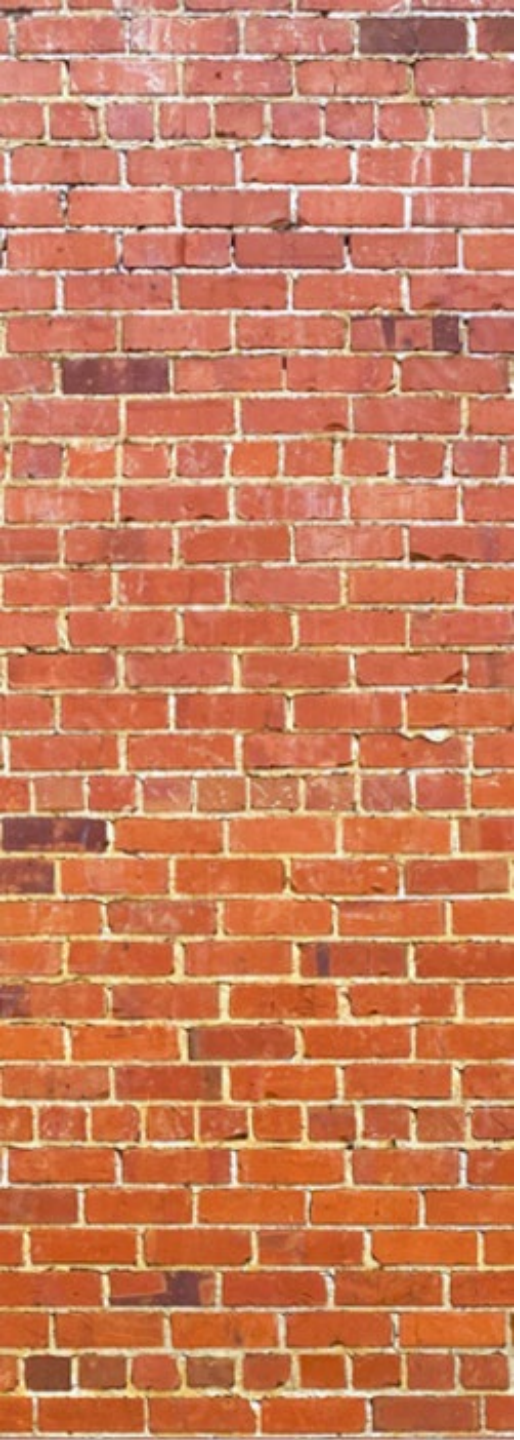


# THE BIG ART

# Basics

## An overview of our transformative project to positively impact Detroit's artists, art audiences, and the community

THE BIG ART

# WHO?

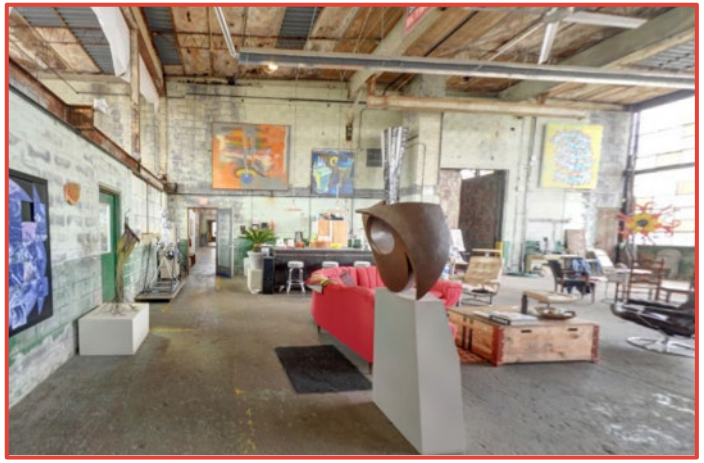
DONATE

## Our Founder & Background

**Robert Onnes** is an established sculptor renowned for working with steel and copper to create substantial, three-dimensional, figurative sculptures. His background in electronics and in property development has greatly influenced his art processes and related endeavors.

Onnes, a native of New Zealand, visited Detroit in 2012 and was captivated by its arts scene. He moved here to gain inspiration, and to help contribute to the strength and growth of the vibrant but fragmented arts ecosystem. He purchased a vacant, historic Highland Park factory and converted it into the exceptional art studios and gathering spaces known as **333 Midland**. He then opened the adjacent **Annex Gallery**. These facilities, now celebrating their 10th anniversary, exemplify the **affordable, flexible arts spaces** that are highly sought after, but extremely difficult to find in and around Detroit. They offer dynamic, well-maintained studio and exhibition spaces, communal art facilities and resources, and a collaborative environment that welcomes artists, art audiences, and the community.

Onnes and his collaborators believe that the spaces, culture, and business practices of 333 Midland and Annex Gallery present a **successful, sustainable, and scalable model** for an even larger, multi-functional arts hub.



THE BIG ART

# WHAT?

VIEW OUR VIDEO

## Our Big Idea: The BIG Art

**Our Mission** – Cultivate a large, flexible arts space and a supportive arts community to nurture artists, engage audiences, and enrich the Detroit arts scene.

**Our Vision** – Detroit is a renowned center for the arts and The BIG Art is one of its brightest beacons.

**Our Plan** – Purchase an enormous, vacant, blighted industrial building in Detroit. Remediate and renovate the property. Redevelop it as a multi-functional arts facility, gathering space, and point of community pride.

- Old office blocks and intermediate industrial spaces will be transformed into 60 affordable artists' studios with access to communal arts facilities and large-scale equipment.
- Huge industrial bays will become flexible, artist-led spaces for sharing unique, local art as it's meant to be experienced.
- Local artists will have the resources, connections, and support to create and collaborate in different fields (painting, drawing, sculpting, photography, digital art, design, glasswork, metalwork, woodwork, music, dance, theater, film, etc.).
- Community members and art audiences will be able to easily access and engage with art through diverse formats (art fairs, gallery shows, concerts, dance performances, art classes, real-time art production, artist talks, immersive experiences, etc.).
- A "Main Street" (café, gift shops, galleries) will welcome visitors for casual exploring and gathering; special event spaces will support organized gatherings (weddings, galas, seminars, etc.).

THE BIG ART

WHERE?

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## The Property & Location

### The Property

- A **1940s factory** left vacant and untended for 15+ years, and now a community hazard and eyesore
- A **110,000 sq ft space** on **3.7 acres** – including 45,000 sq ft of 25-38 ft high stud industrial bays

This property is in desperate need of remediation and renovation, but ideal for being repurposed and redeveloped as The BIG Art.

### The Prime Location

- **14333 Woodrow Wilson Street in Detroit**, bordering Highland Park, near Oakman Blvd and the John C. Lodge Freeway
- **Directly adjacent to the highly anticipated Joe Louis Greenway** – a 27.5 mile outdoor recreation path unifying 23 Detroit neighborhoods, Dearborn, Hamtramck, and Highland Park

The Joe Louis Greenway aims to connect people to nature, art, opportunity, and one another. It will provide safe, equitable access to parks, businesses, and arts/cultural programming without need for a car.

The BIG Art – with its “Main Street” bay opening directly onto the Greenway – will be perfectly situated as a unique destination for art exposure and engagement. Detroit residents, visitors/tourists, recreational Greenway-users, and avid art-seekers will all be able to gather, explore, and find spaces for relaxation and inspiration.

THE BIG ART

# WHEN?

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## Our Timeline

333 Midland and Annex Gallery have been a proving ground for the culture, spaces, activities, and sustainable business practices that support local artists, diverse art audiences, and the community. It's now time to scale this model for greater impact. The anticipated timeline for The BIG Art is:

- **2023**
  Register The BIG Art as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (EIN 88-3713873); Begin to establish our mission/vision/values and development plan.

- **2024-25 (Current Phase)**
  Cultivate interest and support among a wide variety of stakeholders (funders, arts advocates, community leaders/members); Secure funding to purchase the property, conduct environmental testing and safety assessments, and begin remediation/renovation using expert subcontractors; Pass required health/safety/building inspections.

- **2025-26**
  Secure funding to work with expert subcontractors to design and transform former office and industrial spaces into affordable artists' studios, large-scale art facilities, flexible exhibition and performance spaces, "Main Street" commercial spaces, and event spaces; Continue to promote mission/vision/values and cultivate investment from a wide range of stakeholders.

- **2026-27**
  Welcome artists, art audiences, and the community to The BIG Art; Maintain our strategy to develop the essential spaces and resources for artists to flourish, to encourage connection and collaboration, and to promote access and exposure to the arts; Conduct activities that help us meet our mission and sustain our programming.

THE BIG ART

# WHY?

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## The Importance of The BIG Art

- **Art is essential**. Art has the power to connect and reflect communities, and is a powerful tool for growth.
- **Detroit's artists need art spaces and resources**. Affordable, flexible, and collaborative art spaces will help Detroit-based artists: gain inspiration; connect with other artists and the community; build their skill sets; create, share, and promote their art; expand their audiences; and sustain their artistic pursuits.
- **Art is for everyone**. Access to the arts should never be a privilege. Abundant and varied opportunities for arts exposure and engagement are critical and are known to enhance mental and physical well-being, critical thinking, empathy, and community cohesion.
- **Connected communities are stronger communities.** Transforming a blighted industrial building into a safe, accessible, and multi-functional arts space while leveraging its prime location on the Joe Louis Greenway has the power to enhance the built environment, facilitate connection and belonging, and boost community pride.
- **A thriving arts scene contributes to social, cultural, and economic growth.** When diverse art is nurtured, accessible, and amplified, it can attract and engage local, national, and international audiences, and inspire further community investment.

THE BIG ART

HOW?

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## Next Steps

With your investment, we can develop The BIG Art into a recognized arts hub and a prolific incubator and generator of diverse art and unique events. Here's how to help support this transformative project:

- **Make a donation** using the provided QR code (bottom left) or visiting https://sharedetroit.org/nonprofit/big-art
- **Invite The BIG Art** to submit a letter of intent or a full grant application
- **Introduce The BIG Art** to foundations, corporate sponsors, and community leaders who share our vision and may want to support and promote our cause
- **Spread the word** about The BIG Art and the importance of our mission

**Working together, we can support local artists and the larger Detroit community as we continue to grow our city as a center for the arts.**

For more information, please contact Rob Onnes via rob@thebigart.org, or visit https://www.thebigart.org.

Thank you for your time and consideration. **We hope we can count on your support!**