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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Hi, Kevin — What a nice piece. Thank you for sharing. Since it's over, I might run it next week on the arts cover.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Anyone can create

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 What did the entire community create over the past eight  
3 days? Everything you'd expect to find in an office (except, here it  
4 is made or covered in blue or green tape).

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 THE BLAND OFFICE PARK on the edge of Brattleboro isn't  
7 where one would expect the revolution to start. Its tenants are  
8 mostly low-key: lawyers, a tax assistance service, and a pilates  
9 studio. The setting seems more appropriate for a new branch of  
10 Dunder Mifflin, the fictional name of the paper company in the  
11 television show *The Office*.

12 But a recently completed and joyful community art  
13 revolution erupted over eight days, thanks to the Brattleboro  
14 Museum of Art and Tape Art Mega Corp.

15 "Tape Art Mega Corp." is the brainchild of Michael  
16 Townsend and Leah Smith, two painters'-tape artists from  
17 Providence, Rhode Island, who've now completed their third  
18 residency at BMAC.

19 The museum's publicity describes the creation of this  
20 fictional corporate office world with colored painter's tape as  
21 "part immersive installation, part comedy, and all community  
22 artmaking."

23 The project's ethos is simple: Anyone can create.

24 Smith, a thirtysomething who sports a shullet that tucks  
25 into her shirt collar to maintain a more corporate presentation,  
26 says "Some people, myself included, may have left their middle  
27 school art class feeling like a failure. This is the antidote for that."

28 Townsends says, "We're injecting this corporate  
29 workspace with potential. Our job is to inspire engagement and  
30 manage the creativity of participants. We've been constantly  
31 surprised at where the public has taken this project."

32 His eyes light up as he surveys the hum of creativity in  
33 this office suite of 12 rooms.

34 "When Danny [Litchenfield, director of the Brattleboro  
35 Museum & Art Center] showed us this space, we decided to lean  
36 into the setting as much as possible," Smith says.

37 It's the first time they had the opportunity to use an office  
38 setting for a tape project. The muzak and pistachio-colored walls  
39 stayed, but eight days after opening the doors to the Tape Art  
40 Mega Corp., the suite had been transformed.

41 \* \* \*

42 AS I HEAD into my first session, a friend was leaving the  
43 lobby with a dreamy smile animating her face. She told me she'd  
44 planned to go in for 45 minutes, "but it easily turned into four  
45 hours," as she lost track of time and maybe even herself in a flow  
46 state of quiet reverie.

47 Tape Art Mega Corp. gives anyone walking in the door  
48 unlimited rolls of blue and green painter’s tape, provides a few  
49 simple instructions (courtesy of a videotaped “New Employee  
50 Orientation”), and offers some open-ended prompts to get  
51 started.

52 The two artists supervise, as any mid-level manager  
53 would, inspiring, assisting and supporting their “new employees.”  
54 After orientation, and making a tape tie for appropriate corporate wear, everyone is free to roam the halls and  
55 cubicles of the suite of rooms to find their work niche.

56 The resulting work liberates this dull, Muzak-playing,  
57 soul-killing space into a wonderland of surprises.

58 What did the entire community create over the past eight  
59 days? Everything you’d expect to find in an office (except, here it  
60 is made or covered in blue or green tape).

61 There are neat cubicle workspaces filled with lamps,  
62 desks holding computers screens projecting the year’s profits, fish  
63 bowls, tape dispensers, pencils, pens, scissors, file cabinets,  
64 coffee mugs, and a coffee maker. Above a copy machine are  
65 portraits of two butts and a face. (Every office has a jokester.)

66 There are house plants, pets, portraits of children and, in  
67 the R&D room, graphs of projections. Against the back wall, a  
68 sculpture of an office worker gossips with a silhouette of another  
69 by the water cooler.

70 Two other workers show their pets to one another while  
71 hovering above them is a UFO ready to beam somebody or  
72 something up.

73 Additionally, we see everything one wouldn’t expect in  
74 an office setting. In a room with the wide-open prompt —  
75 Animals A-Z — there’s a bow-tie-wearing flamingo strutting  
76 across the wall, a turtle and llama cavorting in the corner,  
77 monkeys and birds filling the sky.

78 Close observation reveals what might be a life-sized  
79 portrait of the late Carlos the ox from the Retreat Farm. A life-  
80 sized green moose with a full rack of antlers is mounted on one  
81 wall.

82 Another room announces a prompt: “aquarium.” It’s  
83 chock-a-block full, with whales breaching on the windows,  
84 sharks pursuing schools of fish, jellyfish floating by, a number of  
85 octopus sporting 3-D suckers on their tentacles.

86 A 7-foot eel comes out and off the wall. In one corner is  
87 a sunken ship; nearby, a pirates’ treasure. Above that, a scuba  
88 diver investigates.

89 Yet another exterior room is a wig design factory. I’ll  
90 leave it to your imagination.

91 In the lobby, next to the elevator are what look like the  
92 hands of God. Across the hall, birds hop from impossible plants.

93 In one corner suite, a skeleton rises from the Earth  
94 surrounded by three circles of tape candles, real tea lights, and a  
95 bonfire as high as my head in what the fourth graders inside  
96 describe to me as “a creepy forest.”

97 Down the hall is an entire office filled wall-to-ceiling  
98 with eyes, over 1,000 eyes, all watching you. And I’m not just  
99 being paranoid.

100 Another corner office is occupied by the boss, a pint-  
101 sized blue-green sculpture sitting at a desk. There are no details  
102 to their face.

103 Smith tells me this is part of their trademark. Many forms  
104 on the walls are silhouetted. The figures could be anyone,  
105 anywhere, any gender. The blue and green colors aesthetically  
106 unify the rooms, but the forms are as varied as can be.

107 \* \* \*

108 GREETING ANY “new employee” at the door are one of the  
109 two artists or Kate Milliken, BMAC’s manager of educational  
110 programs, who says, “This has been the best week of my life —  
111 the smile won’t go away.”

112 All week, friends, coworkers, classmates, families,  
113 knitting circles, bowling teams — groups of any size — have  
114 trekked to the site to get hands-on tape-art classes.

115 After-school hours were filled by grandmothers with their  
116 young charges, adults looking for some diversion or inspiration,

117 and local artists drawn in by the wide-open, pedal-to-the-metal  
118 challenge of making.

119           On the counter next to a flat cake — made of tape and  
120 with one slice missing — is an assorted pile of cardboard,  
121 aluminum foil, wooden skewers/dowels, and empty toilet paper  
122 rolls, all waiting to be called into duty by one of the emerging  
123 artists. Another area has community tables and chairs set up for  
124 planning and collaboration.

125           One aspect built into the project is what Leah Smith calls  
126 “relational aesthetics” — an art term that includes interactive  
127 experiences and encourages dialogue, community, and active  
128 participation.

129           “Anyone can improve upon anything someone else has  
130 started,” Smith continues.

131           The result is that objects morph as new details are added  
132 on by others. Preciousness is tossed aside as, for instance, an 8-  
133 year-old applies eyelashes to the eye their grandmother started.

134           \* \* \*

135           MICHAEL TOWNSEND wears copper-lined glasses and looks  
136 like he could actually be a mid-level executive — he’s fiftyish,  
137 gray at his temples, and wears a crisp man-tailored shirt with a  
138 blue tape tie.

139           He tells me the story of two kids who came to him  
140 seeking a task. He asked them to create a compass to measure  
141 some circles on the floor for their creepy forest.

142           In just under one minute of work, one kid in all sincerity  
143 exclaimed, “Wait a second! This isn’t fun.” He said it as if he’d  
144 been duped.

145           Townsend sensed the child was uncovering the  
146 existential dread that is mind-numbing office work. *Welcome to*  
147 *the work-world, kid.*

148           \* \* \*

149           THE ENTIRE PROJECT is intentionally temporal — the office  
150 held a pizza party on closing day that served as a tear-down and  
151 celebration.

152 Kate Milliken hopes the momentum from this project  
153 “continues to inject collaboration into the community.”

154 As we survey the room, it’s evident that relationships are  
155 being built and/or strengthened, strangers quickly became co-  
156 creators, joy was obvious everywhere one turned.

157 Unlike in most corporations, the “profits” at Tape Art  
158 Mega Corp were shared with the workers. On top of a crate box  
159 big enough for two washing machines is a literal money-pit of  
160 green-tape bills.

161 “Here, every artist gets paid,” Milliken says. She hands  
162 me a bill for my two-hour “shift.”

163 The revolution has started.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

164 **KEVIN O’KEEFE** is artistic director of Circus Minimus,  
165 which brings the magic of circus arts to kids and to schools.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

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####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

167

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

168

###END VIDEO###

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

169

###END LOGLINE###