

New Jersey

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Art Appreciation at One River School in Englewood

At One River School of Art + Design, kids are learning the importance of having art in their lives.

By [Mary Ann Castronovo Fusco](#) | February 13, 2017 | Appears in the [February 2017](#) issue



Students at the One River School in Englewood show off their latest work. Photo courtesy of One River School.

“I think it’s important for people to have art in their lives,” says Matt Ross. Since 2012, he has been putting his money where his mouth is.

That’s when the former CEO of the [School of Rock chain](#) of music-instruction centers opened [One River School of Art + Design](#) in Englewood, where preschoolers to adults can rouse their inner Rauschenberg while soaking up inspiration from the work of professional artists on display at the school. Ross, a resident of Cresskill, plans to open a second studio in Allendale this month.

“We’re trying to celebrate artists and art making,” says Ross. “We focus on what’s current, what’s relevant, and what we think is potentially important.”

Since leaving School of Rock in 2010, Ross has earned a certificate in art business from NYU’s School of Continuing and Professional Education, and collected about 250 works by emerging

artists. Displaying and selling museum-quality artwork in an area that the students see each time they come to class teaches them “art’s meant to be lived with,” says Ross. “It creates an empowerment where you believe you can be a working artist.”

The new Allendale facility includes two art studios, a digital workroom and gallery space. “We’re thinking of also offering other types of creative education—lecture programs on art, creativity, writing, poetry,” says Ross. “In the suburbs we get caught up in our daily lives and don’t have time to run into the city. We’re bringing urban culture to the suburbs and enriching people’s lives.” The name of the school is a reminder that New Jerseyans are just one river removed from New York or Philadelphia.

Teachers at both campuses work from a custom curriculum that includes single-subject classes in studio and digital media, as well as Art Shuffle programs in which students switch among drawing, painting and sculpture each month. Classes are held seven days a week. Monthly tuition, including materials, starts at \$135.

In a recent class, kindergartners learning about the paintings of Laura Owens used letters of the alphabet to create their own letter-inspired drawings. Taking a cue from the food-centric photography of Irving Penn, older students in a class taught by Angela Shin of Bloomfield, the school’s director of education, created compositions in which different foods had to touch each other. Students ages 11 to 18 can take part in Art Effect, a six-month program that culminates in a traveling exhibit. Student artwork has been shown at the Westfield Garden State Plaza in Paramus and Bergen PAC in Englewood, where Ross serves on the board of trustees.

“We encourage students to think about not only how do I make something, but why do I make something,” says Agnes Zabawa of West New York, One River’s director of operations. “It’s as much about creativity, process, and concept as end result.”

Though drawn to art, Ross studied marketing at SUNY Albany and finance at NYU’s Stern School of Business. He worked in broadcasting for 20 years, eventually becoming vice president and general manager of Q104.3, before investing in School of Rock. He still owns franchises in Chatham, Clark and Cresskill.

As CEO of School of Rock from 2005 to 2010, Ross oversaw the expansion of that company’s music centers from five to 55. He envisions similar growth for One River. The first One River franchise, in the Dallas suburb of Frisco, Texas, is to open in March.

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