

# Where Writers Can Write

It doesn't really look like much from the outside, but the tiny blue bungalow that houses Writers Bloc, a burgeoning Downtown artists co-op, is finally giving writers a place to pen their big ideas.

**A**t first glance, the blue bungalow on the northwest corner of Garfield and Sixth Street in Downtown Phoenix doesn't have a lot to recommend it. A few stubby fan palms dot the yard, along with sparse tufts of dry grass and a droopy prickly-pear cactus. The home's front windows look out onto a weedy lot and a nearby gas station.

But when Cindy Dach sees the property, she sees ground zero for a vibrant community of writers.

The house at 902 N. Sixth Street is the home of a relatively new writers co-operative called Writers Bloc. Dach, who is the marketing director of Changing Hands Bookstore, co-founded the co-op with her husband, Greg Esser, last spring. Both were involved in the creation of Eye Lounge, as well as other Downtown art galleries.

Dach based the concept on The Grotto, a San Francisco-based writers co-op. She hoped it would introduce the literary arts to the city's burgeoning arts district.

Dach envisioned something that was part exhibition space, part writers workshop, with visual arts exhibits that would become a stop on the First Friday art walks. Memberships would help pay the rent, as well as ensure a low-cost work and gathering space for writers.

"It's important to have more than one kind of arts," Dach says. "To me, the whole model was out there. It was just a matter of finding the people and the place."

Since spring, Dach has been tweaking the model to meet the needs of local writers. Unlike in San Francisco, she found that writers here needed office space less than a place to meet each other. So she introduced BYOBs on the first Tuesday of every month, when writers could drop by for a beer and mingle with other writers. She also dedicated space for workshops and editing groups, where writers could get help with their works in progress.

The co-op offers two levels of memberships. Studio members pay \$125-\$150 per month for the use of a private studio and 24-hour access to the facility. Supporters pay \$100 per year and receive discounts on writing workshops, which are open to the public. The goal is to keep everything affordable.

Most workshops cost \$100 or less.

The interior has the raw, minimalist look of a Downtown gallery space. Walls are sponge-painted turquoise. Wooden floors lie bare. The furniture is mismatched and plain.

But Dach sees beauty everywhere.

In the backyard, she points out a row of young mesquite trees recently planted to provide shade for writers who want to sit outside to work. She talks about the vines that will eventually grow up along the chain-link fence camouflaging the view of the street. The kitchen window, she says, offers one of the best views of Downtown at sunset.

But not everything has gone according to plan. At press time, two studio spaces remained vacant, and an editing group that was scheduled for the fall was pushed back

because not enough people had signed up. But Dach remains optimistic.

Paul Morris, director of ASU's new Master of Liberal Studies Program at the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing, says the co-op is a good idea, particularly for writers who aren't affiliated with a college-based writing program.

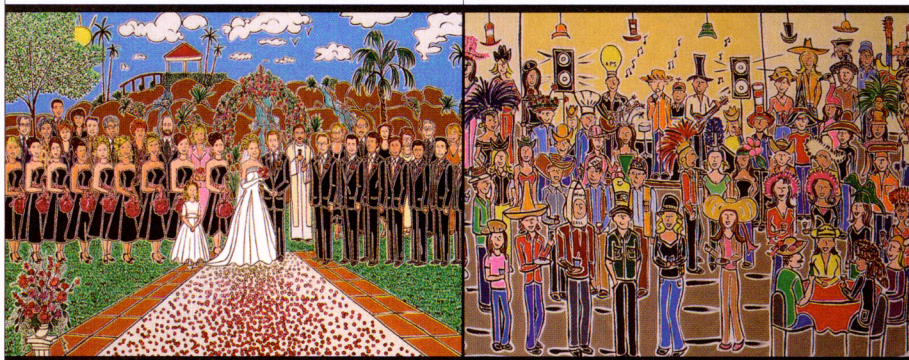
"Any place where writers gather together, it's a very good thing," Morris says. "Writing is very solitary. I always laugh when I see movies that glamorize the writing life. Because all it is, is someone sitting in front of a keyboard for hours by themselves. It is very lonely."

Kevin Vaughan-Brubaker became a studio member to get a quiet place to work on a manuscript before an important contest deadline. Since the deadline, he doesn't use the studio to write, but has attended the BYOBs and teaches workshops. And while it's worked out well for him, he's anxious to see the numbers grow.

"The space needs a larger mass of writers to give it life," he says.

To learn more, visit [writersblocphx.com](http://writersblocphx.com).

— Kathy Montgomery



ARTIST OF THE MONTH

## Samantha Smith

**S**amantha Smith likes to think of herself as the ultimate party crasher. Armed with her paintbrush, canvas and keen observational skills, the Arizona native has attended everything from black-tie affairs to racy Hollywood lingerie parties with one mission in mind – to paint them. Smith says her unique technique for capturing a moment came by accident one night at a house party in the Hollywood Hills, where she decided to paint several of the partygoers as they milled about. She says the positive reaction was overwhelming, and soon, the popularity of her services skyrocketed.

"What I think people like about my work is that they can see themselves in it and that creates a sense of ownership," says Smith, who returned to the Valley two years ago to continue her work in her home state.

Smith, who has done nothing but commission her work over the last few years, just finished displaying a 12-piece set for the city of Glendale, and will continue painting parties for people who want to record their occasion on canvas rather than film. But plan ahead if you want Smith to show up at your party – her waiting list can be up to six weeks long.

For more information, visit [paintingsbysamantha.com](http://paintingsbysamantha.com).

— Scott Buros