

# Jennifer: Ready For S'more Art? Q&A with Kurt Fleksing

Jennifer



*If this bad economy can result in anything good, it's creative business thinking.*

In fact, competing for the dollars and attention of consumers takes a lot of thinking outside of the box.

People in the creative fields have never lost sight of the power of a

non-conformist strategy. And people like artist and entrepreneur **Kurt Fleksing** are seizing this moment to unveil novel opportunities. Fleksing's mobile S'mores Cart is more than just good old fashioned fun. It's a way to capture the public's attention and redirect it to his real passion, artists and public art.

Unlike larger cities, the street cart is a fairly new concept for Kansas City. Where did this idea begin? Does Fleksing have a culinary

background or is he just a s'mores fan?

**KF:** "I have a background in contemporary art and happen to have a well developed sweet-tooth. S'mores are a perfect and rare delicacy in the world of street foods that make people smile.

"I see diverse street vending as important to the creation of a healthy urban experience.



Many cities boast of amazing street food; when in New York or Portland, Oregon, for instance, I have no problem finding tasty street food. The energy and informal buzz around street vendors is really nice. It makes it easy to strike up a conversation with locals, and get a greater sense of a community. I think Kansas City could use more street food vendors for this reason.

"As an artist it is my job to weave together sometimes opposing threads like commerce, education, and generosity into a rich tapestry of meaning and value that speaks in a language that is accessible to many. I chose a food that is a treat. It's not nutritious per se, but something special, sort of like art. I then paired this unique item, along with all its DIY history and tradition, with a mission to raise money to support local artists who are interested in transforming public spaces."

**JJ:** The food cart seems like a simple way to bring food to people, but I think people don't consider the expense involved. Are you experiencing any challenges in making this dream happen? How was the **The Rocket Grant** instrumental in your business plan?

**KF:** "Street-vending is less expensive than opening up a restaurant, but there are a lot of regulations and pre-requisites before getting a permit. The main challenges are in the business aspect of the project. It's one thing to come up with an idea, but when the idea leaves the traditional art venue like a gallery and has to work in the real world of business plans and formation, taxes, permits and health code regulations, it can be very challenging. I can't say I love the business side of this project, but I know it is critical that I get this project off the ground in a way that stays fairly true to my original intentions, and ensures its greatest chance of financial success.

"The Rocket Grant is pivotal to the project; the grant I received is essentially seed money for building a new cart. (<http://www.charlottestreet.org/opportunities/rocket-grants/>) I was very pleased that some amazing and hard-working people such as **David Hughes, Julia Cole** and **Kate Hackman** (among others at Charlotte Street Foundation) helped make the grant available to our community. I can't say enough about how incredible it is that Kansas City was is one of 3 cities in the country that received this **Warhol Foundation** funding. This kind of support makes me want to be part of this community and give back."

**JJ:** You're an artist and very involved in helping other artist's. Can you explain the concept behind **The S'mores Grant**?

**KF:** "This project comes from a concern that no matter how far art has come in terms of accessibility, most people don't really understand or can't relate to the best contemporary art being made right now. So an exciting goal is not making more art, but creating more *places* for art to be seen, heard, felt and understood.

Another thing I want to address is the fact that more artists are

getting a better art education than ever, and more artists are supporting themselves with non-art related work than ever. I think both artists and the public could use an example of a blurred lines approach between a creative practice and financial viability. And if I can make this project financially successful, why not give some of the earnings away to creative people who make our community a better and beautiful place to live?"

**JJ:** Are you still actively producing art?

**KF:** "If you mean by 'art' more traditional mediums, I would say that to keep my hands busy and exploring materials I lean towards designed, functional objects such as lighting and furniture. My art background is in sculpture, and I keep materials such as polystyrene, bio-plastics, steel and various re-claimed materials close at hand in my studio. Working with materials is a valuable way to do research, and it leads to the formation of ideas and projects. I like to build and create, and would also include making food in my kitchen as a creative practice, especially when collaborating with a friend."

**JJ:** I noticed on your blog that you were planning a trip to Chicago with your cart. Is traveling with your concept an important part of your vision?

**KF:** "Yes, I would love to take the cart to other communities, raise funds and award grants to creative people in those places."

**JJ:** You are tapping into people's childhoods and playful nature by offering s'mores. What have you learned about human behavior while you are out on the street?

**KF:** "Most people smile when they see the cart, or hear about the project. It's great to see a slight look of disbelief at the site of a cart roasting s'mores, which then turns into enjoyment. There is always good conversation, and I hope to incorporate more public art information on the cart so patrons can learn about our mission, and about art in general."

**JJ:** If you could name your dream, what would it be? Your ultimate goal?

**KF:** “My dream would be to open the doors to many non-art worlds such as street vending, house-painting, pizza delivery, whatever-anything can be improved by artists and artistic thinking. Its good business! My ultimate goal is to always be coming up with projects that keep me guessing, support me financially, are challenging, and teach me and my community something in the end.”

**JJ:** What do you think is the most important issue in the KC arts community?

**KF:** “Making space for new ideas to thrive and then actually supporting the creatives that want to live here. Art may be too important to be relegated to traditional art venues. Although we still need that kind of art, many creative artistic people in Kansas City have big ideas that might need a little more space than the gallery or museum. How we accommodate them will define our city.”

**JJ:** Any plans to expand into different food area’s?

**KF:** “I am currently designing a new cart so that a gas grill and refrigeration can be added later, so our menu may expand. An artist friend, **Brian Collier**, is currently working on a project that involves Asian carp, and we have been tossing around the idea of a fish taco type of cart, but I first want to get the s’mores cart up and running.”

**JJ:** Where can people find you next?

**KF:** “At 1210 Baltimore (Leedy-Voulkos Center) Friday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7-10:30 pm. We will be out roasting s’mores and spreading the word.”

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The S'mores Cart

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