



Kelly Scanlon: Joining us on this episode of Banking on Kansas City is Tony Jones, the Nerman Family President at the Kansas City Art Institute. Tony joined KCAI in December 2014 as Interim President. He's an internationally-known arts administrator, broadcaster, educator, exhibition curator and historian of art, architecture and design, as well as a consultant on higher education in the arts. Welcome to Banking on Kansas City, Tony.

Tony Jones: Thank you very much.

Kelly Scanlon: Kansas City Art Institute is a hidden gem to many Kansas Citians. I mean they might know that it's a four-year college of art and design, but what they might not be aware of is how central KCAI is to the cultural and artistic development of Kansas City into business development and really to the overall development of our city as we move forward and even further into the 21st century.

Kelly Scanlon: I've got to say, it doesn't really surprise me though because looking back on its history, it looks like KCAI has aggressively embraced innovation from the very beginning. Tell us about that. Let's go back to when it got started in 1885 with the Sketch Club and some of the notable names that have been associated with it.

Tony Jones: I think people in Kansas City, a group of men and women who founded a sketch club. Basically they wanted a cultural organization that was going to be about the practice of art. They all went up to the Art Institute of Chicago. They looked at it, because it was one of the great places in America and they said, "How do you do it? How do you teach? What do you teach? What effect do you have? What do you do for your community?" They asked the Art Institute, "Can you help us?"

Tony Jones: The Art Institute did and sent people down here. We know there's a record of all of this, to try to help the Sketch Club move from being a sketch club-

Kelly Scanlon: Just a club.

Tony Jones: ... a fairly lightweight to something really serious and something that would do something wonderful for Kansas City. When the phone rang one day, and the late Steve Metzler chair of the board of the Kansas City Art Institute called me up and asked me if I would come down here as an interim president, I thought, "Well, it's a long-lost cousin calling. I have to do this."

Tony Jones: Steve was fantastic. I asked him what his ambition for was for life and he said, "Oh, I intend to change the world, one cocktail at a time."

Kelly Scanlon: That sounds like Steve. Steve was a good friend of mine too.

Tony Jones: I thought, "I like the sound of this chap. This is going to be fun." I came and discovered a city full of treasures. I think it was interesting that we came in the middle of the winter. We came in December of 14. The Plaza was all lit up. The lights have just been come on. But we started wandering around and we started getting free distribution newspapers, like The Pitch.

Tony Jones: We started looking at the cultural assets in the city. I thought, "My Lord, this city is really buzzing. There's more than my wife and I could possibly do, music, theater, dance, writing, all sorts of stuff." I thought, "This is really great. It's amazing." Then people would say, "You're the artist. Where is that again? Is that in Overland Park?"

Tony Jones: Didn't know where it was and certainly didn't know what it had done. It wasn't until I started mentioning names like, "Did you know that Walt Disney was a student there? Did know that Robert Rauschenberg was a student there? Do you know about Robert Morris? Do you know about Thomas [Ogden 00:03:37]? Do you know about one of the superstars of contemporary art worldwide, Nick Cave?"

Tony Jones: "No. We thought they were from somewhere else."

Tony Jones: "Well, where did you think they were from? For goodness sake, have some pride."

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah, definitely some major names have crossed our paths. You are building on that legacy. Obviously, we're very glad that you did accept the invitation to come here to Kansas City and you're doing so many things. Let's go back now and talk about some of these recent efforts.

Kelly Scanlon: Talk to us about two very important things that you have introduced. One of them is to create an entrepreneurial minor for artists. Also a new major in product design that's going to be coming in 2020, I believe. Tell us about those two initiatives and how they will not just help the artists but also businesses here in Kansas City.

Tony Jones: You're right, and that certainly is our intention to be part of the creative industries. To help people, help the professions here in Kansas City. We aren't doing that alone. We're doing it in partnership with the The Bloch School at UMKC.

Tony Jones: In the case of product design, it's a sort of triangular program. We teach design, but the engineering school, at UMKC will teach material sciences and engineering theory and design. The Bloch School will teach entrepreneurship. You put that together and you're giving a student an opportunity to be original, to be highly creative, to be really smart, but have a future for those ideas. Otherwise, they just hit the wall. But if you know what to do, if you're a natural entrepreneurial, we train you to be an entrepreneur, you know how to take those ideas forward. That's a really exciting thing.

Tony Jones: We get lots and lots of students come to the college and they want to know what we do. They're thinking about enrolling. We give them an opportunity to see what it's like in the studios. I ask them the leading question, "Did you like what you saw? Do you want to do that for the rest of your life?" They put their hands up and say, "Yes."

Tony Jones: It's our responsibility then to teach them, to work with them, to give them an education, allow them to be free form designers, technologists, media specialists, people who are working across wide range of materials. But at the end of that, when they leave the greenhouse, because we know we're a pretty hot school, you leave the greenhouse and go out into that cold world out there, you need to know that those first steps are based in a knowledge of how to put a business together. How can you go on being highly creative and yet set up something that's exciting and new and will sustain you through your life?

Kelly Scanlon: From the business side, how is that helping the local businesses?

Tony Jones: We've talked to lots and lots of local businesses, all the big architectural firms, all the big design firms. We talked to Cerner, we talk to Garmin, lots and lots of people about what does this community want? Basically it comes down to they want new ideas. They want innovators. In the banking world, you're working all the time with venture capital. We work with venture talent.

Kelly Scanlon: I love that, venture talent. Definitely. Let's talk a little bit about another business partnership that you have, the Sponsored Studio projects. Tell us about those.

Tony Jones: This is an opportunity for us and our young students to interface with professionals in environments. It could be a high school. It could be a bank. It could be wherever to create murals, to create prints, to create artwork, create sculpture that can be on a rotating basis. The people who come into your lobbies or your your business see something and a month later, it's different. Or sometimes it's something that is rather more permanent like the murals that we

are doing in the schools, which goes back to the old WPA days. Kansas City had a part to play in all of that.

Tony Jones: Sponsored Studio is an opportunity to do something new and different. It's been accessed by all sorts of businesses and corporations in Kansas City. It's really meant a big difference for us. It means the student is working with the demanding professional as a client. That's an interface that you can't have in the studio.

Tony Jones: You have to have it with a real person from the banking world, the architecture world, the design world, who's going to say, "I want you to do this. I want you to be highly creative, but here are the parameters. This is how much it can cost, the materials. This is going to be on the wall for a certain amount of time." Set it up as a real-life experiment.

Kelly Scanlon: Give me some examples of some of the projects that you have worked on with businesses through the Sponsored Studio.

Tony Jones: I'll tell you a good example of that I really liked. I thought it was very innovative and very smart. David Manica, the architect, came to us and said he was designing a very beautiful new bar. It's very stylish, called The Monarch Bar. Well it could be Monarch in terms of Kings and Queens, but also could be butterflies.

Kelly Scanlon: Definitely.

Tony Jones: We came up with this rather wonderful idea that you needed something signature, something completely different. The Sponsored Studio project between David and the college was to come up with something that would be a whole ceiling as a gigantic chandelier of butterflies, of monarch butterflies. Student designers worked with him on how to do this and came up with a design based on the shape of the monarch butterfly. Then laser cut those and cut them with routers as well up in David T Beall's Studio for Art + Technology.

Tony Jones: Then heated them and bent them over molds so that they are transparent, but they have the shape of the butterfly. You can see one through the other and then stack them four or five high. We hung them in this ceiling space in the middle of The Monarch Bar. It is a sight to see.

Kelly Scanlon: Incredibly impressive.

Tony Jones: It changes color too, which is really quite wonderful. It was an opportunity to work with a very, very high-class architect on a technically very, very demanding brief from that architect that had to work and be appreciated by thousands and thousands of people who go to The Monarch Bar. That kind of studio sponsored project is a perfect example of what we could do that is a real surprise. People say, "I didn't know you could do that." Well, we do.

Kelly Scanlon: Well, and it's a great example of what you talked about where you may not know that you're intersecting with the Art Institute and the students. Yet a good example is The Monarch Bar. Children's Mercy Hospital, another icon in Kansas City. It doesn't surprise me that you have joined up with them. Tell us how you're partnering with Children's Mercy Hospital.

Tony Jones: That's really been an amazing thing. We built a brand new studio called the David T. Beale's studio for Art + Technology. It's packed with 3-D printers and rapid prototypers. We can take digitally-created big files and we can make a 3-D object. I mean it is a wonder to behold.

Kelly Scanlon: It's crazy what you can create with those 3-D printers.

Tony Jones: People come and they look at it and they say, "I don't believe what I'm seeing here. How is it doing that? How is this machine spinning a four-foot-high form? It's like it's a digital potter. You see the thing being created right in front. We started talking more about how can you make things that are really helpful that are important to our profession?"

Tony Jones: Obviously, if you're an industrial designer you can make something. You can make a prototype. You could do something for architects and architecture. But what if you're a surgeon? The challenge was, working with Children's Mercy, they told us a lot about the challenges of contemporary surgery with children, small children, five, six, seven, eight year old.

Tony Jones: We have three surgeons who were absolutely wonderful. Certainly told me more I ever than I ever wanted to know about the human heart and its mobility and how it grows and how it moves within the chest cavity. They said what we really want to be able to be better surgeons is we need MRIs, we need sonograms, all of that information. But before we actually go into a child in order to operate on their heart, we need to know what that heart looks like. We need a three-dimensional model of that heart. That heart has to be produced the day or the day before surgery. It can't be 10-days old.

Tony Jones: Further, it is specific to the child. It's not a generic heart. We need to know where the heart is within the chest cavity because they move around. We need to know what size it is. We need to do the issues in the heart. Is it the descending aorta? Can we see the blood flow through the heart? For the first time, we started working with them on the visualization through 3-D printing to create a three-dimensional heart.

Tony Jones: We have them. They're about the size of a thumbnail. We also have them about the size of a, they can be the size of your hand. It means that the surgeons can look at that and know exactly what they need to do. The faster they're in there, the faster they work, the faster the recovery time. Because it's not generic, it is specific to the child. Well that opens up all sorts of wonderful opportunities. It comes out of a medical illustration program that we do.

Kelly Scanlon: You were talking earlier about some of the construction that's going on on campus. One of those is the Paul and Linda DeBruce Hall. It's an 18,000 square foot, state of the art, right there at 44th and Oak. Tell us about the building's namesakes first. Then how the building's going to change the campus and student experience.

Tony Jones: It's a transformative building. Paul and Linda DaBruce, are well known business people and philanthropists, love the arts, have been very, very important donors to the Nelson-Atkins Museum, just wonderful people. We talked about the importance of how you can teach the liberal arts and art history. How do you teach that to contemporary students on make that highly relevant?

Tony Jones: One of the things I said was, "The thing about art history is, it's not like art history is good for you." That's like eat your vegetables. It's alive. The reason it's alive is because we're sitting right between the Kemper Museum, which is dedicated to contemporary practice and a magnificent historical museum, which also teaches contemporary practice, the Nelson-Atkins.

Tony Jones: My colleagues, Julian, and Sean at the Kemper, we talk about how do you teach cultural history that is relevant? How does a student place themselves in that continuum of art history? What is the history of design? What's the history of materials? What's the history of technologies and media? We couldn't do that.

Tony Jones: Paul and Linda responded to, the real thing is you need a new facility that's dignified, that's flexible, a dynamic space. It needs to be a landmark building. It needs to be something strong. We went, of course, to a Kansas City architect. Because I believe very strongly that we should be using local talent and giving them an opportunity.

Tony Jones: We do that also with the construction companies that actually build things for us. We've gone to many of them and we went in this case to Matthew Hufft, who is a terrific mid-career architect. We gave him this challenge. We want a 20,000 square foot building of real distinction, which is going to be different, but fits in to the neighborhood of Southmoreland and Rockhill. Nothing too disjunctive and yet something original and strong. He's designed something and believe me, it is going to get people's attention. This building is terrific.

Kelly Scanlon: What a great vision to think about doing using the building in that way. Will this be open to the public at all?

Tony Jones: We're beginning to develop now a program for it. Firstly, of course, it's a teaching facility, but it has a rather wonderful atrium, top-lit atrium and a garden behind it. We're already thinking about art history conferences and events that we can be doing, lectures and presentations and seminars, et cetera.

Tony Jones: We're very committed to our neighborhood. I like being up there. I lived up there, actually my wife and I lived on Rockhill for two years. I like the neighborhood. I like the people. I like the buildings. We need to do something for them. We're building at the moment, the new Cafe Nerman right out the front gate.

Tony Jones: Why is it at the front gates? It's so that we can say to the public, "Come in and have a cup of coffee and a muffin. If you're bringing your dog, here's a place where you can give the dog some water and tie the dog up. If you're jogging by and suddenly needs some caffeine, come in."

Kelly Scanlon: I like that about Kansas City. The Kauffman Performing Arts Center had that philosophy to open up these concerts and these performances to everybody. I'm hearing more and more about that. I mean you just expressed it yourself with, "If you're walking your dog, come in and have a muffin." I like the way Kansas City's going in that direction.

Tony Jones: I think we're doing that for our locals. Obviously, we're doing it for our own community. We're doing it for the Rockhill and Southmoreland community. We're also doing it for the hundreds of thousands of people are going to be coming to Rockhill when the streetcar arrives.

Kelly Scanlon: Yes. I want to talk about the streetcar because you've been such an outspoken proponent of the streetcar, especially in getting a stop there. Tell us about why you feel so strongly about that and what your vision for what the street car can do.

Tony Jones: If you're from Kansas City and you think about Rockhill, and you looked at it, say you had an aerial photograph or map. On one side you have the Kemper Museum of Contemporary art. On the other side, you have the Nelson-Atkins. In the middle, you've got us, right? Two showrooms and a factory.

Tony Jones: Well, what's going to happen on that hill? We're going to open up a new gallery that is going to be under construction in the coming year. You've got the two museums already. You're going to have thousands of people getting off the streetcar right outside the Marriott and Kimpton hotels. They're going to be walking along the street. They'll see giant pieces of sculpture. They'll go to the the Kemper. They'll look across the road and there's another piece of sculpture sitting right next to our front gates. They'll cross the road.

Tony Jones: They'll start to walk from sculpture to sculpture to sculpture, walking through our campus. The next thing you know, that right at the Donald J. Hall Sculpture Park at the back of the Nelson-Atkins. Julian, Sean and I and the neighborhood, we're all talking about what is that going to mean to the quality of life, to the neighborhood? What's going to happen to visitors?

Tony Jones: What happens to us who live and work there? But what experience does Kansas City want to give to a visitor who's come for a convention and has taken the streetcar and alighted at that corner on Main, and walks into this cultural district? What happens? Where do they sit down? Where did they go to the restroom? Where did they have coffee? Where's the signage? How do they move through the space? Are these things fixed forever or do they change constantly? We're all talking cooperatively and collaboratively as to what we can do to make that a better experience for visitors, as well as people who live here.

Kelly Scanlon: Overall, how can Kansas City's embrace of the artistic community lead to community growth and economic development?

Tony Jones: I think there are three or four things that can happen. In the fine art area, if you like, we know there are collectors here. There are people who support the college. We have student exhibitions all the time. People would come and buy tons of work. Those people are sensitized to that kind of expression. They take work home. We do the roll-up printing that we do out in various parking lots, et cetera. It really excites people. But arguably the bigger and wider impact, although much less, not so easy to identify, is the impact of design technology and media.

Tony Jones: The more we talk to people who like the city, we talk to people about design innovation and wanting to have more digital upload, to have more post-production facilities, stuff that's going on that feeds into the developing industry. Whether that is furniture design, on one hand, or something that's completely five-dimensional and screen-based and exists only in the cyber world. Everybody that I've spoken to in industry and the professionals in Kansas City is we need more. We need more smart, well-trained students who are highly innovative who can come and work with us.

Tony Jones: The city, I think is very sensitive to the issue that there's a need for some kind of incubator facility. There's a lot of stuff going on. I mean, look at what goes on at Studios Inc. Look at what goes on at Charlotte Street. All of these things are there. They're all absolutely terrific.

Tony Jones: But my sense is they're a little disconnected. There needs to be some theory of what it is that we want all of these organizations to contribute to the quality of life in Kansas City. To contribute to all of those companies who say, "If we don't have innovation, then we can't secure the market we've got. We can't advance that market. We can't create a market that we haven't even dreamed off."

Kelly Scanlon: That's very true. Talk to us though about beyond Kansas City. What are the changes that are occurring and the programs that you are working like with Children's Mercy? How is that going to attract others to Kansas City?

Tony Jones: I think it's one word, relevance. What I see in talking to my colleagues who run other schools of art and design, whether it's Rhode Island or CalArts or Chicago, obviously, we all talk about this. It's tough out there. We've seen schools of art and design in America close, completely close. I mean, Memphis College of Art was founded in the 1920s, old college has closed.

Tony Jones: Oregon College of Arts and Crafts in Portland has just closed. There are others that have had to merge, disappear and justly won't make it because they're not relevant. They're not talking to industry. They're not talking to the professions. They don't talk to galleries. They're just not looking at the relevance of the education.

Tony Jones: We said it a little earlier, something about applied arts. That's what we're looking at. It's applied creativity and innovation that has a real role. It's rewarding and exciting for the student. They're not compromising their artistic ability, their sense of innovation at all. But they're applying that. Students who have an acute sense of social responsibility, love this kind of approach.

Kelly Scanlon: Which more and more of the younger students have, right?

Tony Jones: Absolutely. More and more of them are saying that. We teach social practice and application of your ideas. Can it help? Does it do something for your society? Does it do something? Does it fill a gap? Does it define a need? Yes, it does. Would you like to work in that world? Yes. Every day of my life I'd like to work in that world.

Kelly Scanlon: Yes, you are doing wonderful things at the Art Institute. It's going to be exciting to watch this vision unfold. Especially in the next two years with with the new buildings that are going up. Then as you say, if the streetcar comes through there. I just want to thank you for all your work on behalf of Kansas City and for the arts community. Thank you so much.

Tony Jones: Proud to do it. Thank you very much.

Joe Close: This is Joe Close, president of Country Club Bank. Tony Jones, the faculty and students of the Kansas City Art Institute are vital to the cultural and artistic development of Kansas City. But they're not only helping shape creative visionaries to develop and produce amazing works of art, they're playing a key role in the evolution of our city.

Joe Close: Through its new venture, the Art Institute is helping marry the creative arts with entrepreneurship. They're working to give students not only the creative skills to succeed artistically, but the business acumen to succeed as an entrepreneur. The combining of those skills makes our city, its people and businesses better.

Joe Close: The Kansas City Art Institute, as Tony puts it, works with venture talent. They're helping to encourage innovators and creative thinkers to go out into our

community and solve real problems across multiple industries like the school's partnership with Children's Mercy. They're tackling long-standing problems in new, unexpected ways to create lasting change in Kansas City.

Joe Close: Country Club Bank, member FDIC.