



A promotional banner for E*TRADE Securities LLC. On the left, it says "NEW! MOBILE * PRO" in green and black, with "Exclusively on BlackBerry." below it. In the center is a black BlackBerry smartphone. To the right, the text "MONEY CAN'T WAIT" is written in large, bold, black letters. The E*TRADE logo is in the top right corner, and a purple "DEMO" button is in the bottom right corner. The background is light blue with a faint reflection of the "MONEY CAN'T WAIT" text.

Need more money? Turn your bedroom into an art gallery

Bruce Watson

Nov 20th 2008 at 5:00PM

Filed under: **Entrepreneurship, Extracurriculars, Home, Real Estate, Career, Relationships, Recession**



Over the past few months, as the economic outlook has grown increasingly gloomy, various pundits, commentators and all-purpose wing nuts (including yours truly) have offered tips to help the average person weather the financial downturn. We've given suggestions for lowering bills, saving money on food, increasing equity, decreasing fees, and various other mainstream methods for reducing your fiscal burden.

While many of these suggestions have been intelligent, useful, and well-thought-out, they generally aren't all that inspiring. Every so often, however, a wild, off-the-wall solution comes along and shows how a little bit of creativity can shore up one's finances **and** improve one's community.

A perfect example of this is **Blanka Amezkua**, an artist in New York City. Noticing the lack of art venues in her area and eager to increase her neighborhood's sense of community, she decided to turn her bedroom into an alternative art space. Christening it "The Bronx Blue Bedroom Project," or **BBBP**, she

began inviting a variety of artists to create art installations in the room, which she subsequently opened to artists and art lovers in her neighborhood. While Blanka doesn't charge for these showings, she and **Laura Napier**, another artist who lives in her building, also host art sales. These, in turn, help her market her own work while continuing to generate interest in the local art scene.

An interesting side effect of converting one's personal space into an art venue is that doing so may make it possible to apply for funding to support the project. While Amezkua has, thus far, been unsuccessful at getting financial support for her BBBP, she continues to apply for grants, and hopes that going into her second year she'll have more success securing outside funding.

While the BBBP is certainly innovative, it follows a long American tradition of transforming personal spaces into public areas for art and free expression.

During the Harlem Renaissance, for example, "rent parties" enabled renters to make friends and pay the bills. Basically, the host would hire a band or invite some musicians into his or her apartment, send the word out that a rent party was happening, and put away all the breakables. Guests, in turn, would bring alcohol and food and would pay a small admission fee. By the end of the evening, everyone was happier, including the host, whose rent had ideally been thus covered. In the process, however, rent parties also became venues for blues and jazz artists to hone their craft. While these events probably originated in New York City, they were also part of the jazz scene in New Orleans, where (according to the Oxford English Dictionary) they were called "skiffles."

The decision to transform one's personal space into a public viewing area is difficult, and Amezkua was concerned about the impact of inviting complete strangers into her home. However, she notes that she has had absolutely no problems with the BBBP. In fact, "everyone has been extremely receptive and supportive." Best of all, she has transformed her home into a living, breathing art space!

*Bruce Watson is a freelance writer, **blogger**, and all-around cheapskate. Right now, he's wondering how his 3 year old daughter would react to having her bedroom turned into a art venue...*

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