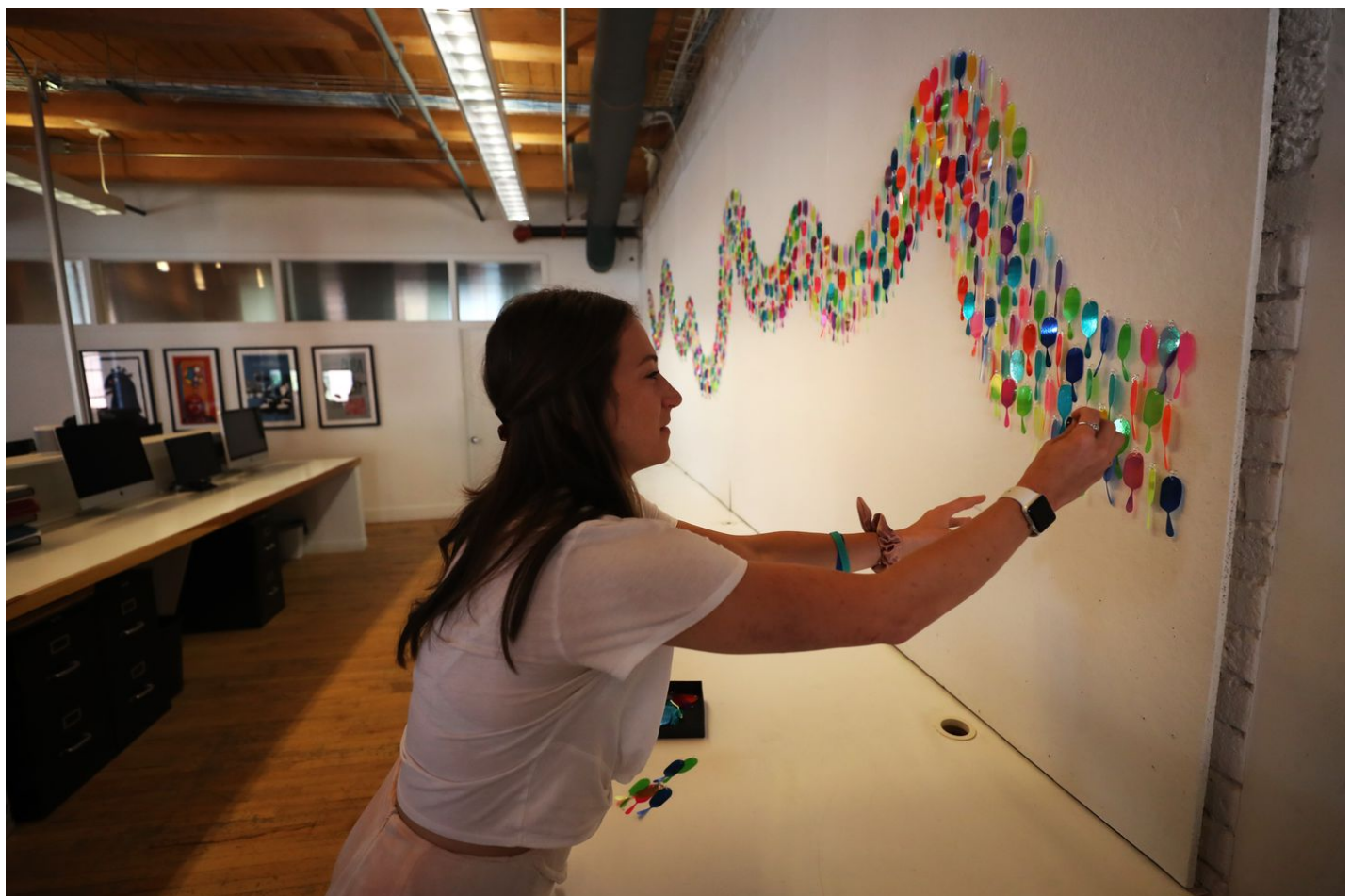


WELCOME BACK

Instead of hitting a wall, these workers are decorating one — together

Each employee of HATCH branding firm adds some color to artist Cheryl Sorg's installation at the office

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated September 8, 2021, 1 hour ago



Account Executive Kristen Bullock adds a colored raindrop to Cheryl Sorg's installation "Raining Upward" to mark HATCH's return to the office. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Employees at the branding firm HATCH The Agency found a rainbow when they returned to the office this week, a year and a half after COVID-19 sent them home. Artist Cheryl Sorg's newly installed "Raining Upward," made of colored plastic droplets, flowed

in sparkling colors across one of the office walls.



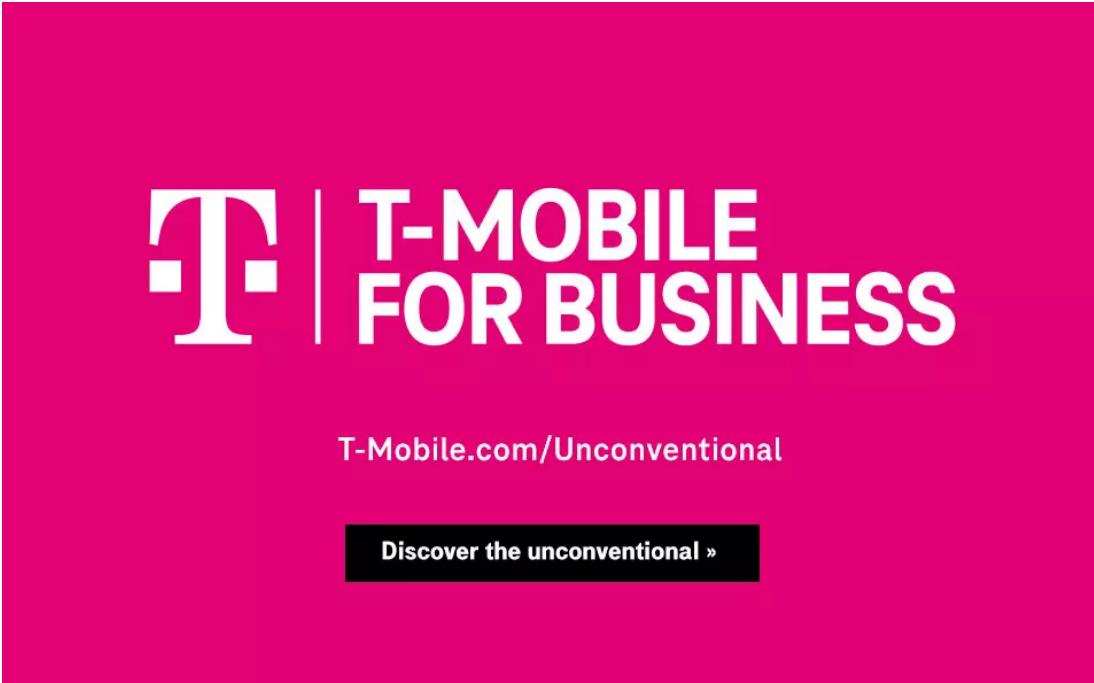
A HATCH employee added a colored raindrop to the office art installation. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

HATCH's president, Jennifer Harrington, had successfully bid for Sorg's custom installation at last spring's art auction at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Harrington is the vice chair of MassArt's Foundation Board of Directors, a volunteer position, and has chaired the auction in past years.

"The thought in my mind was, 'That's what we would put on that wall. And make it an opportunity for people to come back to something a little bit different,' " said Harrington. "That would allow them to see that things had changed as much as they had stayed the same."

Sorg, a MassArt alum, flew in from California last month to install the piece, pinning more than 2,000 jewel-toned, inverted raindrops cut from color-coated plastic film to the 12-foot-wide expanse.

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“I’m taking the metaphor of the rain as a negative or a hardship or a bad thing, and flipping it,” Sorg said over the phone from Encinitas, California.

Bright as candy, and undulant as a roller coaster, “Raining Upward” sweeps and shimmers across the wall.

“It is one thing, but it has all these independent and individual components and diverse colors,” said Harrington. “I think that’s a great symbol for our team.”

Sorg didn’t quite finish the installation. She left behind a tray full of raindrops and pins so that HATCH’s nine employees could complete the work when they arrived for the first time at their office — a welcome-back ritual.

The business, Harrington said, has thrived during the pandemic. HATCH’s clients include Northeastern University, Boston Medical Center, and Santander Bank.

“But you can’t replicate the energy over Zoom that you have when you’re in the same room together,” said Rick McHugh, the agency’s executive creative director, who joined HATCH in May.

Every two months, the group talked about returning to the office, an open, airy loft space in the South End.

“We started to realize that some of our clients were probably going to go back in September,” Harrington said. “Of course, that’s since changed.”

The Delta variant has thrown a wrench into many [companies’ game plans](#). But the HATCH team is small, and they have all been vaccinated. They decided to come back after Labor Day, but only for two days each week.

“There were a lot of different considerations to take into account,” said Harrington. “So much changed over the time we were working apart. I had employees who had their first babies, their third babies. I had employees who had compromised parents.”

Everyone returned to the office, and the mood was almost giddy as they gathered in person for the first time. .

They reminisced about the last time they were there together — March 13, 2020 — and the netherworld they have worked in since.

“I remember the first time I came into the office to pick up some files,” said Tricia Krupa Cha, HATCH’s director of talent and operations. “My calendar was still up for March, 2020, and it was a year later.”

Each employee chose a colorful raindrop to add to “Raining Upward.” Many predicted which color others would pick. Nobody was surprised when Alyssa Napoleon, senior vice president for client services, chose orange.

Krupa Cha opted for gold. After she pinned her raindrop, she hugged Harrington.

As the group completed Sorg’s installation, they chatted about office life.

“Now I can have my coffee in peace,” said Megan Mead, the company’s vice president and account director, a mother of three.

“We can admire each other’s shoes,” said Napoleon.

How is it different from Zoom?

“We’re all dressed,” said creative director Joe Krikava.

As COVID-19 rages on, workplaces continue to adapt. For Harrington, the welcome back around Sorg’s buoyant installation marked a turning point.

“I feel like something is ending,” she said, “and something is starting.”

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