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December 2, 2004

LES Building Hosts Open Studios



Inside an old building with a painted blue door on the Lower East Side is a kind of artists' community. Each of the nine floors at 195 Chrystie Street has creative professionals working in windowed studios on everything from antique frames to canvas bags, jewelry and silk-screen printed tank tops to stationery. This weekend, visitors will get a chance to take a peek inside the workshops of more than 40 artists and purchase their work as the building hosts its semi-annual Open Studios. Creative style -- in everything from portrait painting to pickle making -- will be impossible to miss.

"A Bovine Portrait" by Edie Nadelhaft will be featured at LES Open Studios this weekend

A few days before the upcoming event, Diana Rupp is getting her studio on the fifth floor ready. She is almost finished painting the floors brown and preparing to transform the walls -- currently lime green -- to a shade of blue. In between, she takes

phone calls while dyeing yarn and ringing it out on her fire-escape-turned-balcony. An unfortunate spill of white paint on the newly painted floor captures her attention for a few minutes.

"All I wanted to do was make stuff," admits Rupp, recalling her past work as a fashion editor. And so she took her love for arts and crafts and invested it, creating both a successful livelihood for herself and an educational resource for others. About two years ago, Rupp opened her studio in the building. Called [MAKE workshop](#), it's a craft school, design studio, knitting supply store, and showroom for local artisans all in one.



Diana Rupp, founder of MAKE workshop, in her studio

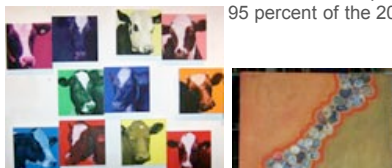
The school offers tons of classes, including "Intro to the Sewing Machine," crocheting, and embroidery, as well as workshops in appliqué, block printing, hand quilting, Kool-Aid dyeing, and afghan knitting. There are also courses that leave students

walking away with their very own hand-made Jimmy Choo-like shoes or trendy ponchos. MAKE's sale, which takes place only on Friday from 6 to 8 p.m., will feature hand-dyed yarns, jewelry, hand-printed t-shirts, crocheted goods, hand-bound books, and more. In addition, the studio will be open during the weekend hours for visitors to stop by and learn about the various crafty programs.

This is Open Studios' fifth year, and once again the gates on each floor of this artsy building will be unlocked and the public invited in to explore. "You have the unique opportunity to see what goes on in an artist's studio, as opposed to in a gallery, when the works takes on a different light," says [Anne Canon](#), who keeps busy on the eighth floor restoring antiques when she isn't painting or doing woodwork or sculpture. "You get to see where it was created," she adds. Like Canon and Rupp, many of the artists in the building have a knack for several crafts. In addition to being chief organizer of Open Studios this year, Canon will display some paintings influenced by the nature that surrounded her during a recent summer workshop in Maine.

Like most of the tenants, Canon rents a studio that was created when the building's original tenants -- garment factories -- moved out and the larger space was divided up. When the last of the garment shops left two years ago, the 80-year-old building's transformation from an industrial manufacturing site to a haven for creative production was complete.

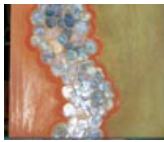
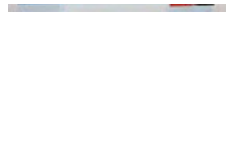
Linda Lee, a sculpture and manager of the building, says that 95 percent of the 200 tenants currently in the



building are artists. "We like having a creative environment," Lee says, adding that she deliberately tries to woo artsy types to fill the space. The building's existing tenants -- talented architects, writers, filmmakers, painters,

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photographers, sculptures, and other creative professionals -- are one draw. Another, says Lee, is the reasonable rent.

the size]." Though the rent is affordable, many of the artists still need other jobs to supplement their

"We are one of the few places where artists can get affordable spaces, which vary from \$300 to \$4,000 [depending on

income. Lee adds that the building is one of the largest (900,000 sq. ft.) in the area with an almost entirely artist-based group.



A 10-year veteran tenant, painter Barry Shepherd describes each floor as having "its own personality." On his floor -- the eighth -- artists are more private, keeping their doors closed while they work, whereas other floors have tenants walking in and out of studios throughout the day, he says.

He is pleased that Chrystie

Street has remained "edgy" and hasn't been "Elizabethized," he says, describing a neighboring street where trendiness is on the rise. Shepherd's work, a mix of portraits and abstract paintings, has its own edginess -- often incorporating pieces of plexi-glass drilled onto the canvases. Though his bigger and more expensive paintings might not sell during Open Studios, he looks forward to the event as a means of getting feedback and expanding his mailing list, which will aid him as he plans future shows in galleries.



Barry Shepherd holds one of his paintings

A few floors below Shepherd, [Edie Nadelhaft](#) is in her studio, surrounded by bright cows and talking about transcendence. The paintings of cows, like those of the flowers and knickers hanging on the white walls, are her signature work and offer a grand visual experience. Though the paintings are of everyday objects, they give the viewer the opportunity to "transcend the subject matter, and it becomes more about the painting," Nadelhaft says. "To me, art is transcendent."

Her work explores themes of existentialism and the impact of the digital on visual experience. Each picture begins with a photograph that is digitally manipulated to produce a monochromatic "head shot," the hue for which is chosen from the 216 colors of the web palette. Nadelhaft, who works as a web designer three days a week, says Open Studios is great way to gain exposure.

Just as Open Studios enables the public to connect with the artists, the building itself has allowed the artists to develop relationships and work together. A photographer, [Charles Nes](#), had his studio in the building for two years and recalls often turning to the other artists for assistance: "If I needed a carpenter, I went across the hall. If I needed a vase, I went across the hall. If I needed someone to strip my furniture and paint it in gold leaf, I went down the hall."



Rick Field and Lauren McGrath in Rick's Picks studio

Unimaginable scenarios sometimes result when so many artists work in such close proximity. Take, for instance, the jar of pickles on sale in a store that carries totes and pillows. This unlikely but fruitful set-up emerged when the in-house pickle maker, [Rick Field](#) of Rick's Picks, befriended designers working at [Hable Construction](#), which has a studio on the first floor of the building as well as a retail shop on Elizabeth Street.

In his sixth-floor studio, Field talks about a "hobby that became an obsession that became a full-time job." He hesitates to call what he does "art," but who else but an artist could fashion (and name) innovative creations like Windy City Wasabeans (green beans in soy-wasabi brine), Phat Beets (pickled beets in rosemary-scented brine), Pepi Peps Pep (pickled roasted peppers infused with their own essence), or Mean Beans (green beans in cayenne-dill brine).

"For us, the total aesthetic package extends outside of the jar, as well as inside," Field says. During the Open Studios, Field and his partner Lauren McGrath will offer tastings of the pickled vegetables (all ingredients are from local producers) and, for the children, pickled-inspired coloring sessions. On Wednesdays, Field peddles his pickles in Union Square.

A tenant of 195 Chrystie Street for the past few years, Field wonders about the turns the building could take in coming years. "The future of the building is an open question. To say that the neighborhood is changing is an understatement, because change is inevitable."

For now, the building stands as an enabler of creative force. And twice a year, the public gets to experience it.

Open Studios @ 195 Chrystie Street, between Stanton and Rivington, will have its opening reception on Friday, December 3 from 6 to 9 p.m. The event will continue on Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 6 p.m. Admission is free.

To learn about Lower Manhattan's Cultural Council, an organization that has been serving and integrating artists within the downtown community for more than three decades, please click [here](#).

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