

We're SO
not getting
our security
deposit back

A guide to defunct
artist-run spaces

DC Edition

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artist-run spaces

DC Edition, October 2017

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Essay by Blair Murphy

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Introduction

Paddy Johnson

If high-end commercial galleries and museums feel a little impersonal, consider the artist-run space. If you want to know about the artist's process, they're there to tell you about it. If you want to think about the art, no one will bother you. And if you want a checklist for a show, expect it to take at least twice as long as commercial space because an actual human has to put it together.

I love these inefficiencies—they're like scars demonstrating commitment to the cause of art—but they're also the reason so many of these projects are short-lived. They run on dedication and care of artists, and while that makes them immensely influential within artist communities it does not always translate into money. Eventually something gives.

AFC Editor Michael Anthony Farley and I launched this project because we knew that the projects made with love and sweat equity were the ones least likely to be archived and most precious to us. So, in June 2016 when artist and Beltway Public Works curatorial collective member Natalie Campbell responded to our call for submissions and asked about the possibility of doing a DC-specific zine, we jumped at the chance. We were sure the submissions would each tell a different story, and that together they'd give a sense of what the artist community in DC is all about.

Now, usually untested project theories like these have a weird way of being disproven during the execution. There's always an unaccounted-for factor. This time, though, we were entirely on the money. Of course, we don't have all the stories or all the images we'd need to give a complete history. But this zine, as unfinished and imperfect as it is, is about as close as anyone's going to get.

Temporary Art: Remembering DC's Artist-Run Spaces

Blair Murphy

We all know that the histories we learn are incomplete. The past is messy. Some of the most interesting stories go untold because the people involved didn't have the time or resources to document them. Even the very recent past can quickly disappear. *We're SO not getting our security deposit back* is an effort to fight this disappearance, by recovering lost stories that chronicle the impact of artist-run spaces and capture the unique character of independent scenes in different cities.

But to fully understand those spaces, it's important to know the context from which they emerged. For the DC edition of the zine, that means looking at DC's unique political status and its influence on the city's growth, the drastic redevelopment it underwent in the 1960's and 1970's, and the shape of its arts infrastructure including nonprofits, commercial galleries, museums and artist-run spaces.

Inevitably, the city's art scene has had to contend with the character of DC's built environment. As a city shaped by politics and government, rather than manufacturing, DC has never had a large stock of empty warehouses or industrial buildings. Finding exhibition and studio space has often meant putting smaller spaces—tiny storefronts, row houses, garages, basements, and porches—to creative use. The city's geography also plays a key role. DC is a federal district. It's not part of any state and its 680,000 residents lack voting representation in Congress. The city is less than 70 square miles, bordered by suburbs in Maryland and Virginia. In daily life, the boundaries are porous—it's not unheard of for an artist to live in Maryland, have a studio in Virginia, and be represented by a gallery in DC, or for a DC artist to postpone a move in order to finish up a project funded by the District's arts commission.

In the last decade, breakneck gentrification has reshaped a city that has long been a center of black cultural life. DC was majority black between 1960 and 2010, as white residents flocked to the suburbs. A recent influx of younger, whiter residents—and new money—has created an economic boom, but also anger and tension. Long time residents have been pushed out or, if they remain, may no longer

feel at home in their own neighborhoods. Many local artists and collectives have been powerful advocates against the whitewashing of DC culture (for example, the exhibition *How We Lost DC* by the Delusions of Grandeur collective, Honfleur Gallery and *Black Space* by Holly Bass at the central MLK Library, both, 2015). Yet artists and arts institutions have also benefitted from the city's economic growth. They have cultivated relationships with developers and seen increases in city funding, made possible by growth in tax revenue. Meanwhile, the city's history is ignored or commodified in condo developments and businesses aimed at wealthier newcomers—a pattern that is familiar in so many cities across America right now.

The history leading up to this moment shares commonality with other American cities as well, though the specifics of this tale are what make DC unique. During the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's, DC was torn apart and reconstructed in the name of urban renewal. In downtown DC, DC Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) and the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), both federal agencies tasked with redeveloping swaths of DC, regularly leased buildings to artists and arts organizations. They gave them temporary space for little or no money while the agencies developed long term plans for the buildings. Once they were ready to move forward with new construction, the leases were terminated. The original locations of the non-profit arts organizations Washington Project for the Arts (WPA) and the Museum of Temporary Art (MOTA), were leased directly from RLA. Between these PADC and RLA-owned buildings and an abundance of other available and inexpensive spaces, downtown saw a boom of arts organizations, studio space, and ad hoc artist housing, ranging from informal, temporary initiatives to formal non-profits and commercial galleries.

This period in DC coincided with the alternative arts boom of the 1970's, which saw the emergence of artist-centered arts organizations in cities across the country. In addition to WPA, Arlington Arts Center, Torpedo Factory, and Capitol Hill Arts Workshop can all trace their roots to this period and persist today as important hubs. By the 2000s, those

institutions were joined by a slew of new 501(c)3 organizations, including Pyramid Atlantic, DC Arts Center, Transformer, Hamiltonian Gallery, Hillyer Arts Space, and CulturalDC. As many respondents to our survey noted, nonprofits have exerted an outsize influence on the local scene; arguably, this influence continues today to a greater degree than other American cities. The NEA funding cuts of the early 1990's damaged the city's arts infrastructure, but local government funding for the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (DCCA), DC's equivalent of a state arts agency, increased with the city's economic boom.¹ In 2017, DCCA had more funding per capita than any other state arts agency. Neighboring Maryland ranks third per capita among the fifty states for its state arts funding and, while Virginia's state funding is less generous, Arlington County, which borders DC, has its own Arts and Cultural Affairs office, which had a budget of \$2.5 million in 2017.

In contrast to the growing number of locally-focused nonprofits, commercial galleries face a challenging environment. The market for contemporary art in DC is small and has a conservative bent. There are a handful of passionate, committed, and forward-thinking local patrons, but many collectors prefer to buy from the New York establishment. Plus the city's retail real estate is now wildly expensive. Meanwhile, only a few of the city's museums—including the Phillips Collection and the National Museum of Women in the Arts—have forged connections with the local scene. The larger institutions understand their audience as national, rather than local, and offer few opportunities for DC artists. Their federal funding and national prominence also make them a constant target for culture war-style attacks from right-wing religious leaders and politicians.

Artist-run spaces, which tend to be less visible, don't receive the same level of scrutiny from the right. They thrive, in part, because they have more flexibility than the models above. They don't have to craft five-year plans, write donor appeals, cultivate collectors, or speak to a national audience. They can host experimental projects that may appeal, initially, to a small group of friends and colleagues but be an essential step in the development of new work.

In other instances, artist-run spaces host the kinds of unconventional projects that attract participants who might not necessarily attend a more formal opening or a museum show.

Many organizations also refuse neat categorization. The Museum of Temporary Art (p. 22) grew from an anarchic artist-run establishment into an influential and long-running alternative arts organization under the leadership of Janet Schmuckal. The space for Botswana (p. 8) was provided by the WPA, in part as a result of criticism that the nonprofit was straying from its original mission of supporting local artists. Civilian Art Projects (p. 10), was founded by artist Jayme McLellan on the heels of several nonprofit and artist-run projects (including co-founding Transformer with Victoria Reis) to address the lack of local commercial representation in DC.

The flavor of the city's artist-run spaces has also been influenced by their close connections to the city's music scene, which has a long history of DIY and house venues. Hardart (p. 17), run by Rogelio Maxwell, hosted countless shows over the years, but is most famous for a 1979 performance by Bad Brains. The DC punk band had been banned from the city's legit music venues because of their notoriously raucous performances. A shared need for work space brought visual artists and musicians into close contact in multi-use studio buildings like Eye Street Studios (aka Gold Leaf Studios), home to The Hosiery (p. 19). After the building that housed Eye Street/Gold Leaf was sold to make way for a condo building, Mike Abrams, the former manager, opened Union Arts, another multi-use venue that housed artist studios, music venues, and the vintage store Nomad Yard Collectiv. In 2016, Union Arts closed; the building that housed it had been sold to a developer who plans to open an art-themed boutique hotel.

As rents have continued to rise, artist-run spaces have popped up outside of the city, including Otis Street Art Project (Mt. Rainier, MD), Olly Olly (Fairfax, VA), Rhizome (Takoma Park, MD), and WAS Gallery (Bethesda, MD), all of which are still in operation. This movement of spaces away from the city

center and into the burbs might be seen as a prediction of things to come.

As the submissions included in the zine suggest, artists who create their own spaces are often responding to some kind of lack. They need something—exhibition opportunities, space for dialogue, a sense of agency, chances to connect with other artists—that isn't being adequately supplied by the existing infrastructure.

We hope that this zine—like several other recent local exhibitions, research projects and programs²—will be another step towards creating more complete, inclusive, and accessible histories and that these histories can help to shape the future. Politicians, business people, and city planners often express a desire to create (and retain) space in DC for art and artists. But their conversations lack a sense of history, an understanding of what artists in DC have already built, on their own and below the radar of official institutions. If civic leaders and arts advocates truly want to understand what artists need, we suggest that these stories and this civic history might be a good place to start.

¹ Cuts to NEA funding contributed to the near death of Washington Project for the Arts, leading to its absorption by the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The Corcoran's capitulation to culture war politics (the cancellation of the Robert Mapplethorpe show in 1991) did irreparable damage to its reputation and, likely, its financial stability. The Corcoran, one of DC's only non-federal art museums, was dissolved in 2014 after years of financial distress and mismanagement.

² These include: Jess Solomon, *Meridians Lab* (Transformer, 2017), Blair Murphy, *Footprint AKA the Lansburgh's Notebook* (Flashpoint, 2017), Beltway Public Works *Lending Library* of DC art (WPA, 2017); the online platform DIRT DMV; *Making a Scene: The Jefferson Place Gallery* curated by John Anderson, with a web archive created in collaboration with Day Eight; and the Artists' Town Hall events organized by NoMüNoMü with Washington Project for the Arts (2017–).

Botswana

Location: 400 7th Street, NW (inside Washington Project for the Arts)

In Operation: 1985–1987 (two years)

Founders: Lynn McCary, Tom Ashcraft, Dave Brown, Suzanne Codi, Sal Fiorito, Evan Hughes, Paula Schumann, Charlie Sleichter and Peter Winant

Narrative by: Lynn McCary, Charlie Sleichter, Paula Schumann

Programming structure: Shows rotated every two weeks and included artwork, performance art, live music and many combinations of the three. See below.

Evolution: Botswana was founded within the old Washington Project for the Arts (WPA) space at 400 Seventh Street, NW. It was founded in response to ongoing complaints from the community that the WPA was not doing enough to support and present local artists. McCary was a staff member at the WPA and helped secure, execute and maintain the collaboration between the Botswana founders and the WPA. When WPA moved to a much smaller location, it was “more or less the death knell” for this space-within-a-space, despite attempts to relocate it in concept.

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

Peter Carley, a local businessman sympathetic to the arts, donated drywall and studs to close off the space. The budget was almost nothing. We rallied an anchor group of local artists to design and create the space. The area that we were provided with was a very large loft-like space on the third floor of the WPA. All we had to do was build a few walls, furnish the lounge and install a special entrance. The materials came from scrap yards (the “Radar Bar” was crafted from an old radar antenna, the entry door was an old darkroom revolving door, furnishings were found on the street, etc.). An army of volunteers put it all together with enthusiastic sweat equity. It was hard work, but more than that it was fun! The revolving darkroom door was totally illegal. Only one person could pass through at a time. I think people really liked the way you entered through a tiny “rabbit hole”. The hard part was stocking the bar. We were open two days a week and we took turns running it on those nights. Whoever’s turn it was had to carry whatever beer and soda that had to be restocked as well as ice up three flights of stairs. At the end of the night you could usually count on members to help take down the trash.

How did the space function financially?

Botswana was officially under the 501(c)3 umbrella of the WPA, but it didn’t receive any financial support from WPA. It was operated as a private club. While it was open during WPA gallery hours for public viewing at no charge, the after hours social club required membership for entry—which cost something very minimal, maybe just \$10 per year, or less. We served beverages for something like \$1 a drink (through a drink ticket system). The membership dues and drinks sustained our minimal financial needs. The “staffing” was volunteers and the exhibition space rules were that the exhibition artist(s) had to leave the space the way they found it (blank, white walls) so maintenance was relatively minimal.

No one ever took money out of Botswana. Consequently, even though we were selling

beer and soda for \$1.00 we had a positive cash flow. We were able to purchase a decent amplifier and cassette tape deck to play music

What did your neighbors think of the space?

The neighborhood we were in had no residential units at that time, so we had no issues. At night, the neighborhood was a ghost town, except for DC Space up the block.

What types of programming did you put on and how frequently?

Botswana hosted exhibitions that changed every two weeks. Interested artists would fill out a simple questionnaire to apply, which was reviewed by a volunteer program committee for approval and scheduling. We also hosted live music, poetry readings and other forms of performance art. In general it was not a tough process, most applications were approved.

The only rule we had about show proposals was “No Resumes.” We were focused on ideas, not what someone had done before.

Botswana had an official “Suggestion Box.” A core group would meet about once a month to read suggestions and grant the two-week slots to artists who applied. We tried to avoid curating and most artists who applied got a show. Those suggestions that weren’t realized for various reasons were often great reading and at one point we had a show of all “suggestions.”

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

Botswana received no direct governmental financial support, but we did secure a respectable amount of press coverage in The Washington Post, The City Paper, Washingtonian Magazine and other local press.

Did the goals of the space change as time passed?

The goals remained true to the cause.

What was your most memorable show?

Two shows really: the inaugural show was a “trade show” — anyone interested could bring an artwork to hang on the wall; once all of the work was hung, the “trading floor” was open.

Once a piece was traded, it could be traded again and again for other artwork, all of the trades were noted on a form accompanying the mounted piece, so the current “owner” could be identified. At the end of the exhibition, the final owner took their work home to keep. This was a refreshing social experiment that brought out so many members of the creative community and encouraged dialogue, competition and plenty of humor. We also had the amazing opportunity to host an interview and slideshow with the southern Baptist minister and folk artist Howard Finster just as he was getting famous for his album cover work with Talking Heads and REM. One of the many perks of Botswana was its proximity to the 930 Club on F Street. Several band members made a habit to drop by Botswana while on tour through town, such as Jon Langford from The Mekons. We also hosted a reception for the legendary Meredith Monk while she was in residence at the Kennedy Center.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

With commitment and passion, anything can be accomplished. I have always believed that creative people can make their own ideas realities and should not wait “to be chosen.” We were a group of people getting together to make something creative and original happen in a city where fringe thinking was not supported at that time.

What’s the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

Our host, WPA, became jealous of Botswana. I think our flexibility, lack of funding, and short turnover times allowed us to take a lot of risks. Failure was not a concern and this opened many creative doors for us. The WPA had funders, a board of directors and the general public to answer too. We did not.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Luckily, we never had to pay the WPA for the space.

Civilian Art Projects, (original location)



Location: 406 7th Street NW (7th & D Street NW)

In Operation: Original space 2007–2009 (project is ongoing)

Founder: Jayme McLellan

Narrative by: Jayme McLellan

Programming structure: Exhibitions every 5 to 6 weeks, lots of music events, talks, etc.

Evolution: The decision to open a brick-and-mortar space, which is a commercial gallery envisioned as a way help artists create a more stable support base, came after a number of roving and nonprofit efforts. McLellan, a photographer herself, got her start by curating shows at DC Arts Center (DCAC). Following this, she ran The Tandem Project, going to the countries of the former Yugoslavia to meet with artists and curators and bring some of them to DC for a residency and exhibition. Through this that she met Victoria Reis, then an independent curator herself, and her future partner in co-founding Transformer in 2002, a still-thriving artist-centered nonprofit. Civilian occupied its original location from 2007–2009, relocated to 7th & New York Avenue NW from 2009–2013, and since 2014 has shared space at 4718 14th Street NW with G Fine Art, another established DC gallery.

How did the space come to be? Who was involved in the founding and operation, and why did you decide to start the venue?

I talk about this in Sharon Louden's book *The Artist as Culture Producer: Living and Sustaining a Creative Life*, which came out this year (check it out). "I opened Civilian Art Projects as a spaceless and roving gallery project representing ten artists, many of whom are still with the gallery. I had been making my own work, and showing it some, but for the next four years, I would primarily focus on building this next-level step for the community of artists around me. I launched the gallery with a small group of painters, photographers, a sculptor, and two very conceptual artists working in a variety of media. Some of the artists I knew well. The others I found by word of mouth or suggestion. With a line of credit, a credit card, and no business plan, Civilian was born with a group show at the Warehouse Gallery run by the Ruppert Family in December 2006. The exhibition was a huge success, but no artwork sold. I began to see the importance of space to identity. No one knew this was an exhibition designed to encourage Washingtonians to buy the artwork of the artists living and working around them."

What was your most memorable show?

One epic show was three or four bands, DJs, hula dancers, and films projected overhead. Over 1000 people came to the event. Another one was a DJ party sponsored by Red Bull where the whole place got tagged with silver marker, someone peed in the corner, and someone punched a hole through the wall. A talk with George Pelecanos and Anwan Glover was a highlight. Quintron show when we thought the floor would collapse. Goodbye party for New York Avenue was great. Painted love on the wall in big dripping white letters. And the exhibitions. Too many great ones to name. Most all of them were great.

Was burnout ever an issue for those involved?

Yes, almost died.

Why did the space close?

The buildings were sold to big developers.

Decatur Blue

Location: 919 Florida Ave NW Washington DC, 2nd floor, above a functioning body shop. After the first three years 2000–03 there was a string of short-lived spaces (see below).

In Operation: 2000–2005 (five years)

Founders: José Ruiz, Ryan Hackett, Javier Cuellar, Stoff Smulson, and Champ Taylor

Narrative by: Champ Taylor

Programming structure: 6–8 visual art exhibitions per year, many bands including the Apes, Enon, Ted Leo, the Itals, French Toast, [Sonic Circuits Festival], etc.

Evolution: José Ruiz found a listing on Craigslist and started making phone calls to other artists (if you picked up and were interested you were in). The initial group consisted of José, Ryan Hackett, Javier Cuellar, Stoff Smulson, and Champ Taylor; Brian Balderston and Gabriel Martinez joined the group within the first 1-2 years. The space was conceived as a studio for artists and quickly evolved into a gallery space wherein we hosted exhibits of our own work as well as that of other, mostly local, artists, bands, and performers. Music performances increased and the goal became to sustain the space through draw and notoriety, while breaking even financially. After 2003 the project was sustained across a series of short-term venues, including: Brass Knob Warehouse on Ontario Road NW (for one expansive show only); 2nd and 3rd floors of a space next to Warehouse Next Door across from the Washington Convention Center (then under construction; again, for one exhibition, funded by Washington Project for the Arts / Corcoran); Blagden Alley, 2nd floor studio space above Signal 66. The original space is now a condo building called "The Floridian."

How did the space function financially?

We paid rent, 1k split five ways; we took bar tips; we did not charge admission for gallery shows but we did charge admission

for music shows and we took some of the proceeds from these shows and paid them forward or retro to cover rent.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

Acquired funding from former WPA/Corcoran to curate and host an exhibition culled from WPA artists, \$1000. This was after we had moved from the original space, during the space-hopping period of 2003–2005.

Was burnout ever an issue for those involved?

Of course.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

We were all pretty young in the sense that if there was an agenda it was being formed it was as a process: ok we did that now what next/ gee this thing is pretty fun/whoa look at all these people/that was a blast/that was stressful/that was worth it/but what about my own process/ repeat. Once it started it seemed unstoppable. Momentum and expectations kept it going even as roles of the individual members shifted.

All of us had different ways of moving through the world (a more collaborative or more individual studio practice). Decatur Blue helped those differences become more- (or less-) pronounced; each of us negotiated (fortified or obliterated) those boundaries in our own, sometimes contradictory, sometimes harmonious ways.

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

What was perhaps surprising and memorable was that there was little to no tension between the group and our landlord—he actually said "let's do it" as we were preparing to sign the original lease; he had improved the space before we moved in by joining two separate structures which were originally separated by an open-air, rooftop space. He was impressed with what we were able to accomplish at the space, and he told us so.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Yes.

Delicious Spectacle

Location: 1366 Quincy Street NW, Washington DC

In Operation: 2012–2014 (three years)

Founders: Victoria Greising, Megan Mueller, Dan Perkins, Camden Place, and Sam Scharf

Narrative by: Dan Perkins and Sam Scharf

Programming structure: We had rotating exhibitions, roughly 8–10 a year. The first year was super busy and we had a new show pretty much every month, slowing to a 6 week show schedule in following years. The space was always flexible. We had installation based shows, more conventional painting shows, performances, etc.

Evolution: The space was founded by Victoria Greising, Megan Mueller, Dan Perkins, Camden Place, and Sam Scharf. We had the opportunity to move into the house for a period of a year or so and wanted to show art in the main room that was empty. The concept was to have a show a month for a year, each person curating one show, a couple guest shows, solos and open call shows. We were finishing our MFAs from American University and wanted to start a project where we could become part of the community, show people's work we thought was interesting, and give people space to tackle exciting projects that wouldn't necessarily function in a conventional gallery space. Burnout was an issue: after a couple shows, participation in press release, prep and installation began to wane with some members, although spreading out individual curatorial responsibility helped. As the space grew in popularity and success, the different reasons for everyone's participation became apparent. After the first year, Megan and Sam moved to California for her graduate degree and Tori, Dan and Camden had programming for about another year before moving to NYC and Portland.

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

We simply used the front two rooms of the row house we were all renting. All five of us lived there, paid rent, and split expenses for running the space. We fully painted and cleared walls, patched, sanded, built a divider wall downstairs in the basement, and cleared headspace in the stairwell. Each show would usually require some work depending on what was going, and we would pitch in to get some beer and wine for the opening. Then monthly patch and paint etc. between shows. The total was about \$3000.

How did the space function financially?

Completely non-profit, all proceeds and sales to artists, who then could donate if they chose for paint, toilet paper and beer costs. We rented the house for \$3,600 a month and all collectively pitched in for expenses. The whole concept was to keep the space flexible and not dependent on extra funding, given that it was also our living space.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

Mostly didn't care, some neighbors came when we went around inviting and some would just show up and hang during hours. A mail person specifically came in saying she heard we ran a "museum" in there. Another person came once that said he had grown up in the building in the 60s and had some beers with us while reminiscing.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

ZERO. We did get press though and that was quite helpful in getting the community support and activity.

What was your most memorable show?

For Sam, "It was my..." by Stewart Watson which was memorable because it was our first show and it really solidified how invested we were to do this and do it well. Also, "The Bubble" by Calder Brannock. It was a summer show where the five of us, with the help of Calder Brannock, constructed a



large inflatable bubble on our back porch. It was over 2 stories tall when fully inflated and about 8 - 10 people could stand inside at a time. That was our last show of the first year and was in direct conversation with the failed "Bubble" project at the Hirshhorn Museum.

Why did the space close?

It was never meant to "stay open" or become a "something more serious" in the first place. It began and always was temporary, between the time we were given the lease to the inevitability of continuing on our own artistic careers. The landlord was returning to live in the home shortly after we went our separate ways. A new family lives there now.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

Everyone involved in the arts is working hard for usually not enough money—artists, curators, dealers, etc. Except for maybe collectors. It also made us appreciate the value of artists empowering themselves, running their own space, giving opportunity and a varying viewpoint. Also, that to really make a mark and invest in your "art community"

you just have to start and figure it out as you go. Trying to have something fully formed from the beginning, wastes all the beautiful moments of feedback that the participants deliver in the young stages of the project.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

Delicious Spectacle as it was in DC is no longer. We all have started or branched off on our own projects and our individual artist practices have grown as well. Megan and Sam have started a new project space in LA called Gait.la. It's an experimental project space on our rooftop in downtown.

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

They were pretty nice, considering. Although at one moment they acted like we never told them we were doing the project and acted surprised we would ever think we could do it. Luckily for us, we had skills enough to hand the walls, floor and house back better than we found it.

Did you get your security deposit back? Partially...

FCDC (or FightClub, DC.)

*We were actually nameless until visitors started calling it by this name. It depends on who you talk to, but there are different recollections of how we became known as FightClub.

Location: 1250 9th Street or you could enter through Blagden Alley

In Operation: 2004–2009 (five years)

Founders: Nick Pimentel, Lisa Garfield, and Jason Conny

Narrative by: Anthony Smallwood, Dan Zeman, Jennifer Kessler, Stephanie Murdoch, and Ben Ashworth

Programming structure: See below.

Evolution: It came to be when a group of skater/artists who individually couldn't afford studio live/work space compromised to try and find some sort of mutually beneficial common ground. Anthony Smallwood, Dan Zeman, Jennifer Kessler, Stephanie Murdoch, and I were the founders and handled operations. I specifically remember driving with Anthony Smallwood after a particularly rough work day at Green Skate Laboratory, a community based public art/skate park at Langdon Recreation Center. We were nearing the end of the project and I had an hour drive ahead of me back to Woodbridge, VA. I confided in him that I wish we had a place in DC to skate to live music and have creative space. Anthony suggested I meet his friend Dan Zeman that night. 10 minutes later we were skating in Blagden Alley scouting spaces. Dan was renting from a local landlord who had multiple properties he was sitting on till the surrounding area was developed. After five years of running the space we were all suffering from burnout. We exhausted one another, the space and the landlord. We were never able to get a certificate of occupancy and officially open. Now the space has been converted into luxury lofts—I'm afraid to drive by.

Can you describe the space?

We had a huge compound between 9th and 10th and M and N. There was an outdoor grassy area where a building had burned down and expansive indoor space with holes in the roof. The indoor space looked like it had been a strip club before we moved in then had sat derelict as a junkie squat for quite some time. We cleaned up all the crack bags/needles/condoms. Some holes we repaired and some we made larger so you could drop in from the roof, ride down the wall into a large indoor skate-able pool/living sculpture/exhibition/music/cross pollination mash up zone. We never moved but the principal partners were nomadic and had each individually been involved in creating radical space prior.

What were some of the improvements/changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

We rebuilt the roof, one floor of the building on 9th Street, rebuilt collapsing walls that had trees growing between them, poured concrete in the outdoor areas, wired up a gallery on 9th Street, we were constantly building the skate-able structure at the core of the compound, the work was nonstop. Well over \$100,000.

How did the space function financially?

We all had our day jobs and paid monthly rent to the owner of the property. We only asked for a donation at the door. On occasion we rented to space for bigger art events so that we could meet rent if we were behind. Any extra money went into renovations. Outside of that we had an alternate exchange economy where favors were currency. The local brew master provided beer, the electrician put in track lighting, everyone contributed in exchange for creative space.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

Our neighbor Frank ran Old City Green at the corner of 9th and N NW (now Old Farm and Guild next to Shaw Skate park). Frank shared similar sensibilities about the value of spaces for creative types to cross-pollinate ideas. Sometimes he would party with us but he would also bark if things got out of hand. Our other neighbor Jeff Dawson on the Blagden



Alley side was the best. I think he truly loved the explosive raw energy being passed back and forth between musicians, skaters, artists, and audience all as participants. For a while he provided us with power and water to operate. We had other neighbors that threw bricks over our fence, that was the crew that was dealing on N Street and they thought we were creeping on their territory. We eventually squashed all that and got along though. Live and let live, who am I to judge? Our operation was illegal just like theirs. We never had a certificate of occupancy, we were open all night, etc. The DEA even raided us once because they thought we were operating with the dealers on N Street. Once they understood it was an artist skate club, the local police saw us as a positive force.

What types of programming did you put on and how frequently?

Weekly Wednesday night sessions and weekend sessions. We offered touring bands a place to crash if they would play a set after their gig, or our house band The Points would book friends' bands in exchange for practice space. We were constantly working on the building, the bowl and

having art exhibitions. It was more of a constant open studio and often a classroom for wayward youth. We had homeless skaters that would work for us in exchange for a place to stay.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

None. Philippa Hughes did host a Hirshhorn Board of Directors dinner there once while we skated on the walls of the opposite gallery. The local police never stopped a single event except when guests were peeing out of a 2nd floor window onto 9th Street.

What was your most memorable show?

Our annual Halloween party, where I met my future wife Jennifer. She was wearing a pink wig and watching a bunch of us skate while bands played. I skated really fast so she would keep looking at me. It worked. (Anthony chimes in: He recalls when Lost Tribe played and part of the ceiling rained down on the audience—while we were all skating—and then the Steve Olson art exhibition, and our photo week exhibition showcasing David Alan Harvey.)

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

I've been developing a project since 2012 called *Finding A Line*. The first iteration was produced for DC's Temporary Public Art Initiative 5x5 with Laura Roulet, Working Man Collective and John Falls. Since then I've been working with Garth Ross of the Kennedy Center to develop *Finding A Line* as an ongoing community-sourced public art project. Our current site is at Gallaudet University and I'm developing it with Max Kazemzadeh, a fellow skater/artist.

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

He sued all of us even though he knew we were giving all we had. The judge said the lease was draconian. We lost.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Hell no.

Location: The Flats at Atlas, at the corner of Bladensburg Rd. and Neal Street NE. (in their unfinished/unrented street level retail space)

In Operation: April 26th–28th 2013 (2 days)

Founders: Calder Brannock, Billy Friebele, Jonathan Monaghan and Michael Dax Iacovone

Narrative by: Michael Dax Iacovone

Programming structure: One weekend: opening Saturday night, an artist/curator talk that Sunday. The goal was to start this thing, and then set it free if someone else wanted to take it on. A year or so later curator Kayleigh Bryant took it on for an opening at Project 4 (no longer open), and that was great. We don't want it to be about us and our efforts, we'd rather it be an example of DIY that might convince some other people to give it a shot.

Evolution: Calder Brannock, Billy Friebele, Jonathan Monaghan and I had been talking about pulling together and making a public art night happen when the space fell into Calder's lap. The Condo building was looking for publicity, and had a lot of unused space they offered to us, and somehow Calder also talked them into getting us some money to put this on. Today, the space is still unused retail space. Putting on the show was a ton of work, but any of us would be up to doing it again.

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

It was up for just a weekend, and we had less than a month to put the entire thing together, so it all had to happen really quickly. Between the four of us we started getting artists we knew that would want to be part, we got a webpage up, and we began hustling. The space was just a huge concrete room with some fluorescent lighting. There were junction boxes in the ceiling, and luckily we had John Malis on board and he knew how to get electricity running from those junction boxes, and we had some connection to the Corcoran and we borrowed dozens of shop lights and extension cords. I'd say with all of us working, we probably totaled a hundred hours or so of work to bring it all together.

How did the space function financially?

We had the space for free, and the condos actually gave us money to put this thing on. Not enough to cover our labor or anything like that, but enough that we weren't paying anything out of pocket.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

The people living in the condos already seemed to like it. The people living in that neighborhood were already skeptical of the shiny new condos invading, but we did get a fair amount of them to come by and see the show.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

The Corcoran loaned us lighting equipment (unbeknownst to them). And that's about it.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

We showed over 40 local artists, and that was really rewarding.

Location: 1407 15th Street NW

In Operation: 1976–1985 (nine years)

Founders: Rogelio Maxwell

Narrative by: Rogelio Maxwell

Programming structure: See below.

Evolution: Hardart, as run by Rogelio Maxwell, was the second incarnation of the Hardart space. An earlier group of artists, including Harrison Miner, Paul Bridgewater, and tktk, ran a gallery in the rowhouse in Dupont Circle. In 1975, when Maxwell and friend Janet Schmuckal were looking for a new place to live, they discovered that the proprietors of the original Hardart had moved out. They moved in, kept the name, and found several other artists to move into spaces in the basement and upper two floors. Maxwell ran the space for nine years, doing monthly art exhibitions, performances, music shows, and other events. A rotating cast of housemates brought in new artists and new energy until, in 1983, they lost a legal battle with their landlord and were pushed out.

How did the space come to be? Who was involved in the founding and operation, and why did you decide to start the venue?

I wanted to move out of my apartment, so my friend Janet Schmuckal suggested I move into her group house. That was Riggs and 19th Street. We were evicted from there and literally at the last possible moment we found another place at 16th and V. We were evicted from there to 17th and Q Street, from there to 1608 Q Street. This is 1975 and we have to move again. We just happen to be walking down 15th Street, past Hardart. We both paused and looked at the building. We knocked on the door. No one was there. Just as we were about to leave we heard this voice. And it was this guy Raoul, he was the only one living there, he was basically a squatter. It was freezing, no lights on. And we asked, "where are the people"? And he said "they all left." And I immediately thought, how do we get in here?

So Janet and I contacted the real estate company that managed the building. They weren't happy at all. I won't go into details about how why the other artists left, cause that's all hearsay. But they were gone. We had to explain to the real estate company that we weren't with that original group. And they told us that, if we were willing to pay the back rent and the back utilities, we could have the space. It wasn't much.

I had just discovered Marcel Duchamp and I thought "this is a readymade!" All we have to do is put art on the wall and send out invitations and it's already a gallery. We couldn't pay the rent on our own, so we put ads out around town for artists looking for space. The basement and two floors above were studios, the ground floor living room was the gallery space. There was a flood of applications. Within a month we had 6 artists moved into the space.

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

There weren't many changes at all, since it had already been a gallery. What would you do if you were walking down the street and found the Guggenheim? You would put art into it! It was this perfect art space that had a history. We thought, we aren't going to turn this into just a group house, it has to be a gallery. The first floor had to be painted white, that was about it.

How did the space function financially?

I always had jobs; I would work temporarily here and there to pay the rent. We would divide up utilities and rent by six. One person would collect rent for the oil bill, someone else for the gas. Sometimes someone would collect the money and use it for, well, recreational purposes. One winter someone collected the oil money and then spent it elsewhere. We were very cold for a month after that.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

The neighbors were neutral, for the most part. To the north of it was an apartment building, to the south of it was this church. The church was always pretty cool with us, they never

THE HOSIERY at Gold Leaf Studios

Location: 443 Eye Street NW

In Operation: 2000–2005
(Approximately three years)

Founders: Nick Pimentel,
Lisa Garfield, and Jason Conny

Narrative by: Nick Pimentel

Programming structure: Mainly bands
and gallery shows once a month.

Evolution: The Hosiery was a name given to a performance space within a larger warehouse (Gold Leaf Studios) that contained artist studios and a recording studio (Trans Am's National Recording Studio). The Hosiery started as just the name of events put on by studio mates Nick Pimentel, Lisa Garfield, and Jason Conny. The events were held in a common shared space that all the artists used. Mike Abrams, an artist, was a very handy building manager, and helped repair the space as needed. We took donations at the door, which we gave to the performing artists and to cover beverages and food costs. As we started to slow down our events, and new artists started to move in, the space was revitalized (renamed Gold Leaf) and larger events were happening more often. The project ended when the whole building closed January 2012. The location is now home to condos.

What was your most memorable show?

One of Devendra Banhart's earliest shows was at the Hosiery. Also the band !!! definitely turned the whole building into a giant dance party.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

Have fun while getting dirty.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

Nope.

Did you get your security deposit back? YES!

came to the events but they never tried to shut us down. The apartment building was mostly poor black folks. Those tenants were really cool with us. It gave people an excuse to come out for openings and it was always a party.

What types of programming did you put on and how frequently?

Everything, really. Exhibitions with painting, sculpture, or installation. Performances, music shows. We had a loose policy for showing art, anyone who had enough chutzpah to approach us could have a show. There were no portfolio reviews. If you came in and wanted to have a show and thought you could get it together you could have a show. That was that.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

No, I never at any moment thought about that. We were paying the rent, so that was done. As long as rent was paid and utilities were paid, we didn't need anything else. It was self-managed and driven by the people in the building. We didn't need outside help. If an artist sold the work, they got all the money.

Did the goals of the space change as time passed?

By 1977, 1978 we had a group of artists moving in who were very young. Peter Muse from Tony Perkins and the Psychotics. Samantha Peterson from Rhoda and The Bad Seeds and the Cancer Girls. Susan Mumford from Tiny Desk Unit. A lot of punk or neo-punks that were now residents. And they had a different vision and were drawing a different crowd. They had friends who were young aspiring artists. I got a charge out of that.

I always thought of Hardart as self-sustaining, as much as it could be. So each group of artists, depending on who they were, brought a new energy. I wasn't trying to do anything with the space—I just wanted to space to do whatever the space could do.

What was your most memorable show?

The Bad Brains show—that to me was the most memorable. For one, there were so many people there. It was packed. There were people lining up from 1407 15th Street to Rhode Island Avenue. At that point they were

at the pinnacle of their career. We were just a few blocks from the Washington Post building. They were making so much noise and then the crowds were so huge, the Washington Post sent Lucian Perkins down the street to cover it.

There had to be 600 people in a space that could reasonably hold 10 or 20. I remember sitting in the back room with HR after everybody left. There was a grease stain from people's bodies all the way around the walls of the gallery. It left this long sweat mark from one end of the room to the other. Towards the back of the room, there was a big two-foot by two-foot square hole in the wall. I don't know how the hole happened, but I remember repairing it. That has to be the biggest crowd Hardart ever drew. Nothing compares with that.

Was burnout ever an issue for those involved?

No, because the gallery kept itself alive. All I had to do every month was make sure it was cleaned and painted. People didn't always help me with that, but I was young, I had a lot of energy. Most of the artists who had shows would help with prep. I don't think I ever burned out.

Why did the space close?

By 1983 the landlord could sense that it was a valuable piece of real estate. He showed up one day yelling, "You guys are costing us money. I don't care about an art gallery, this isn't an art gallery. I want you out." We hired a pro bono lawyer to fight the eviction. But he owned the building, we were on a month to month lease.

The judge was about to decide in the landlord's favor. And then we overheard one of the landlord's lawyers saying he thought it was obscene that black men and white women were living under the same roof and not married. We used that to get a six-month stay from the judge. Then the landlord tried to say he was planning to move into the building himself. So we found his house, it was this big mansion out in Potomac or something. We took pictures and presented them in court. There was no way he was moving back to Hardart on 15th Street near all the prostitutes. So then he said he was going to use it as an office. We weren't going to be able to fight forever, it was his building,

after all. So the lawyers told us the best they could do was to get us money for moving expenses. They did and the landlord agreed to give us each \$300 or something, whatever was the equivalent of a month's rent. That's what we got, that was the end of Hardart.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

Life serves you with certain things that are kind of out of your control, but they are there for you to do with what you will. The other takeaway was about community, about interacting with kindred spirits. The most important thing was that communicating with HR, the day he walked into Hardart and said Yo, Rogelio, they won't let us play anywhere in DC. Can we play here tonight? Or some young 20-year old painter walking in to Hardart and saying can I have a show here. I was in a position to allow these artists to put their stuff up and invite their friends and family to come see their work.

What is the location now?

Now, it's condos. It's been gutted and redone.

Market 5 Gallery

Location: 7th & North Carolina Ave. SE, Washington, DC in the North Hall of Capitol Hill's historic Eastern Market.

In Operation: 1973–2003 (almost 30 years!)

Founder: John W. Harrod

Narrative by: Victor Sparrow

Programming structure: Visual Art Exhibitions usually lasted a month, while the Young Players of Capitol Hill had access to the space from June until August each summer. Other groups—lobbyists, arts groups, etc.—would sometimes rent the space for their events throughout the year.

Evolution: In 1973, John W. Harrod took over a storage space in the north end of Eastern Market with no bathrooms, running water, heating or air conditioning. Harrod had a vision. He transformed the space into a gallery and workspace for artists, musicians and theater troupes. For over 30 years, the space hosted art exhibitions and during the summer, local kids were employed by the city's Summer Youth Employment program (SYEP) to mount plays there. The space closed in 2010 when Harrod's health declined. There was a political struggle in the use of the space as the neighborhood changed and others imagined more lucrative uses. It has ended in a stalemate. The location is now an auxiliary lunchroom for the South Hall of the market.

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

I worked at Market 5 for two summers in the early 80s and had at least 3 art shows (paintings) during the 90s. In each instance there was an enormous amount of sweat equity invested. As performers in The Young Players of Capitol Hill, we had to build our own sets, light the stage and prepare the house for an audience. As an exhibiting artist, preparation was less elaborate, requiring only a fresh coat of paint on the gallery walls. Gallery preparation for exhibits generally took two days, whereas theater preparation usually took a month.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

The Farmer's Market at Eastern Market was a weekend institution until John was too ill to administrate it. The neighborhood was mostly supportive of the endeavor though a few of the vendors in the south end of the Market resented Harrod's claim on some of the sidewalk space.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

Market 5 Gallery had the explicit support from the Mayor's Office during the Barry administration (1979-91). Market 5 never had the infrastructure to do any elaborate collaborations with outside groups. The Galleries full-time staff only amounted to about 3 persons, John Harrod and two or three part-time assistants.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

No. The space reverted to the City's hands in 2010 after Harrod's death.

Mott's Market Art

Location: Above Mott's Market in SE, 233 12th Street, SE, DC

In Operation: 1997–1999 (three years)

Founders: Victoria Reis

Narrative by: Victoria Reis

Programming structure: Visual art exhibitions that usually had bands or a guest DJ presented 2-3 times a year.

Evolution: My boyfriend at the time & I had just broken up; we had been living together (though it was my apartment with a roommate before the boyfriend had moved in) and as a way to empower myself, and expand my own at the time emerging curatorial work, I decided to turn the majority of the apartment into the art space. It was named Mott's Market Art because it was above Mott's Market. Eventually, the work got to be more than I could handle and I grew tired of having an art space function out of the space where I also lived. It was just too much. Mott's Market Art went out to become Stack it Up Productions, with exhibitions and events presented out of the La Casa Community Center, in collaboration with Natalie Avery, and Amanda Huron. Stack it Up Productions then led to the creation of Transformer, a nonprofit I cofounded with Jayme McLellan, which is currently celebrating its 15th year of operations (see transformerdc.org).

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

It was all sweat equity and all funded by me, with some in-kind donations of food and booze from friends.

How did the space function financially?

The artists and I paid for everything—it was completely DIY.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

They didn't really know about it. They just thought I had a lot of parties. I did this for my friends, who were artists and musicians.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

None was sought; none was given.

Did the goals of the space change as time passed?

No.

What was your most memorable show?

Cynthia Connolly's Icebox exhibition presented on the outer walls of my building, with Lungfish playing in the back yard, and snow cones via a snow cone machine on loan from The Black Cat.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

I met my husband of 14 years at a Mott's Market Art event!

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

Via a few different manifestations, Mott's Market Art was reincarnated as Transformer! (transformerdc.org)

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

My landlords were Korean immigrants who lived in Arlington and commuted into their store every day. They didn't speak too much English, so we didn't have too much communication about anything. Most of what I did with Mott's Market Art took place at night, when they had already closed their store for the day, so they didn't really know what I was up too. They did however let a visiting curator—Sarah Tanguy—into my apartment when I wasn't there. Thankfully Sarah is a friend so it was ok. I'm not exactly sure how Sarah got them to let her in!

Did you get your security deposit back?

Hmmm—I don't remember.

Museum of Temporary Art

Location: 1206 G Street NW (1974-1980), 716 11th Street NW (1980-1982)

In Operation: 1974–1982 (eight years)

Founders/Key Personnel:

Richard Squires (Founder), Janet Schmuckal (Director, 1975-1982)

Narrative by: Richard Squires

Programming structure: Occasional films, parties, and art exhibitions

Evolution: In 1974, artist Richard Squires asked the DC Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) for studio space downtown. The agency gave him rent-free use of a building at 1206 G Street, far more space than he needed or expected. He put out a call and found several other artists to move into the building. They coined the name Museum of Temporary Art and programmed events and exhibitions on the ground floor, taking an anarchic and ad hoc approach. Squires and the early occupants clashed with the RLA, who threatened to evict them. Janet Schmuckal, an artist who had shown at MOTA, became involved with the space and had an interest in formalizing its programming and operations. RLA agreed to allow MOTA to stay, on the condition that Janet Schmuckal take over the lease. The earlier residents moved out and Schmuckal formalized MOTA, doing monthly exhibitions and other regular programming and putting out several publications, including the quarterly newspaper Art Ink and MOTA magazine. MOTA stayed at 1206 G Street NW until 1980, when it moved to 716 11th Street NW. MOTA closed permanently in 1982.

How did the space come to be? Who was involved in the founding and operation, and why did you decide to start the venue?

The Redevelopment Land Agency gave me a lease on the space to do work on a catalogue for Soft Gallery, a performance venue I created with Marta Minujin.

What were some of the improvements/changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

We spent a few months cleaning up but in the end we left it as big a mess as we found it.

How long was the space in operation and what were the dates?

The original MOTA with its original Bored of Directors lasted from 1974 through 1975, after which we passed it off to the more responsible hands of one of the artists we had championed, Janet Schmuckal.

How did the space function financially?

We had no finances. The building was rent-free and none of us had any money.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

Jimmie Muscatello, the uniform maker around the corner, informed on us to the FBI. Most of our other neighbors were vacant buildings. Alice Denney was across the street with WPA. When I told her we'd been evicted, she laughed and said that I'd certainly picked the right name for the space.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

We were a group of neo-Dada cultural anarchists. No one would have wanted to support us.

Did the goals of the space change as time passed?

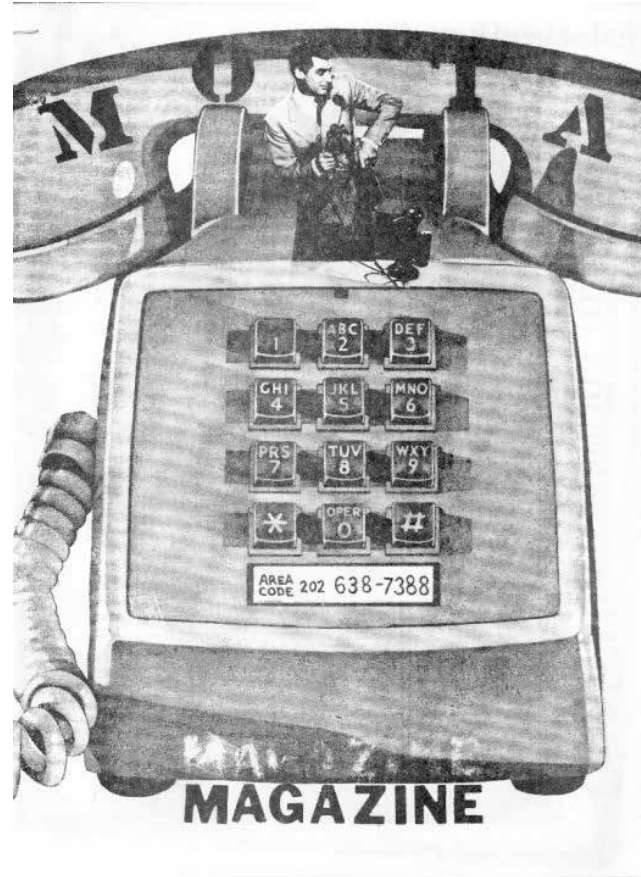
We were ad hoc from beginning to end.

What was your most memorable show?

The American premiere of the Cuban government's film on the Bay of Pigs invasion. And some original footage of Ken Kesey, Neal Cassady, and the Merry Pranksters that drew huge crowds.

Why did the space close?

The landlord evicted us.



What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

If you ask for trouble it's quite possible that you'll get it.

What is the location now?

I think it our building was demolished and replaced with a modern shoebox.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

It continued for some years afterwards under Janet Schmuckal, and then as a magazine, MOTA.

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

One of the Directors of the Bored painted the sidewalk in front of MOTA with some house paint and a broom. The landlord called it spilled paint and demanded we clean it up. We contended it was a work of art and thus protected by the First Amendment. The dispute went on for months.

Did you get your security deposit back?

No.

NoMüNoMü

Location: 1912 3rd Street NW

In Operation: 2014–2016 (2 years)

Founders: Nora Mueller and Joseph Orzal

Narrative by: Joseph Orzal

Programming structure:
4 to 5 shows per year

Evolution: Nora Mueller and Joseph Orzal started NoMüNoMü in response to the lack of opportunity we faced after graduating from college. Outside of the few galleries in DC there were almost no artist-run spaces that would allow a context for experimentation and promotion of dialogue between artists. After two years, burnout became an issue. Nora was pregnant with twins and decided that the house was too dangerous to raise babies in, so we shut down the regular programming. The only reason it was so affordable was because of the landlord's negligence. NoMüNoMü exists as a roving space.

What were some of the improvements/changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

After every show we had to return the space back to its livable buildout. Each show cost around two to three hundred dollars to paint the walls, build walls, patch, light etc.

How did the space function financially?

We all chipped in to do buildout, and we accepted donations at the openings. We rarely made any profit.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

None.

What was your most memorable show?

Our New Works show was a group show that turned into a ridiculous house party. We had to re evaluate how we contextualized the work and the space to prevent that from happening again.



What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

Artists need artist-driven non-commercial art space to exhibit and experiment. It is essential in building a strong artistic community. The positive feedback we got for just a living room space was amazing. In DC artists are starving to exhibit not out of a need to sell but out of a need to communicate.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

Yes

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

He literally never communicated with us.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Not yet... there's a court order out tho.

Outer Space

Location: In a detached garage in an alley off of 13th Street NW in Petworth

In Operation: 2011–2013 (R.I.P.)

Founders: Chandi Kelley and Frank Adams

Narrative by: Chandi Kelley and Frank Adams

Programming structure: Visual art exhibitions on a bi-monthly basis

Evolution: We were residing in the basement of the house on the same property, and the garage was included in our portion of the rental. To use it creatively was an opportunity that we felt the need to take advantage of. DC is such a difficult city to find affordable space in, and we felt a responsibility to do something to help expand the art community. Burnout was an issue because we both had full time jobs, but the space closed because we moved to Baltimore and no longer had a garage. Our old space is probably being used as garage to this day.

What were some of the improvements/changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

We spent about a month adding framing and drywall, painting the floors and ceiling, and adding track lighting. Total cost for the improvements was around \$1,200.

How did the space function financially?

We covered all expenses ourselves, keeping costs as low as possible. Exhibiting artists would contribute to the cost for beer/wine at openings, but we did not take a commission on sold works.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

We felt it was well received. Often neighbors would come by wondering what we were up to, and either thinking it was strange or awesome or both. Our upstairs neighbors loved it, and joined us for openings. But we still aren't sure if our landlord ever knew what we were up to.



What was your most memorable show?
Our very first exhibition! Titled "MOBA In Space," it showcased a collection of bad art purchased at thrift and antique stores from our personal collection. It was accompanied by a catalog with critiques on each piece, which we sold to raise money for The Museum of Bad Art in Boston. We then shipped selected works from the exhibition for consideration in the museum.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

The immense support and encouragement from the DC art community. It made us realize even more that this is something people needed and wanted as much as we did.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

We would love to resurrect Outer Space in Baltimore, and have been revisiting the idea recently.

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

None...we kept a good secret.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Yes!

PASS GALLERY/Painting and Sculpture Studio

Location: 19th century carriage house in the rear 1617 S Street NW

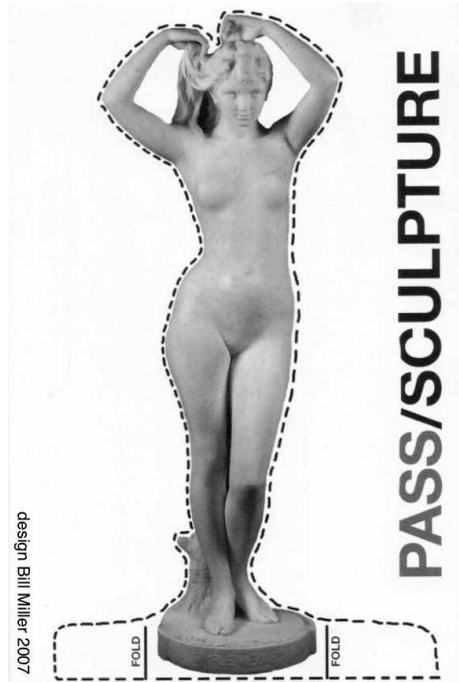
In Operation: 1996–2014 (Eighteen years)

Founders: Richard Siegman

Narrative by: Richard Siegman

Programming structure: The gallery had visual art exhibits every 6 weeks, poetry readings, and indie film screenings. The gallery was also used as a film location for several local independent films over the years.

Evolution: I originally leased and remodeled the upstairs as my painting studio. I then decided to take the whole building and open a gallery, to offer local artists a place to exhibit and to hang out. The smaller upstairs gallery was already remodeled. The larger downstairs gallery had two brick walls, which I kept. I dry walled one large white wall, painted the cement floor grey and put up some lights. It took two weeks and cost about \$500. I covered the rent, the artists chipped in for opening expenses and helped sit the gallery during the show. The gallery kept 30% of sales. We often had large openings that spilled into the alley. The gallery had a long run as galleries go. After many of years of working a full time job as an art installer, running the gallery and my own painting career I guess I slowly burned out. I still lease the building as my studio, though, so the space is still around in some form.



What was your most memorable show?

A celebration of the life and work of Mark Planisek, an artist and a friend to the gallery who was tragically killed by an automobile in 2010. His retrospective was well attended by many friends, family, and local artists.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

If you build it, they will come.

What is the location now?

I still lease the building as my studio.

Did you get your security deposit back?

I still lease the building. After over 20 years, I don't expect to get my \$150 back.

Pleasant Plains Workshop

Location: 2608 Georgia Avenue (a small storefront, across from Howard University—a stone's throw from Banneker Pool)

In Operation: In Operation:
2010–2016 (6 years)

Founders: Kristina Bilonick Royer

Narrative by: Kristina Bilonick Royer

Programming structure: 4–6 visual art exhibitions a year (usually solo shows by area emerging artists, including MFAs from Howard or other nearby programs, and shows by/curated by resident artists. 1–2 times a year, the shop became something different—a vintage clothing store, or a pop-up holiday market. We also had small group classes, artists talks, movie screenings, and a series of group art crits.

Evolution: I was looking for a new apartment and a new studio. I found this listing for a commercial storefront with an apartment above and it fit my budget. There were no pics in the 1-line Craigslist ad so I jogged over—took one look at the space—and fell in love. It wasn't till I moved in and started making the storefront my studio that I felt that I should do something more collaborative. It felt weird working by myself in this cool space with a window facing the street. Oh, and I needed to buffer the rent too, so I carved out some room for another artist studio and started selling merch and zines and stuff up front. In 2014 we decided to move to a studio building—we were all burned out and the new space was cheaper and we had more space to focus on our work; I definitely missed the daily interaction from the storefront. But we were still stretched so thin and that took its toll. Eventually, my husband got a job that took us overseas to Scotland. It was like a band-aid rip but the artists that were in the last space decided to keep the studio going and they still hold events/exhibitions on occasion so they're keeping it alive. Currently the old space is vacant.

What were some of the improvements/changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

We expanded into the building next door two years into the project and I did an Indigogo fundraiser to help with repairs to the the space and getting screen printing equipment. But over the years total SOOO much of my own money went into it, from covering gaps in rent, crazy utility bills, pest control, plumbers, broken windows, etc. We also all worked there for no pay so the other artists and I spent lots of hours manning the shop or installing shows just on a rotation basis. But again, it was a labor of love and we were always having fun, hanging out with other artists, drinking leftover gallery wine, eating tacos from Mama Chuy's next door. It was so much fun. I will say I did some things I regretted like liquidating a 401K to cover bills and racking up some debt on my business line of credit. It all got sorted out in the end though. I'm actually better with money having seen all these sides of it including doing all the bookkeeping/business taxes/artists payments/etc.

How did the space function financially?

We were registered with the city as a retail business. I rented studio space to 6-8 artists at a time, which covered rent and most utilities. We could each teach classes and keep 100% of income generated. And we also all kept 100% income from shop sales (60% was the split for non-studio renting artists). In exchange we all had to work the shop a certain number of hours a month and either curate one exhibition or teach one class per year. That kept the programming in the space fresh and not all coming from my perspective.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

The community in Pleasant Plains was the best! We named our collective after the neighborhood. Our residential neighbors were so supportive because there weren't any other art galleries or stores where you could pick up a little handmade card/zine/t-shirt. There was a group that came to all of our openings or passed by on their way to/from work or the pool. And to add to that, the business community



was beyond amazing. On our block there was a deli, a famous barber shop, a taco joint, a radio station and a couple bodegas. It felt like Sesame Street—we all knew each other well and supported each other—I became super involved in the Georgia Avenue Business Association and the local community advisory board.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

We received funding from the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities a number of years in a row for special projects and exhibitions—like our public art project that gave artists stipends to do installations in storefront windows along Georgia Avenue. In our final year of operation, we received funding from the DC Office of Planning and the Kresge Foundation to do a larger scale public art project in the Shaw neighborhood. That project was so exciting because we got to expand our scope/audience and got to work lot of local, national, and international artists. It was an honor to be funded by a national organization like Kresge and also so much fun to get to work with DC’s Office of Planning. Our contacts there were historians and city planners and it was a neat contrast to the usual art bubbles we work in.

What was your most memorable show?

OMG! I can’t pick, but it was pretty hilarious when one of our artists, Paul Shortt, did a show about how much his art degree was worth and hired an art student to be his ‘intern’ and had him sit in the gallery at a special desk for the duration of the show. He also decorated our

building with a giant graduation tassel made of giant rope that the intern had to hang on the side of our building daily. And when photographer Larry Cook posted some photos of friends of his with their pants sagged in our windows—he asked people to post why they sagged using the hashtag #sagmypants. Most people took it in jest, but we got a lot of blowback on this neighborhood blog. The comments ended up being so interesting that for the artist talk we went around and read them aloud.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

I love collaborating and working with artists, and I also learned how to connect more with community organizations and our local government in a way I wouldn’t have had I been just a practicing artist in a rented studio somewhere.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

Planning my next move. I’m working at a printmaking studio here in Edinburgh in exchange for free studio space/time and I’m also working an hourly job at an art museum and thinking about going back to school. It’s a time for reflection, which feels really luxurious right now.

What’s the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

OMG—my landlords were an amazing older couple that treated me like one of their kids, so it was a really great relationship.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Yes! 100%

Porch Projects

Location: 13th & D Streets NE

In Operation: 2011–2012 (two years)

Founder: Mariah Anne Johnson

Narrative by: Mariah Anne Johnson

Programming Structure: Visual art exhibitions, four or five shows a year.

Evolution: I created my space when I was relatively new to the DC art community. It was located in a spare room in my house and I used it as a way to get to know other artists, be a useful member of the community, and fill needs that I saw (artists helping artists, small curated group show opportunities). After suffering burnout I decided to close the space and focus on my own work. The space is now a storeroom.

What were some of the improvements/changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

I patched walls, painted, installed window shades, and flooring. I hired an electrician to install lighting and electrical outlets. I probably spent \$1000 on my space.

How did the space function financially?

Ha ha!

What did your neighbors think of the space?

My neighbors have lived in their houses for over 40 years each. They have seen everything. I think they were amused by my project.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

If you give artists a resource (space, time, food, money, supplies, etc.), they will use it to the max. The return on investment is incredible.

Signal 66

Location: 926 N Street NW (rear) in Blagden Alley (warehouse)

In Operation: 1999–2004 (five years)

Founder: Steve Lewis, Pat Rogan, Eric Gravelly and John Figura. Later on Tom Dodd joined the group and did sound and other assorted tasks for the featured bands.

Narrative by: John Figura and Steve Lewis

Programming Structure: An artist-run space, created for artists. We welcomed all proposals and had monthly exhibitions, film screenings, spoken word performances and even hosted an event with The Bindlestiff Circus. All openings featured live music by alternative bands such as: Dead Meadow, Thousand Legger, The Phobes, Traylor Park Romeos, The Oranj, The Gully Jimson Quartet, The Skinnys, etc.

Evolution:

The landlord, Giorgio Furioso, had bought the building in the 90s. It originally consisted of two open floors occupied by the video movie making collective the Beta Punks and a series of hanger-on types, most notably HR from the band Bad Brains who lived in a tent in the middle of the floor. The Beta Punks had a makeshift video studio built into a corner of the top floor and used the bottom space, which later became Signal 66, to host events. Eric, Steve and Pat had studios in the upstairs of the warehouse. John was the director of Anton Gallery at the time, a commercial gallery on R Street. John had shown paintings by Steve Lewis at George Mason University Johnson Center Gallery when he was the gallery director there, and had known Pat Rogan for many years since being his instructor at Catholic University. The group began talking about doing something together. All of us were growing dissatisfied with the R Street scene and wanted to try something different. Steve recalls feeling that the politically and socially inflammatory work he was doing wasn’t going to fly with the local art gallery culture, which seemed to favor more decorative work and was increasingly showing picked-over New

York-based blue chip stuff (as Steve says: they were slowly turning themselves kind of as a satellite mall for the larger international art world, which ended up not working as they are mostly now closed.) We got together and decided on trying a one-night art event in the vacant downstairs space. We spoke with the landlord, got permission, painted the walls, put up some clamp lights and planned an event. Our plan was to do something different, something that featured large-scale artworks and alternative music—bringing together both the art crowd and the music audience. The event featured works by 12 artists including Jeff Spaulding, Manon Cleary, David Chung, Clark/Hogan with a performance piece by John Anton. We had live music by the Skinnys, MK Ultra and 1000 Legger. We bought 50 cases of Natty Bo and stepped back to see what happened. The event was a huge success, big audience, lots of energy and a lot of buzz. So much buzz and good response that we decided to rent the space and open the gallery. The gallery mission was to provide a true alternative arts venue with a commitment to the local visual arts scene, which we felt was lacking after the WPA moved to 7th Street. We felt that an established hierarchy of commercial galleries, co-ops and alternative spaces had controlled and stagnated the Washington arts scene for well over a decade, overseen by career arts administrators. We cherished our independence and our freedom to make the choices we wanted. We possessed a rebellious aesthetic and attitude.

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

Over the course of our time in the space we built walls (with the help of sculptor Greg Hannan) painted the space, installed projectors, installed soundproofing to help with the sound for musical performances and did basic upgrades. Lots of sweat and money spent but it was all worth it. We had one of the largest gallery spaces in Washington. Eric Gravely—who was not in the art world per se—partnered with

us and brought a lot of technical vision. The first thing he did was raise the lighting to an acceptable professional level; he developed a website (in 1999!) and what eventually became a huge email list—innovations no other gallery was doing at that time. He had the building wired with a T1 fiber optic line and lent us video equipment—we could live stream three camera productions to the internet (the audience for this was small back then, but again it was cutting edge). Steve estimates about \$50,000 in unpaid labor over five years.

How did the space function financially?

We charged a cover for the bands that would follow each art opening (the events were free from 6-9, and we charged a cover starting at 9:30). We also welcomed donations, sold beer and sold art (75% to the artist 25% to the space). None of us made money—all monies went back into the running of the gallery.

What was your most memorable show?

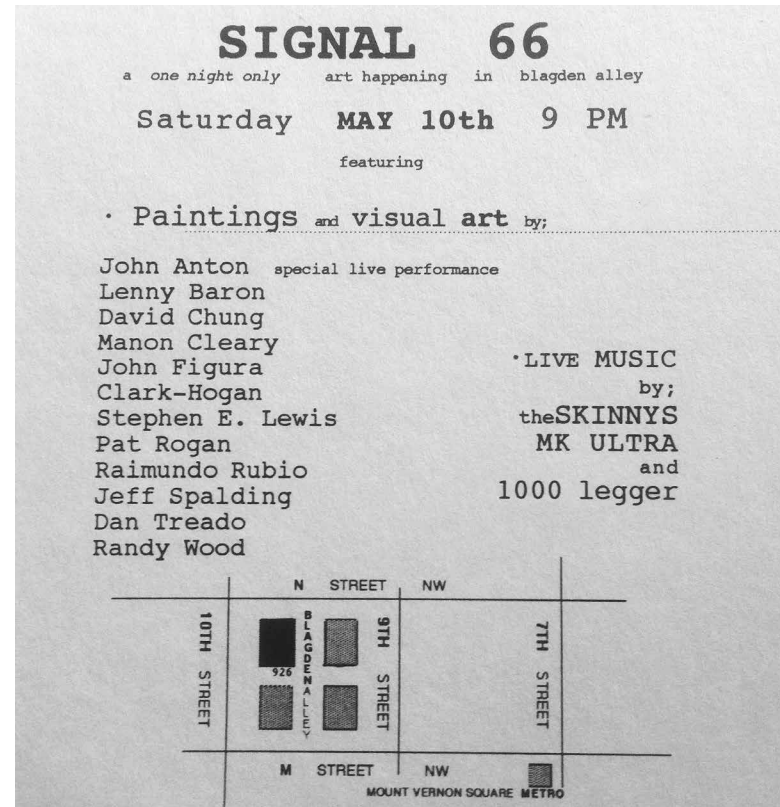
It is hard to pick one. We showed the work of so many wonderful artists who are major figures in the local scene: Chan Chao, Jeff Spaulding, Erik Sandberg, Dan Steinhilber, Manon Cleary, Dan Treado, Tim Beard, Kevin Mitchell, etc.etc. Our theory was that people crave excitement, exciting music, exciting art, fun people. The collectors would show up on their own if they were interested. This way of running openings and events in alternatives spaces in now kind of the norm. PS1 in NYC has summer mixers AKA DJ raves, every museum has some hip nightclub element, but at the time it was unusual and we were roundly criticized as being a party space not a gallery, a claim that is rebuked by examining the record of the events and shows that we organized over five years.

Why did the space close?

As gentrification reared its ugly head our rent went up it became difficult to pay the bills. Once the new convention center began construction a couple of blocks away, we knew our days were numbered.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

We supported one another. It was a labor of love. the excitement of organizing exhibitions,



working with the bands, seeing the appreciation of our audience, and the great camaraderie that the five of us had—those were the great takeaways. It was a wonderful time in our lives and in the DC art scene. We used to have Friday night artist happy hours from 6-9 on Fridays when there was not an opening. Artists could come in and drink for free—lots of great conversations, discussions and scheming. There was a sense of belonging to something—and that is something that had always been lacking in the DC art scene—and perhaps is still lacking.

What is the location now?

There are trendy restaurants now in Blagden Alley—can't walk back there anymore. The main space is now a giant PR agency. It's certainly not the place where our gas meters got shot out in a gun fight outside the building.

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

Our landlord, Giorgio Furioso, a well known supporter of Washington art, was great—he really enabled the gallery to exist. Without a sympathetic landlord who is willing to let things roll along at sub market rates, there is no independent alternative space.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Hell, I don't think we ever gave him one.

Space 4

Location: The Lafayette (1605 7th Street NW #4, Washington DC).

In Operation: 1999–2001 (two years)

Founders: Brian C. Balderston

Narrative by: Brian C. Balderston

Programming structure: For the most part, the programming consisted of group shows of emerging visual artists, with a few music, dance and performance art pieces sprinkled into the mix.

Evolution: I was fortunate to move into the Lafayette, one of the few true artist live/work spaces in DC, shortly after moving back to DC from New Orleans in 1998. Between the fact that the neighborhood had yet to be gentrified and DC had yet to experience its recent real estate boom, I could afford a 1,700 square foot space for \$600 a month. I had taken a second job at Utrecht where I met a host of other artists who seemed to be making interesting work. Considering the dearth of galleries and exhibition spaces catering to young artists at the time, it occurred to me that I should start curating shows featuring the work of my peers. Burnout was never an issue, but my floor eventually succumbed to the transition to condos. I was thus forced to close. The new owner added a huge portion of what had been my apartment to hers and I moved to another unit in the building.

What were some of the improvements/changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

I installed track lighting and painted the walls. My initial landlord was George Hemphill, and he paid for the paint. My parents helped me pay for the lighting. In total, we probably spent a few hundred dollars, but I did all of the work installing lights and patching and painting the walls.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

When I first moved in, all of my neighbors were artists, and they were supportive. As the building transitioned to condos, the enthusiasm definitely waned...

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

I never sought, nor received, any support from any local organizations. The only outside organization I worked with was called C.A.C.E. (Central Asian Cultural Exchange) with which I collaborated to exhibit the works of contemporary visual artists from Kazakhstan.

Did the goals of the space change as time passed?

Not really, it was such a short run and so ad hoc that I never had a chance to stop and think about what I was doing or where I wanted to go with the project.

What was your most memorable show?

Probably the first exhibition, which was a huge group show called Polaroid (the first of two *Polaroid* shows). It featured about 20 artists who all utilized Polaroid images in one way or another. Some of the work was pretty exceptional actually, but since it was my first show, I had no idea what to expect in terms of attendance for the opening. I guess the pre-internet word got out and the time was ripe for something like that show to happen, because the opening was packed. I just remember being amazed at the response and how quickly we went through the beer. Needless to say, I sent people out for more beer.

Why did the space close?

My floor eventually succumbed to the transition to condos. The new owner added a huge portion of what had been my apartment to hers and I moved to another unit in the building.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

The experience really impressed upon me the importance of artists taking the initiative to create their own space/scene. I was aware of the history of DIY venues/bands/projects in DC, and it was an honor to have participated in that energy.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

I eventually joined forces with another collective called Decatur Blue that had formed shortly after I began putting on shows. In fact, after I joined Decatur Blue, I learned that everyone that eventually became part of that collective had either shown work in, or been at the opening of, the first Polaroid show at Space 4.

Currently, I operate a curatorial collective in Brooklyn called Present Company with one of my partners from Decatur Blue (José Ruiz), along with two others (Chad Stayrook and Vince Contarino). Old habits die hard.

What's the weirdest interaction you had with your landlord?

When the new landlord had the workmen who were renovating her apartment break through the wall between our apartments. She hadn't been very clear about her plans for renovating the space and this came as an unwelcome surprise.

Did you get your security deposit back?

Yes.

Somewhere in Trinidad

Location: 1501 Neal Street NE, DC

In Operation: 2010–2012 (two years)

Founders/Key Figures: Ray Hennessy, Calder Brannock

Narrative by: Ray Hennessy

Programming structure: Contemporary expression across all mediums. Every 2 months.

Evolution: Artists in DC rarely have access to raw space without having to answer to a management company, gallery owner, investor, or some organization dictating usage requirements. I owned a raw space that was not being utilized and wanted to provide an opportunity for DC artists to do whatever they wanted without restriction. Eventually I sold the place and it was converted into a private live/work space.

How did the space function financially?

Money ruins everything, so finances were left out of the equation to ensure success.

What did your neighbors think of the space?

Reactions were usually “Can I grab a beer?”

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

Zero. Didn't want any. They ruin everything that is pure and good.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

Your biggest rewards will come when you ask for nothing.

Sneak Preview

Location: The last studio and home of African American artist David Bethuel Jamieson (1963–1992), 3229 Walbridge Place, NW in Mount Pleasant

In Operation: 1995 (one summer), plus 22 years (ongoing) existence as The Studio House at Walbridge

Founders: Maureen Leak (Sneak Preview); Peter Stebbins (The Studio House at Walbridge)

Narrative by: Maureen Leak and Peter Stebbins

Programming structure: We have had a variety of programming varying from that first summer of 1995's full roster of Sneak Preview single or group art shows; 1996-1998, a regular winter calendar of monthly shows with summer kids art shows and programming; 1998–2004, focused exhibitions on Jamieson's work, summer kids programming, living artist studio space and performance programming with artists from the DC Punk music scene; for awhile we did a micro-cinema hosted by local independent filmmakers Paul Bishow and Osheen Keshishian; 2004-present, changing installations of Jamieson works with public programming including annual screenings from VisualAIDS Day without Art and gallery talks related to Jamieson.

Evolution: African American artist and DC native David Bethuel Jamieson (1963–1992) died of AIDS-related causes; his last DC studio and home, owned by Charlie Mason, husband of DC Councilmember and World Grandmother Hilda Mason, remained intact and was being used by his partner, Peter Stebbins, to develop shows for public lending. During the summer of 1995, Maureen Leak, then working at Food for Thought, organized a series of shows featuring young living DC artists while the Jamieson show was on the road. Sneak Preview lasted that summer only; over the course of the fall, several participating artists helped reorganize the space as The Studio House at

Walbridge, which continues to operate today. While the core group that came together through Sneak Preview in 1995 (our earliest incarnation as an 'organized' artspace) have pretty much all moved on, several are still active in the DC scene. These days we frequently host local artists in transition and visiting artists, we continue to offer studio space on occasion and currently have an adjunct space available in Brentwood, MD. As always, we continue to display Jamieson's work in the main floor galleries, free and open to the public by chance or appointment.

How did the space function financially?

The Studio House at Walbridge was owned by Charles N. Mason, Jr., a philanthropist and civil rights activist. He originally bought the house in the early 1950s in an effort to help desegregate Washington, DC, which had only recently had its racial covenants law overturned by the Supreme Court. Charlie never lived at 3229 Walbridge Place, NW. Instead, he made the house available to families of color. Previous to the Studio House at Walbridge incarnation, the house served as residence to three separate families as their mothers pursued MSW degrees at Howard University and attended All Souls Church Unitarian. In the fall of 1988, Dave Jamieson, one time foster child of Charlie and his wife Hilda, came back to DC after completing studies in art and history at the University of Vermont, and the Masons offered him 3229 Walbridge Place, NW to use as a studio and home. Jamieson was joined by his partner, Peter Stebbins. After Jamieson's death, the Masons continued to support the house's encumbrances as Stebbins developed Jamieson's career non-commercially with public exhibitions, loans and placements of works. Upon Charles N. Mason, Jr.'s death in 2007, the house entered into the Walbridge Trust, dedicated to the display of Jamieson's work.

Did the goals of the space change as time passed?

The space has always been dedicated to Jamieson and his oft-cited credo, Support Living Artists. The use of the space has certainly shifted. In the early years, all of Dave's works and archives were in storage and the house

was used liberally by artists for any and all projects. We collectively worked on exhibitions and other uses of the space that included living artists working in the same vein as Dave. Our neighborhood, Mount Pleasant, in those years, was one that had achieved some version of the diversity our home's owner, Charlie, had envisioned when he bought the house in the 1950s. Mount Pleasant was a neighborhood of group houses, artists, and activists. The Studio House at Walbridge was rarely locked, used by many. Nowadays, the house is a bit rough around the edges, the costs of archival storage for art and objects in the DC area is prohibitive. While we continue to offer some public programming and are always open 'by chance or appointment' to share the works by Jamieson on display in our main floor galleries, we must be more gentle with our building and its contents.

What was your most memorable show?

Difficult to answer...crowd-wise, the Ides of March punk show featuring then resident artists; another show, "Flinch!", brought an incredible crowd, spilling out onto the streets... In terms of Jamieson's impact, shows that went on to travel to museums and institutions like the Smithsonian Anacostia Museum, Saint Elizabeth's, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Robert Hull Fleming Museum, etc....

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

It's incredibly difficult to produce art in this country. It is incredibly difficult to achieve public recognition and to provide public access to art. The capitalist market is not the best place for these practices; its taint is palpable and damaging. It is vital that an appreciation of artists who lack public recognition be promoted non-commercially, and that public access to art through best practices in preservation and placement of culturally important artworks becomes standard practice.

The Warehouse aka Warehouse Theater & Gallery

Location: 1017–1021 7th Street NW - Three buildings on 7th Street, between New York Avenue & L Street NW

In Operation: 1994–2009 (gallery); 1994–2016 (theater)

Founders: Molly Ruppert & Paul W. Ruppert (mother & son)

Narrative by: Paul W. Ruppert

Programming structure: Programs were extremely wide ranging—theater, music, films, dance, performance art, gallery shows, readings, figure-drawing sessions—anyone with a lot of passion and support could do a show at the Warehouse.

Evolution: The Ruppert family—led by mother-son team Molly & Paul—created the spaces. There was a need for space for emerging artists—visual artists, performers, musicians, etc. Over the course of several years we built out a series of gallery rooms and 4 performance spaces and a bar and cafe. It was combination of sweat equity and capital. A significant DIY ethos and efforts married with work by licensed contractors. The Warehouse was for-profit venture that had a range of income methods - space rental, art sales, door splits, food and drink sales, etc. We partnered with many local arts organizations. Not much support from local government. We started strictly as visual arts, then added theater followed by music and then film. The space closed because the family sold the buildings. In 2009 the gallery space was rented to Civilian Art Projects. Currently the site is undergoing development—on the way to becoming retail and office space. Molly continues to curate art shows all over Washington. Mark & Christina Ruppert run the 48 Hour Film Festival. Paul operates several retail businesses, including Upshur Street Books.

Washington Women's Arts Center (WWAC)

Location: The original location was in the Dupont Circle area at 1821 Q Street, NW, from 1975 to 1980 a long vacant doctor's office. From 1980-82 at 420 Seventh Street, NW the former Lansburg Department Store. 1982-86 Willow Street, Takoma Park 1986-1988.

In Operation: 1975–1988 (13 years)

Founders: Barbara Frank, Katherine Butler, Janis Goodman, Sarah Hyde, Ann Slayton (Leffler) and Josephine Withers

Narrative by: Barbara Frank, Judy Benderson, Taina Litwak, Ellouise Schoettler

Programming structure: Monthly thematic exhibitions with catalogues and guest curators; literary readings in conjunction with publications of poetry; performances; lectures and panel discussions; technical and business workshops. WWAC also featured a monthly newsletter and published a serious literary journal.

Evolution: Starting in 1974, following the Womansphere Interarts Festival at Glen Echo Park, Artist Barbara Frank organized the founders group with artists Katherine Butler, Janis Goodman, Sarah Hyde, Writer Ann Slayton (Leffler), and Art Historian Josephine Withers to address professional needs of women artists, writers, and curators in the Washington DC area.

The organizing committee decided to start activities before they had a space. The first event was a lecture and reading by Katherine Ann Porter, at the Hand Chapel on the campus of the former Mount Vernon College on Foxhall Road, NW. (Now George Washington University's Mount Vernon Campus). It was Porter's last public appearance. The original location was near Dupont Circle at 1821 Q Street, NW, a long vacant doctor's office (1975–1980). Other locations include 420 Seventh Street, NW, the former Lansburg Department Store (1980–82); Willow Street, Takoma Park (1982–86); the space dissolved 1986–1988.

There were well over 100 exhibits organized in the three locations. Several nationally known artists as well as locally known artists curated important shows. They included Miriam Schapiro, Dorothy Gillespie, Hilda Thorpe, and Rebecca Davenport.

What were some of the improvements/ changes you made to the space, and about how much sweat equity and money would you estimate you spent?

The Q Street location had been vacant for many years—still had some of the original medical furniture—supply cabinets, examining table, art deco draperies and aluminum floor lamps. It needed plumbing work, electrical, painting, etc. It was an English basement that had probably been two apartments in a medium sized, old apartment building. From time to time when it rained a lot, the floor flooded. The renovation work was done by member and non-member volunteers. At the start, a plumber came in, wrenched a sink and pipes off the wall and left without telling us her name or leaving a bill.

How did the space function financially?

The organization was a 501(c)3, incorporated in the District of Columbia. It was supported by membership dues, private donations, art auctions and commissions for sales. At one point a Department of Labor program covered the cost of a part-time employee.

Even as the space was being planned people started joining and paying membership fees. 100 members had joined by the time the space opened. These fees paid the rent and all expenses in the beginning. The all-volunteer staff ran the operations.

The original rent on the Q Street space was extremely low, as the owner was a relative of one of the founders group and supported the work; we recall it was about \$75.00 a month.

What types of support (or not) did you receive from the local government or larger institutions?

We wrote many grants and received several over the years, including DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities; NEA; Edith C. Blum Foundation.

Was burnout ever an issue for those involved?

Burnout was a regular occurrence as the volunteer staff rotated over the years. The Board of Directors was made up of the members. It was a member-run organization. The executive director and board members served for one-year terms to help with the problem of burnout. The work was challenging, complicated, and interesting. Everyone was involved.

Why did the space close?

The Center left its original Q Street space to become part of the downtown revitalization fostered by the DC government. They offered leases in the Lansburg Building (a defunct department store) to arts organizations at very attractive low prices. Other organizations included The Dance Place, City Museum, GALA Hispanic Theater, Greg Reynolds' Dance Quintet and the Museum of Temporary Art. When the building was closed for redevelopment, WWAC moved to Takoma Park, changed its name to The Art Center, responded to the desire of men to become more involved in the direction of the organization, and changed the focus away from offering professional services and opportunities to the women's community. Because the focus turned away from its feminist origins, the organization eventually just faded away.

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

WWAC filled a need for professional development and opportunities for women in the arts that was not being met at the time. The organizers and many, many talented volunteers, hundreds over the years, instead of waiting for something to happen, created opportunities for themselves.

Are you still working on this, or a related project?

The AU Museum at the Katzen Arts Center is planning an exhibit about the WWAC for Summer 2018: "A Retrospective of the Washington Women's Arts Center."

Art F City

Art F City is a non-profit publication that supports the creation of more sustainable artist-run projects through a mix of criticism, special projects and professional development opportunities. Our initiatives include an online publishing program, a project space and a diverse event program which serve to curate emerging practices, commission new art, and build IRL and online communities. We believe culture makers function best with a supportive community. To that end, we're working toward a more socially conscious art community by facilitating the sharing of ideas, resources, and skills.

Beltway Public Works

Beltway Public Works (BPW) is a new cultural initiative made up of artists, curators, and educators active in the Beltway region and beyond who maintain deep ties to the area. BPW considers art to be a civic resource, like water or public transit, and is interested in championing the role of contemporary art in the lives of Beltway residents.

Images

P. 10, Poster by Erick Jackson, courtesy of Civilian Art Projects.

P. 13, members of Delicious Spectacle installing Calder Brannock's DELICIOUS BUBBLE. Courtesy of Sam Scharf.

P. 15, courtesy Anthony Smallwood.

P. 23, detail of MOTA Magazine
Courtesy of Marty Mintzell.

P. 24, courtesy NoMüNoMü.

P. 25, courtesy Outer Space.

P. 26, courtesy of Richard Siegman.

P. 28, Larry Cook, #sagmypants exhibition at Pleasant Plains Workshop, 2013.
Courtesy of Prince of Petworth.

P. 31, courtesy John Figura.

