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Ex-Bakery Art Center In Florida

AP

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For South Florida artists who have been driven out of popular enclaves by rising rents and who are searching for some camaraderie, this is Bakehouse - one of a handful of centers around the nation where artists can meet, work and exhibit under one roof.

"We felt the time had come for Miami to have a working art facility, a gathering place for visual artists," said Helene Pancoast, who with three co-founders had envisioned the acquisition of an affordable complex that insulated artists from high rents.

They found exactly what they were looking for in the cavernous, 32,000-square-foot building previously owned by the Flowers Baking Company. The complex, with hardwood maple floors and ceilings as high as 16 feet in some places, was purchased with grant money for \$225,000, although it was appraised at \$900,000. 'It Really Was a Perfect Space'

"It gave you that feeling of the old warehouse space in SoHo," said the director of Bakehouse, Vivian Rodriguez. "It really was a perfect space to work in and subdivide."

A corner room where huge mixing vats once sat is now a spacious gallery. The bakery's open loading dock was enclosed, and now houses the area's only licensed, professional jewelry institute.

An open central area for ovens and packaging has been partitioned into 65 comfortable studios for painters, sculptors, ceramicists, performance artists and others.

"Miami has been growing culturally, and we really are infants in many ways," Miss Rodriguez said. "In a sense, what we're doing here is a prototype."

The fenced-in Bakehouse, which opened a year ago, has not only survived in what some might describe as a rough neighborhood, but is also flourishing. Its studios are full. In fact, there is a waiting list. Open Houses Draw Hundreds

Monthly open houses, when artists put their work on display and mingle with the public, are attracting hundreds of people. Some workshops and classes have been held and more are planned.

South End Alternative Theater, a professional company, has presented at least a half-dozen productions in the Bakehouse's 85-seat theater on the second floor. It plans to perform year-round.

Influenced by similar centers for artists, such as the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, Va., and the Art Place in New Orleans, Bakehouse has succeeded in fostering a convivial atmosphere that is getting raves from many of the artists who rent studios from about \$100 to \$450, depending on square footage.

"I've always worked by myself," said Sofia Taylor, who for a while had a studio in Coconut Grove, a popular area for artists until developers came in and prices went up. "Since I've been here, the

interchange has been marvelous." Many Mediums

During the latest open house one week ago, visitors strolled the maze of hallways, browsing at artwork on display in the studios and chatting with the artists.

Maggie McClellan was putting the finishing touches on her business cards, miniature watercolor pieces, as visitors popped in. A half-finished watercolor portrait sat on an easel nearby.

Like many of the artists at Bakehouse, Miss McClellan used to work out of her garage, but isolation and lack of recognition prompted her move to one of the largest studios at the complex.

"It's a comfortable community. You're inspired by each other's work," said Miss McClellan, who worked with a partner at the Torpedo Factory. She said Bakehouse was "the greatest thing that's happened to the community, artwise." Secure, Affordable Space

For Kenneth Gregory, a painter and art teacher, his bedroom-sized studio is secure, affordable space he can use at any time.

In addition to 65 tenants, Bakehouse has 30 associate artists who have studios elsewhere but participate in exhibitions and other activities at the complex.

Bakehouse is still in its infancy: the gallery needs lighting improvements and a new floor, and the outdoor sculpture sheds need finishing.

Miss Pancoast, who founded Bakehouse with Faith Atlass and David and Nathalie Nadel, said the complex could become a big force in South Florida's cultural growth given enough time and community support.