

Property prices, artists get organized

BY NICOLAS VAQUIER

In the British capital, culture seems healthy. The sector contributes every year for up to almost 50 billion Euros (42 billion Sterling Pounds) to the city's economy. Culture represents one job out of six and the creative jobs (claimed to be difficult to automate) increase four times as fast as the average.

Beyond this bright picture, the British cultural sector is suffering, in particular by the price of real estate and its successive surges. Thus, for the first time in 50 years, there are more Londoners leaving the capital than new residents. Artists are not spared and end up, little by little, being "evicted". This is the gloomy analysis made by the London organization SPACE in its study entitled "Artists in the City: SPACE in '68 and beyond".

Established in 1968, SPACE intends to make workspaces available for artists at moderated prices. SPACE manages today 19 sites throughout the city and provides studios to more than 700 artists, for a total surface of more than 25 000 m².

The initiative took shape more than 50 years ago when its founders, Bridget Riley and Peter Sedgley, both renown artists, opened a first space in a former ivory warehouse in St Katharine Docks, along the Thames. They fitted the place and rented then the first artists' studios for the equivalent of €500 per year. In the following years, more buildings were converted.

If the concept of refitting industrial wastelands into artists' studios was not entirely new then – the founders declared having been inspired by New York -, SPACE was the first artists' studios complex legally established to delve into the profusion of disused industrial warehouses. It is out of this model that P.S.1 was born, a New-York production and exhibition structure established in 1976 in the former premises of a *public school* (from which it earned its acronym) or even the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin.

The organization now leans on a vast program of partnerships with the real estate sector, as well as a plan to support artists under the form of grants and residencies. However, Anna Harding, the current director of SPACE, issues a warning: "the vital resources, such as studio space and alternative art venues, should never be taken for granted. And without them, London's preeminence as a creative city is at risk."

spacestudios.org.uk/artists-in-the-city