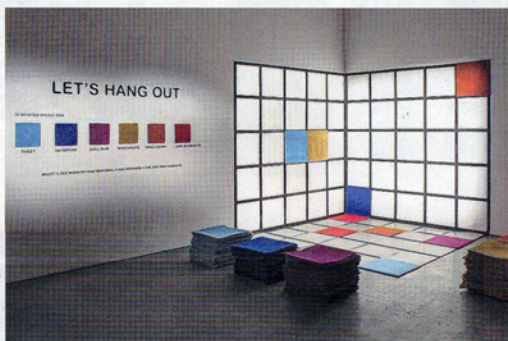




London homes

Arthouse investments



Developers are bankrolling the arts' gentrifying influence, says **Claire Carponen**

What makes property developers want to donate space to artists? For Rob Soning and David Barnett, it was simply their passion for art. Londonewcastle, the Central London property development company the duo run, bought a former printworks in East London for redevelopment. They applied for planning permission but four years on building has yet to begin. Instead of leaving the building empty, they spent £80,000 on turning the site into a gallery space. The venue has held nearly 40 exhibitions and has been used as a film location for the past three and half years.

A property developer working with artists might seem like an unlikely partnership but the Londonewcastle Project Space is part of a growing trend. Luvor Lubomirov from Alisn, the artist-led initiative support network, explains: "There is a perception, backed by plenty of experiences to confirm it, that the cycle of property development is detrimental to art: artists go into a poor area, the area becomes cool, the property developers

come in and then young professionals start buying first homes, which then raises prices and pushes out the artists. But, of course, that picture is not complete." He continues: "Business and particularly property business is increasingly becoming involved with art and recognising its importance to increasing the desirability of an area and thus drive prices."

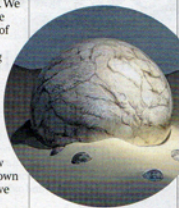
As Londonewcastle has discovered, it is a partnership that can benefit both parties and the local community as well. This is not a money-making venture but it has not done the Londonewcastle brand any harm. Soning says: "It can take years to get planning, and properties just lie empty. We decided to set up the gallery because we are huge art fans — and it was our way of putting something back into London."

Property developers are recognising the important role that artists can play in the continuing transformation of areas, and free or cheap exhibition space means that art has the opportunity to exist without profit concerns.

Developers are more interested in this kind of temporary-use project now that the property market has slowed down so, says Doug Francis, the creative director of Artspace Lifespace, an artist-led initiative based in Bristol that turns vacant, underused and problem properties into arts venues: "These temporary projects are now continuing a lot longer and even starting to influence and integrate with longer term development plans. We have seen a lot of escalation in our activity here in Bristol over the past five years."

Although many buildings lie empty or abandoned for years awaiting resale or

Top left: the Londonewcastle Project Space; above: the Let's Hang Out by Julia Vogl; bottom: the winner of the visitor's vote (Mother Hairy Eye Ball Leleta' by Adeline De Monseignat); bottom: the Lubomirov-Easton gallery in Deptford



redevelopment, creative and community space can be hard to come by. This is where local councils can play a vital role — by helping to connect property businesses with local art communities. Last month, Alisn started running an exhibition space (called Lubomirov-Easton) in seven galleries run by a local arts organiser housed on the ground floor of a private new-build apartment building on Deptford High Street. The developer had to include the art spaces as part of its tender to the council. This project, Lubomirov says, was part of the local government's thoroughly considered gentrification strategy which is working through the private sector to effect change as opposed to the postwar model of public-money led social schemes.

The Catlin Art Prize, an exhibition held in May in the Londonewcastle gallery funded by the Catlin Group, a property insurer, is typical of the type of event hosted at the project space, Soning says. "We like supporting up-and-coming artists — we haven't succumbed to big offers from famous names."

The industrial-looking redbrick building, located on Redchurch Street in Shoreditch just behind Shoreditch House, the members-only club, is part of a collection of independent galleries on the street. In recent years, the hidden backstreet, home to Terence Conran's Boundary hotel and restaurant, a number of high-end boutiques including Aubin & Wills, has gone from shabby to chic. People from all over the capital come for an alternative shopping experience — it has been dubbed the "the new Bond Street" — and it is these types of people, presumably, that Londonewcastle hope will buy homes in its new scheme.

The developer has outline planning permission for a mixed-use development, including 100 flats, on the site of the existing two-storey building. The scheme, located on the former Huntingdon Estate, has been controversial. The initial design, a 25-storey "twisting" tower, was scrapped after it met vociferous opposition from local residents, including Rachael Whitehead, the Turner Prize-winning artist, who lives nearby, who objected to the scale of the building. The developer is in the process of submitting a revised plan.

The art venue, however, has been so successful — it is booked up until the end of the year — that Soning wants it to continue as a gallery when the development is finished.

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