

The Docklands | news

EXHIBITION

Open house for artists living in once derelict fire station

Emerging young talent open their doors to the public to showcase their work in Grade II listed building

» Tucked away on the edge of the Blackwall Tunnel, the old Poplar fire station provides a striking image of the transitions the East End has gone through over the decades.

Disused for a long period up until the 1990s, the Grade II listed building on Gillender Street marks its centenary this month with a brand new lease of life.

Since arts charity Acme bought the building in 1997 it has housed more than 50 artists, Turner Prize winners included.

The organisation is the only one of its kind in the country to provide highly subsidised live/work spaces for struggling young talents.

This weekend it will open its doors so the public can peruse the 12 artists' work and get involved in exhibitions and performances.

Jonathan Harvey, Acme's chief executive, said: "The building has always been intended to be a live/work space. Instead of laying empty, it has provided a perfect use for emerging artists. Living in London is expensive enough but renting a studio is a real problem for many."



■ Emma Smith in her studio flat

With a waiting list of 800, places are hard to come by and the artists on one of the five-year placements know how lucky they are.

Emma Smith, in performance art, said: "Artists generally are paid below the minimum wage."

"The statistics show there are enough empty buildings to

house all the homeless people in London."

Ms Smith, said it took her five years after graduating from Goldsmith's to be able to earn a living from her trade.

Briony Anderson, a painter, said: "This has given me a means to continue to live and work in London. It's also motivational being around other

Building History

The building opened as Brunswick Road Fire Station on May 19, 1911. As one of the first stations built for motorised fire engines, the crews who lived there served heavily bombed East London during the Blitz.

The station was decommissioned when the Blackwall Tunnel Approach Road was constructed in the 1960s. It lay empty until it was bought by Acme in 1997 and converted. More than 50 artists have now live and worked there.

artists.

"I hope the open days are interesting for people to see how pieces go from start to finish."

The old fire station will be open to the public on Saturday and Sunday (May 21 and 22).

Briony will be showing her landscape paintings while Emma is declaring her home a space for the 'Non Emergency Services' and will lead performance art centred on quiet contemplation.

Former fireman and MP for Poplar and Limehouse Jim Fitzpatrick will unveil a plaque by former fire station artist Ben Cove.