

Old fire station artists to share their work with the public

Take part in open house events

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Tucked away on the edge of the Blackwall Tunnel, the former Poplar fire station provides a striking image of the transitions the East End has experienced over the decades.

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

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

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

This weekend it will open its doors so the public can see 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."

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.

Performance artist Emma Smith said: "Artists generally are paid below the minimum wage.

Motivational

"The statistics show there are enough empty buildings to house all the homeless people in London."

Emma said it took her five years after graduating from Goldsmith's College, University of London to be able to earn



■ **Emma Smith will be at the former Poplar Fire Station**

a living from her trade.

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

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 created by former fire station artist Ben Cove.