

Supporting the Affordable Artists' Studios Sector

Established by artists in 1972, Acme Studios has benefited from an extraordinary consistency of management and vision. The co-founders, Jonathan Harvey and David Panton continue to lead the organisation today.

The main challenges facing the affordable artists' studio sector have changed little over the last thirty-five years. Acme's first brochure, published when The Acme Gallery opened in Covent Garden in 1976, emphasised that: *'Permanent property must be found and acquired...'* because of the waste of energy and investment in moving from one temporary building to another. An understanding of the need for studio groups to work together was also clearly expressed: *'There is a case for all groups working in the area of provision of studio space and accommodation to co-operate and to pool resources and information, rather than to continue the fragmentary development being done at the moment'*. Thirty years later this ambition has been realised, with Acme taking the lead role in establishing the [National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers](#) in 2006.

Acme's story, like that of most studio organisations, has been about survival, about the challenges of creating and sustaining affordable space for artists in the face of escalating property and land values and with relatively little public subsidy. However, Acme has always seen the value and importance of collaboration and sharing hard-won experience with others.

As early as 1975, in collaboration with SPACE and supported by The Arts Council of Great Britain, a pamphlet was published entitled *Help Yourself to Studio Space*. The purpose was: *'...not only to show what opportunities exist, but also to pass on our experience and to establish communication between groups and individuals who have their own solutions to these kind of problems. We should especially like to offer other artists our advice and assistance in obtaining space for themselves.'*

The experience Acme has gained in the acquisition, development and management of affordable studio space and accommodation for artists is unequalled. We pioneered the concept of combined working and living space for artists, converting, refurbishing and managing over 400 short-life houses for this purpose during the 70s, 80s and 90s. In recent years, this idea has been taken further with the conversion of ex-industrial buildings to create permanent 'work/live' space for artists. Over the last 30 years we have converted over 25 major buildings to non-residential studio use, carefully evolving a design specification to ensure that we meet the changing needs of artists.

We have developed and maintained a disciplined approach to our capital development work to ensure that affordability is sustainable in the long term, rejecting buildings that will not guarantee this, finding economic solutions to conversion work and maximising the availability of external funding. In the past additional funding has come from a wide variety of sources, most significantly through the National Lottery. With capital funding becoming increasingly difficult to

secure, the achievement of our new-build Galleria Studios in Peckham, completed in 2006 through the use of planning-gain, is a vitally important model, not just for Acme but for the sector as a whole.

We have consistently shared our experience with others and continue to provide free advice on all aspects of the acquisition, development and management of affordable accommodation for artists. This is available to individuals and groups of practitioners, studio organisations and all those with an interest in helping to develop affordable space for artists.

In recent years Acme has taken the lead role, working with other studio groups and organisations and the Arts Council, in the strategic development of the affordable artists' studio sector in England, which includes the establishment of the [National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers](#)

In 2006 Acme completed its Capital Studios - London Artists' Studios Development Programme supported by [Arts Council England, London](#). Capital Studios is an advocacy programme on behalf of all London affordable artists' studio providers.

All Acme [Publications](#), including previous research studies produced as part of the organisation's strategic development role, are available as downloadable pdf files.

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