

# The Studio: a struggle to survive

by BILL HUGHES

Paradise found may become paradise lost for a group of artists working in a facility in downtown Bryan known as The Studio.

For owner Susan Mahoney, it's a matter of economic reality.

The financial burden of establishing a new home in Houston, trying to sell her home here, and owning and maintaining an artists' workspace has forced Mahoney's hand.

"It's a very emotional decision," Mahoney says. "If I weren't moving, there'd be no way I'd be giving it (The Studio) up."

Mahoney said the decision was especially difficult because of the struggle involved to get The Studio up and running and to keep it going with little support from the community.

She'd like to sell the building to the artists who now use The Studio.

The artists can pay the rent, but they're finding it difficult to come up with the money for an outright purchase.

If the artists can't buy the building, Mahoney says she hopes someone interested in keeping the facility as an artists' workspace will buy it and allow the artists to stay and pay rent as they're doing now.

The final option would be to sell the building to someone who would want to use it for a purpose other than art. Although this option

would help Mahoney out of a financial predicament, she says it would be a painful decision, especially after all of the work that she and the other artists have put into the facility.

The Studio is located on 26th Street in downtown Bryan. It was converted from a former bank building into an artists' haven through Mahoney's vision and the perspiration and dedication of a group of people committed to establishing an art community in Bryan-College Station.

Mahoney remembers her first impression of the building.

"It was horrible," she says.

The paint on the ceiling and walls was peeling, there was a tattered green carpet on the floor, the rooms in the former bank building weren't suitable for artistic pursuits and there wasn't any air conditioning.

Betty Foster, an artist at The Studio, says that Mahoney's real gift was being able to see the possibilities of the space as an art studio even though the building was in a sad state of disrepair.

Mahoney made connections with other artists in town through word-of-mouth, and when she decided to buy the building, the artists were ready to pitch in to convert the space into a workplace for the visual arts.

Walls were torn down, the interior was painted white, a darkroom

was set up and Mahoney's husband installed the air conditioning.

The carpet was pulled up, revealing a white pine floor. Yellow with age, the pine looked hopeless, but Mahoney talked with restoration experts in town and found a way to remove the yellow and restore the beauty of the floor.

Now when you walk into the building, there is a large, evenly lit open space.

Natural light streams in from windows running the length of the west side of the building, and the white walls and light wood floor contribute to the airy feeling.

Foster, sitting at her easel and painting a landscape as she talks, says, "It's a very practical space, yet it's a little bit elegant even though it's a workspace."

Jazz music drifts through the room as the artists work. Some are painting, one is teaching a class of children and others are cutting patterns for silk blouses that will be hand-painted.

"It's a very synergistic atmosphere," says Mary Ciani Saslow, an artist working with oils and oil pastels. "Someone can have an idea and someone else will have access to materials or can help with carrying the idea through."

Saslow was the artist-in-residence in the environmental design department at Texas A&M last year.

"When someone's teaching at the

University," she says, "they get so much interaction with students and other faculty that when they work, they usually want to work alone. It's different for artists outside of the university situation because you don't have that constant interaction. An artist's life is usually very isolated and lonely."

Saslow says she stumbled onto The Studio and thought it was perfect in terms of space and lighting requirements, as well as being a place to meet with people who have similar interests.

"When you work, it's nice to have colleagues," she says.

Lou Egg, who calls herself "a novice artist," agrees.

"I'd hate to lose this building," she says. "It's such a good atmosphere to be around other artists."

"The first time I came in, I just knew this was right... it felt good."

Claire Lawyer, a freelance artist specializing in photo retouching and restoration, says The Studio is "motivation more than anything else."

"If I make the effort to get down here," she says, "I'm going to use it (the workspace). It's nice to see other people work and get some inspiration."

Lawyer says she doesn't worry about losing the building.

"I feel that this will work out — I want this to work," she says.

Most of the artists working in The Studio believe the facility is a concept that's long overdue in this area. Now that they have a place to work, they're going to fight to keep it.

"We looked for a long time before we found a suitable building," Saslow says.

Foster is working hard on finding a way to buy The Studio because of the difficulty involved in setting up and maintaining another space.

"I've lived in this community for about 20 years and I've tried about five or six times to set up some sort of studio space," she says. "I found that if I didn't own the space that it always fell through."

The artists are trying to get a group of four to six people together to buy the building and carry the mortgage as a group. Under this plan, space would still be available for other artists to rent.

So, if you're looking for a home for your artistic endeavors or just want to check out part of the local art scene, the artists at The Studio say you're welcome to drop on by.

**Artist Betty Foster (left) wants to keep The Studio as an artists' workplace. The building's owner has to sell and time is running out for the artists who now work there to come up with a plan for buying the facility.**



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