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NYC artists find half the battle is studio rent

NEW YORK (AP) -- For artists in New York - one of the world's most expensive cities - finding stable, affordable places to create and showcase their work can be challenging. A growing number of programs are offering solutions.

According to the census, 124,000 New Yorkers identified themselves as artists, writers or photographers in 2010. Many face a constant struggle to find stable, affordable workspaces - a problem that's been growing for decades and is now reaching a critical point, said Paul Parkhill, executive director of Spaceworks, a nonprofit spearheaded in 2011 by the Department of Cultural Affairs to transform underused public and private building spaces into permanent artist workspaces.

"We get a lot of stories about people moving from studio to studio every year or two," he said, citing once-affordable neighborhoods like Brooklyn's Williamsburg and Red Hook as now out of reach.

"But despite the economic challenges, New York is a place where artists want to be," Parkhill said.

Spaceworks' two visual art spaces in Brooklyn's Gowanus neighborhood rent for \$350 per month - about 50 to 60 percent below market value. In Long Island City, Queens, Spaceworks' three theater, dance and music spaces rent for \$12 to \$16 per hour. It was a godsend when renovations forced the Mabou Mines/Suite theater ensemble to leave its lower Manhattan location.

"We were delighted to find the spaces are generous in size, clean, with sprung floors," said co-artistic director Sharon Fogarty; the rent would have been triple elsewhere.

Spaceworks is developing rehearsal spaces at the Brooklyn Public Library in Red Hook, as well as rehearsal and visual art spaces at the library's Williamsburg branch. Within five years, it hopes to have a few hundred visual art studios citywide.

Among other programs offering relief or extra exposure to artists:

- The New York Performing Arts Spaces website, run by Fractured Atlas Artists, lists over 1,700 rehearsal and performance spaces, from major theaters to small studios and church basements. Some go for \$10 per hour during off-peak periods - "spaces that otherwise would go wasted," said program Director Lisa Niedermeyer.

- Curate NYC is funded by the city's Economic Development Corporation and is the brainchild of philanthropist and gallery owner Danny Simmons and marketing maven Brian Tate. Artists are selected for online or New York City gallery exhibitions by curators from institutions like the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington and the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

"Commercial galleries really don't want to take a chance on an unknown artist," Simmons said. Curate NYC takes that "out of the equation."

In 2010, 1,100 artists submitted pieces through Curate NYC's online portal; 150 were featured in a group show at a single gallery. Last year, 900 were selected from 1,900 entries for exhibitions in seven city galleries and 30 online shows. The program is still growing.

- The Building Art Curatorial Program was started by commercial leasing broker Cindy Glanzrock. Working with galleries, she leases works to office buildings, turning marble and granite lobbies into exciting temporary art spaces. She's currently showcasing purchasable pieces by former street artists Desire Obtain Cherish (DOC), Angel Ortiz (LA Roc) and Sens 2.

About 600 passers-by a day view DOC's whimsical melting ice cream and blow pop sculptures in a Manhattan lobby.

"The more my work gets exposed," said DOC, "the more the potential for sale there is."