



CHANGING SPACES —Global

Preface

All cities love the artistic vibe but often destroy it with high rents. As such the affordability of artists' studios is a good judge of cultural cache (and a new judging metric for this year's Quality of Life Survey) so visit three urban centres where cheap space allows for enriching creative success.



Adapting to the Cuban boom *Havana*

Carlos Garaicoa is such a typical Cuban artist that he isn't even in the country when we visit his studio. His assistant Lillebet, who has worked with Carlos for 16 years, shows us around as he's in his other studio, in Madrid. Cuban artists who have left the country tend to keep a space back home, as the fascination with Cuba ensures a higher sale value for their works than if they solely lived abroad.

"He has a large team, including two architects and a model-maker, because he is always showing around the world and in projects that involve big production, as well as running initiatives for emerging and Cuban artists," says Lillebet. "We are always busy but there's one rule: make time for a communal lunch."

Young artists in Havana will often use their home as their studio before renting a flat or a house alone or with other emerging artists to use as a studio. "This step now happens earlier in their careers. It's the Cuban art boom, predicted for years," says Christian Gundin García, who owns El Apartamento gallery overlooking the Malecón in Vedado.



01



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- 01 Carlos Garaicoa in his Havana studio
- 02 Painter and installation artist Rachel Valdés Camejo
- 03 Work by Alex Hernández Dueñas
- 04 Tools of the trade
- 05 Large-format photograph by Adrián Fernández and storage alcove

After leaving ISA (Instituto Superior de Arte, Cuba's only postgrad art school), Adrián Fernández, Frank Mujica and Alex Hernández Dueñas got together. "We bought a 1940s house in La Sierra, a neighbourhood in Playa, with savings and money from selling our work," says Mujica. "We took advantage of a change in Cuban property law to buy the house from another Cuban. Because we have different practices – photography, drawing and mixed media – visitors for one often end up buying or showing the others afterwards."

The house would have cost about \$150,000 in 2013 and today it would be more like \$280,000, or €250,000. "Despite a lack of building there are properties available but warehouse



05

- 01 Frank Mujica at work on a large-format graphite drawing
- 02 (From l-r) Alex Hernández Dueñas, Frank Mujica and Adrián Fernández
- 03 Upstairs corridor in Rachel Valdés Camejo's studio
- 04 Studies for installations by Rachel Valdés Camejo
- 05 Exterior of Rachel Valdés Camejo's studio



01

spaces tend to be owned by the state so what is available is domestic," says Mujica. "Especially when you're renting, that can mean making do. A large house like this would rent for about \$3,000 [€2,700] a month." Whether buying or renting, it's all in cash in Cuba. Some artists negotiate use of former industrial sites from the authorities in exchange for community engagement. Before the law changed, people would buy illegally, or swap houses, with money paid for differences in size and location.

That practice of swapping continues today. Rachel Valdés Camejo is a painter and installation artist whose work has gone up on the Malecón in Havana and in New York's Times Square. She's one of the rare artists not to have gone to ISA. "I got in but then moved to Barcelona

instead. My love for my home city and cheap prices for fantastic property drew me back and I now live between the two cities. I swapped two nearby apartments and paid a little extra for a two-floor art deco villa in Vedado. It's beautiful but needs fixing up. Dust from the crumbling ceilings can stick in my paintings. But these things you can sort out," she says with typically relaxed Cuban pragmatism. "The high ceilings are perfect for my large-format canvases."

For non-Cuban nationals, a residency visa is hard to come by. Buying a house is only legal if you are Cuban, unless you buy property owned by a foreigner (to find an empty property, try revolico.com or casascubanas.com). ISA offers tuition in its beautiful 1960s building, which is one way to get a longer-stay visa. — TLS



02

Painting by numbers
Proximity to city centre? Good supply of studio-worthy property within a 20-minute drive
Local art market? Healthy since the 1980s
Access to international art market? Excellent
Taxes on art? 20-50% for sellers; none for buyers
Price per sq m? Monthly rent: €5 to €7



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PHOTOGRAPHER: PILAR RUBI



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02

- 01 Adrian Wong's studio
- 02 Sketchbooks in Adrian Wong's studio
- 03 Mural by comic artist Mauro Marchesi
- 04 Wong in front of his work 'Untitled Grate'
- 05 Wong's studio assistant
- 06 Communal area in Spring Workshop
- 07 (From l-r) Mimi Brown, Janine Armin, Malak Helmy and Christina Li at Spring Workshop
- 08 Greer Howland Smith's artwork
- 09 Smith's working desk
- 10 Interior of Smith's studio
- 11 Artist and writer Malak Helmy at work in Spring Workshop



06



07

2

Ever-evolving map
Hong Kong

Photographer Chan Dick has reason to feel nostalgic about his former studio: he shot his award-winning series of photographs of Chai Wan fire station from the toilet window. He moved out last year when his ex-landlord raised the rent, asking more than double what Dick paid when he moved in six years earlier. "I moved into Chai Wan because the rent was cheaper but I stayed because of the community of photographers," says Dick, who now works from a studio nearby, albeit lacking a view of his former muse.

Chai Wan is one of several artist clusters that have sprung up in Hong Kong since the turn of the millennium, making use of industrial buildings left empty by the migration of manufacturing to China. The most established community is in Fo Tan, in the New Territories, which is where American artist and UCLA lecturer Adrian Wong started his first studio in Hong Kong after relocating in 2005.

"It was a dream studio and they were asking half market value because it had been empty for more than 10 years," says Wong. "Before I pulled the trigger I sat down with a security guard and he told me to stay away from the place. He said: 'It's on the fourth floor, it's bad luck and many of us have seen ghosts coming in and out.' So I thought, 'Awesome, I'm taking it!'"

Wong stayed in Fo Tan for four years despite a run of spooky activity culminating in a crazed monkey taking a chunk out of his arm. His current studio is in Wong Chuk Hang, one of the newer artist communities on the south side of Hong Kong Island. These days his main disturbance comes from news reporters banging on the door with lights and a



03

camera looking for the previous occupants: a plastics company involved in a contaminated pipes scandal. On the flip side his craft-brewing neighbours Black Kite keep his fridge well stocked.

Mimi Brown arrived early to Wong Chuk Hang, founding Spring Workshop in 2011 to provide short-term studios for artists invited to visit Hong Kong by her non-profit partners. "I became interested in the art scene through two organisations: Asia Art Archive and Para/Site," says Brown. "But I soon realised how pressed for room they were – I'm a Californian so I love vast open spaces. Wong Chuk Hang felt like an ideal area of production."

Spring Workshop gradually became the informal hub of a vibrant community of artists; mixed-media artist Greer Howland Smith, for example, moved into a studio upstairs in 2014. Now the project is coming to an end and Brown is working on the next iteration. Job done? "Job exceeded," she says.

One of Wong Chuk Hang's newest studios opened last year when Linda Lai moved her Floating Projects art collective



04



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08

from Wan Chai. The artist and professor at the City University of Hong Kong now has three times the floor space with which to better serve an expanding membership. Once the MTR extension opens next year Wong Chuk Hang will become a zippy five-minute jaunt from the city centre – a mixed blessing as convenience inevitably means rising costs.

As rents increase in these established enclaves, younger artists are finding new areas to set up studios. Donna Tam recently bought a 50 sq m space in Kwai Chung – home to Hong Kong's bustling container port – with the help of family and friends, and she now shares it with another artist. "A lack of space is a big challenge," says Tam, who gave up her teaching job two years ago to concentrate on art. "I mainly work on small-scale projects."

To complete her first large-scale work Tam resorted to borrowing space from a friend. Even established artists such as Wong work at multiple addresses across Hong Kong, while peers have turned to renting second, much larger spaces across the border in Shenzhen. "I never expected that 15 years into my career the most viable workspaces would be in one of the most expensive and densely populated cities in the world," says Wong. "Although if I were 25 again, trying to find a studio, I'm not sure I could give myself advice." — JCH



09



10

Painting by numbers
Proximity to city centre? Close: Wong Chuk Hang is 20 minutes; Chai Wan 25; and Fo Tan 35 minutes
Local art market? Very healthy; record crowds at Art Basel Hong Kong
Access to international art market? A big draw
Taxes on art? No
Price per sq m? Monthly rent: €1.55 (per sq ft)



11

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3

The importance of proximity
Leipzig

The international press calls Leipzig “the next Berlin” but the regional capital is definitely its own city, especially when it comes to art and artists.

Leipzig is, after all, home to one of Germany’s most renowned art academies, dating back to 1837. The new Leipzig Museum of Fine Arts opened in 2004, the number of galleries and project spaces keeps rising and the city still has lots of space for inexpensive artist ateliers.

Nowhere is the latter more apparent than in the Spinnerei, a sprawling complex in the western Lindenau district. With 10 hectares and more than 20 buildings, the Spinnerei was once Europe’s largest cotton mill. Workers spun cotton here almost until the first artists settled into studios in 1994, not long after the Iron Curtain parted and the east German economy began to dramatically shift. A factory worker friend tipped off early-adopter artists to available space. One of these artists was Neo Rauch, who would later become a global art collectors’ darling.

Christiane Baumgartner has worked in her light-filled corner studio in Hall 18 for more than 21 years. “Look at how amazing this light is,” she says, chuckling as she rubs paper on a woodcut form under vast-paned windows. In the late 1990s Baumgartner studied in London but returned to her native Leipzig, where she studied and now teaches as a guest professor. “In London I went to openings every night but in Leipzig you can concentrate and work,” she says. “From here I got a good London gallery.”

A couple of floors down is painter Sebastian Burger’s high-ceilinged studio,



Painting by numbers
Proximity to city centre? 5km
Local art market? Solid. A few locals do buy regularly
Access to international art market? Good. Many international collectors come here to ‘shop’
Taxes on art? 19% VAT
Price per sq m? Monthly rent: €3 to €4.50

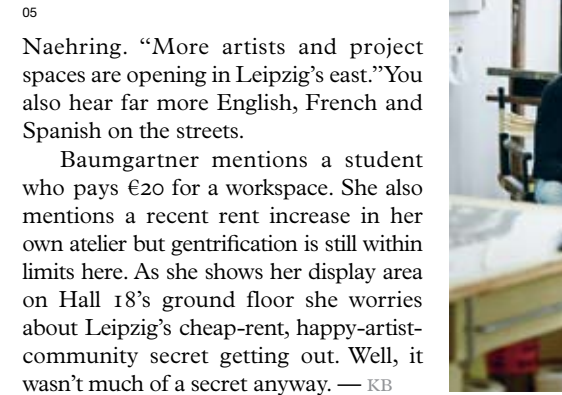
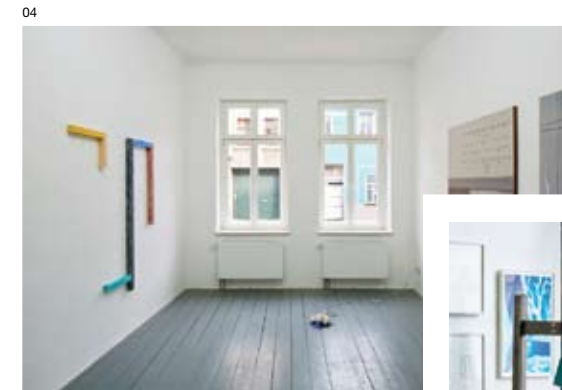
- 01 Sebastian Burger work in progress
- 02 The Spinnerei’s grounds: ‘Capitalist Melancholia’: is an exhibit in Hall 14
- 03 Artist duo Famed in discussion
- 04 Christiane Baumgartner in her studio
- 05 Tobias Naehring Gallery
- 06 Sebastian Burger in his studio in the Spinnerei

which is 115 sq m and costs him €500. Studio prices in the Spinnerei range from €3 to €4.50 per sq m, which is unheard of in other German cities, even Berlin. After a stint in Vienna, Burger studied at the Leipzig art academy, ultimately doing his master’s work under Rauch. “As an artist you do have to leave Leipzig sometimes but it’s a wonderful base,” he says. “The scene is small and here at the Spinnerei everything is in one place.”

When Burger needs a paintbrush he goes to Boesner, a well-known German art-supply store, across the street. There are print shops and other fabricators on site. The Spinnerei officially opened as an arts-based complex in 2005 when a trio of owners launched the Spinnerei brand – and it’s since grown into an arts community. It also includes galleries such as Leipzig’s own Eigen + Art, whose New Leipzig School figurative painters became an art-market sensation in the 2000s. Some of those painters still work there.

Hall 14 has been renovated into an impressive non-profit museum-like exhibition space and a masterplan includes new culture institutions (such as a controversial natural history museum), but some artists are noting shifts away from just art. The artist duo Famed (they don’t go under their own names at all) have created conceptual and installation work since 2003 and have had studios in Spinnerei for seven years: “More tech start-ups are slowly creeping in; there’s a call centre a few buildings away,” one of them tells us. However: “The Spinnerei wants the artists here, it’s part of what they do – they’re trying to keep a balance.”

Leipzig lacks a subsidised artist atelier program like Berlin’s. But with such low rents it doesn’t need one – yet. The Spinnerei is already considered pricey. “In Leipzig’s west things are getting more expensive,” says gallerist Tobias



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PHOTOGRAPHER: ANDREAS GEHRKE