



The Art Project

The Minnesota Street Project is transforming an industrial stretch of Dogpatch into an ambitious art laboratory.

By Lauren Murrow



Above: A rendering of 1275 Minnesota Street—opening March 17—which will house 11 galleries, art studios, a restaurant, and a bar. **Left:** The building's graphic facade, designed by Jensen Architects.

Minnesota Street.

That's...where now? Even native-born San Franciscans might have a hard time pinpointing the narrow, eight-block-long, Midwestern-designated drag on a city map (look down there on the southeastern corner of the Dogpatch, just east of Potrero Hill and north of the Bayview). But they're going to know it a lot better soon: Opening this month, the Minnesota Street Project—a gallery hub, a complex of rent-controlled artist studios, and a concierge art storage facility—has transformed that short, sleepy corridor into city's newest and most unusual arts district.

The project was conceived by art collectors Deborah and Andy Rappaport two years ago, when the Union Square galleries they had long frequented were beginning to falter. Decades-old Geary Street standbys like Rena Bransten Gallery, Modernbook Gallery (now Themes + Projects), Nancy Toomey Fine Art, and Anglim Gilbert Gallery were becoming victims of rising rents and the gradual gallery-scene migration to the city's south and east, as well as to the East Bay. "For us," says Deborah, "the idea of living in a city devoid of art was impossible to contemplate." Andy, a retired venture capitalist, had some experience investing in real estate, so the couple began to hunt for large-scale buildings to fill what they

saw as a depressing void.

They searched in the Bayview, SoMa, and Potrero Hill before coming upon the industrial Dogpatch, where buildings are zoned PDR (reserved solely for businesses engaged in production, distribution, and repair), keeping rents comparatively affordable. Their first discovery was 1275 Minnesota Street, a 1937 industrial warehouse that was then home to a local woodworker looking to downsize. "When I first walked into that building, the physicality of the space was so overwhelming," recalls Deborah. A haze of sawdust hung in the air. "It was so beautiful: this sturdy, storied, working warehouse." The 35,000-square-foot space will soon house 11 contemporary art galleries, including several transplants from 49 Geary Street and 77 Geary Street, once the most esteemed art addresses in the city, as well as buzzy young galleries like Et Al Etc., Casemore Kirkeby, and Bass & Reiner.

The second site that the Rappaports scooped up, a 22,000-square-foot T-shirt printing factory just across the street, at 1240 Minnesota, will soon be home to artist studios—all rented at between a quarter and a third of the market rate—as well as a woodshop, a digital studio, and a print studio. The project received 250 applications for 27 permanent spots,

The New Gallery Row
1275 Minnesota Street's multimedia tenants



1. *Serie Estrujados (Afro Dog "Karya" XL)* by Javier Arce, represented by Jack Fisher Gallery. **2.** *Long Legs* by May Wilson, exhibited by Bass & Reiner Gallery. **3.** *Spring's Landfall* by Tom Chambers, represented by Themes + Projects. **4.** *Untitled Sphere* by Lisa Bartleson, represented by Nancy Toomey Fine Art. **5.** *Additive* video by Owen Kydd, exhibited by Casemore Kirkeby



Minnesota Street
Project cofounders
Andy and Deborah
Rappaport

which its newly hired studio director, local artist Brion Nuda Rosch, winnowed down. Rosch evaluated applications for a diversity of experience and media, hoping to house artists with roots in painting, sculpture, 3-D and multimedia work, ceramics, and woodwork. The rent-controlled leases will be renewable at the discretion of the tenants—a sweet deal for the winning artists. “It’s a double-edged sword,” says Deborah. “It’s wonderful to have such a diversity of work, but it’s also really depressing that we can only accommodate 10 percent of the people we would have liked to.”

While the cavernous studio space and the galleries across the street will enliven this formerly silent corridor with the sounds of artists working and gallerinas hopping, they won’t necessarily turn a profit. The real revenue generator of the enterprise is a third building, on the corner of Minnesota at 1150 25th Street that will house a 15,000-square-foot, climate-controlled storage space to serve the city’s growing ranks of fine art collectors. The Rappaports expect the proceeds from this venture to offset the low rents they’re charging in the gallery complex and artist studios. “We basically designed the art storage building that we would want to patronize,” says Deborah. The key selling point: Whereas existing storage companies charge collectors a fee every time they retrieve a work of art from storage, the client-focused Minnesota Street Project Art Services will offer a range of flexible plans.

To renovate the trio of raw warehouses, the couple enlisted Mark Jensen of Jensen Architects, who had served with Deborah on the board of the Headlands Center for the Arts. “I wanted to maintain the sense of patina, layers, and history,” says Jensen. “We didn’t want to erase that rough workshop feel.” At 1275

Minnesota Street, which will open on March 17, the architect added an entire second floor of galleries, each bathed in natural light from at least one skylight. The original concrete slab floors, metal columns, and blackened trusses were retained to keep the industrial feel, and a new grand architectural-steel staircase was constructed. Up front, a restaurant and bar will be unveiled later this year—the Rappaports envision them as hangouts for artists, gallerists, and collectors. In back, a series of oak-clad stairs will double as bleacher seating for regular author and artist talks and events. It’s a far cry from the exclusive, appointment-only feel of the Geary Street galleries. “Our goal here,” says Deborah, “is that you can wander in off the street with no particular destination and take a look around.”

The trio of buildings forms the basis for a delicate, self-sustaining arts ecosystem, in which each complex benefits from the others. Similar industrial buildings in Minnesota Street Project’s immediate vicinity will be available within five years, and the Rappaports optimistically expect that their model will inspire others to undertake similar schemes. “Minnesota Street Project poses a solution to the very specific problem of San Francisco real estate,” says Deborah, “We’re trying to build it in a way that is reflective of this city.”

Above all, the Rappaports champion the idea of a collaborative art community—one with the luxury to prioritize the creation of art over the constant worry of financial strain. “We’re not doing this to make money,” says Deborah. The pay-off, she hopes, will be in the quality and diversity of the art. “By supporting local artists and galleries, we’re hoping that they’ll be willing to take more risks in their work.” ■