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Donald Locke is a 61-year-old painter and sculptor — and one of 12 new tenants in Nexus's studio wing.

Building a creative atmosphere

True artists' community takes shape at a 'new' Nexus

By Catherine Fox
STAFF WRITER

The sunshine pours into Donald Locke's new artist studio at Nexus Contemporary Arts Center, but the brightest light emanates from his face.

"This may sound pretentious, but I feel that this is the beginning, the nucleus of something," the 61-year-old painter/sculptor says, surveying the paintings leaning against the exposed

brick walls. "I don't know what, but it feels good."

Mr. Locke is one of 12 artists inaugurating Nexus's new studio wing, two century-old Means Street warehouses facing a communal courtyard adjacent to the Nexus Press building. The center spent \$500,000 on the renovation that yielded 12 studios, two apartments (one for the studio manager, one for visiting artists) and an office wing for the staff.

Mr. Locke's sense of expect-

tancy is not unfounded. The synergy that can benefit an artist's work has played a role in the popularity of similar arrangements in old schools and warehouses around town.

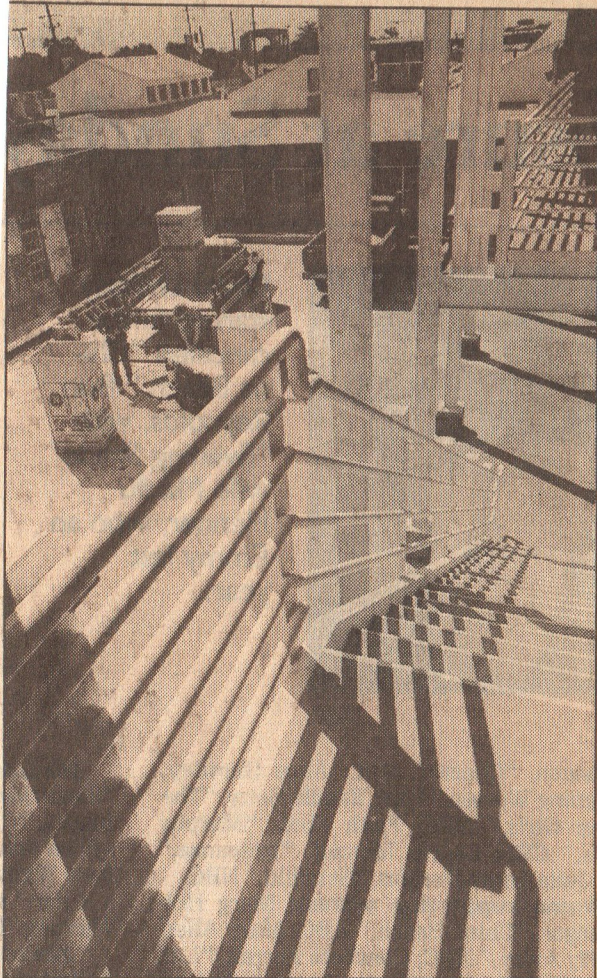
Dana Cibulski, 33, who had sublet a studio at the old Nexus on Ralph McGill Boulevard and has become one of the new tenants, remembers the "collective identity" there. She likes the

Please see **NEXUS, F3** ▶



Photos by NICK ARROYO/Staff

Sculptor Jimmy Hull, 30, will be resident manager of the artists' apartments. One perk: He'll have a terrific view of the skyline.



NICK ARROYO/Staff

A courtyard next to the Nexus Press building faces two renovated warehouses, where 12 artists will have their studios.

Nexus: Studio wing just for artists

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sense of community.

"I'm not a lone-wolf type. I need to get out and gab, to ask, 'Can you come look at this for a minute?'" says the artist, known for her large pastel works on themes of nature and politics.

Jimmy Hull, 30, also looks forward to the "critical exchange." The sculptor, who will be resident manager, will enjoy the added bonus of a spectacular view of the Atlanta skyline from the window of his studio apartment.

Architect William Valle of Peter Hand Associates can't take credit for the view, but he has managed to create pleasant spaces blending the character of the old and the comfort of the new on a low budget. Retaining as much of the original features as possible — such as the wood-trussed ceilings, multitoned brick walls and even the old Standard Oil lettering on a brick wall in the offices — was a priority. Corrugated aluminum panels on the facades suggest a contemporary functional aesthetic.

The artists were selected by a jury on the basis of quality, says Nexus director Louise Shaw. Yet, there is a surprising diversity in age and discipline.

"It's an interesting mix," says Ms. Cibulski, who gave up a larger studio

You can view Nexus's artist studios:

The artists' studios in Nexus Contemporary Arts Center's new wing are private, but they will be open to the public one night next month.

► **When:** 8 p.m.-midnight, Friday, Sept. 11.

► **What:** Nexus's annual ARTPARTY.

► **Where:** 535 Means Street N.W., off Marietta Boulevard. Turn onto Ponders Avenue at the Salvation Army.

► **What to see:** In addition to the artists' studios, the party features art exhibitions, tours of Nexus Press, food, music and performances.

► **Admission:** The price of a Nexus membership: \$20 artists and students; \$30 individual; \$35 artist couple; \$50 couple; \$100 patron. Add \$5 if purchased at the door.

► **Information:** 688-1970.

in hopes of hooking into the opportunities that being at the center might offer. "All the artists are really serious."

The artists, who may stay a maximum of five years in studios renting for \$120-\$250 per month, are required to render community service by participating in one of Nexus's outreach programs, including its Family History Project (working with neighborhood children in creating autobiographical books) and Artist Mentor Program (guiding homeless artists or those with disabilities).

The completion of the studio wing marks Nexus's last major construction project for a while. The center is winding up its \$1.95 million capital cam-

paign, to which the Whitehead, Kresge, Harlan and Tull foundations have been important donors. Money raised will be used to buy necessities such as equipment and signage.

The compound of warehouses has been renovated in phases, beginning two years ago with the Press and the Gallery, the center's more public components. Though last (a performance space is on indefinite hold), the studio wing is integral to Nexus's mission.

"The presence of working artists gives the center a special dimension," Ms. Shaw says. "Having working artists around creates another kind of environment. The creative process goes on all the time."