

MALC Steering Committee Statement on the Boston Center for the Arts Studio Program & Green Street Dance Studios

<http://artistsunderthedome.org/malc/news/malc-steering-committee-statement-on-boston-center-for-the-arts-studio-program-green-street-dance-studios/>

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Artists of all disciplines need space and time to create their work. There is a space crisis in the Greater Boston Metro area both in the housing sector and in the commercial property sector. This crisis hits our community two-fold, and it is not the time for our community to be pitted against each other.

The MALC Steering Committee is greatly disturbed by the Boston Center for the Arts (BCA) recent plans and actions for its “studio building.” What the BCA has proposed is not innovative. It is not creative. It is not bold. It is destructive and is pitting the artists community against each other¹.

We should all expect and demand better of a non-profit arts organization that is itself subsidized by the City of Boston, and rents and manages city property for \$1 per year².

The BCA’s treatment of the current artist studio tenants (visual artists, musicians, filmmakers) is disrespectful at best. To call a town meeting for the BCA studio artists under the pretense of discussing the plans for the BCA’s 50th anniversary — only to tell them they are ALL being evicted — is something one might expect from corporate raiders, not from non-profit arts organizations.

Likewise, the hypocritical gesture of the BCA administration saying the current studio tenants can reapply for studio space, and IF re-accepted will have to completely move out of their spaces (for two months) before moving back in, with NO guarantee of getting their current studios space, is only a ruse to enable the BCA to seem as if it not displacing all of the current tenants. If not, the BCA would have had these new program policies and applications ready for the BCA studio artists to re-apply to months ago. The “you can re-apply for your job” language is often used by corporations when they are restructuring, and all employees know this is double-speak for being fired.

The BCA strategically waited until after the highly successful Nick Cave exhibition in the Cyclorama, the Joy parade connected with Cave’s exhibition through the city, and the 2019 South End Open Studios occurred to announce their 50th anniversary plans to ensure that the BCA studio artists could not use the visibility of those events to make the situation known and gather support.

The BCA should have a transparent and inclusive process for all their programs and for all their applications and review processes. However, the way the BCA has “rolled out” its 50th anniversary programs is unacceptable and disrespectful to the entire artist community. Yes, there needs to be more studio space available throughout the city, but trying to manufacture this by evicting artists en masse to make room for other artists is a zero-sum game and destroys years of stability and community building. It pits artists against artists. How a new program is implemented matters just as much as what the new program is. No funders of the BCA should let this stand. The BCA needs to stop this eviction of the current artists — especially given the recent resignation of its President & CEO³.

The BCA has lost the trust of the artist community, and now needs to put in the work to regain the standing it built over the last 50 years.

In addition to the BCA eviction situation, Central Square's Green Street Studios is being forced to close at the end of this month after 28 years of operation. That Green Street Studios, located in Cambridge's Central Square Cultural Arts District, is being pushed out due to a massive increase in their rent (despite their own financial stability) is also unacceptable. Even though it is a private commercial space, it is still an unconscionable and heartless act by their new landlord, as well as an ironic one: GSS was originally created because dancers had lost performance and rehearsal spaces. A cultural district too expensive for cultural organizations to exist in it is a cultural district in name only, and Central Square is fast approaching this status⁴.

Both the BCA Studios and Green Street Studios are precious spaces. They are precious to those who use them for their artistic disciplines, but they are also precious because of our arts funders, our governmental agencies and administrations, and our elected officials' failure to create more affordable spaces for artists of all disciplines. Our community has made the space crisis known for years. We don't need more task forces, more reports, or more cultural plans to determine IF there is a need for more permanent work spaces for artists of all disciplines: we already know there IS. We need action, and it is time to hold these leaders accountable if they don't take it⁵.

The Massachusetts Artists Leaders Coalition (MALC) was formed in Summer 2008 and we are an all-volunteer coalition. The MALC Steering Committee meets monthly and although members may have different perspectives on how best to address the issues facing our community, we are all committed to improving the social and economic position of all Massachusetts artists of all disciplines (literary, performing, visual, etc.). The overall goal is to empower our community, support our artists leaders, and to mentor new artists leaders. We want to ensure that artists are at the policy making table.

Footnotes

1. Link to BCA announcement:

<https://mailchi.mp/bcaonline.org/were-doing-something-big>

Press coverage from the Boston Globe:

9.25.19 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/09/25/new-residency-program-for-artists-could-displace-some-tenants/YQG2BH8dSXLV5ODmWP7J6I/story.html>

9.27.19 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/09/27/this-has-been-home-artists-devastated-over-impending-loss-studios/IAO0J1SM52JPVAuUnCo0CP/story.html>

10.2.19 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/letters/2019/10/02/cheers-for-bca-revamp-artist-space/BNV4NaE89zHJ7KPf2ikVbN/story.html>

2. Link to BCA leases with the city for its campus that includes the artist studio building:

1973 Lease Agreement: http://www.artistsunderthedome.org/BCA_Lease_Agreement.pdf

1979 Lease Amendment: http://www.artistsunderthedome.org/BCA_Lease_Amendment.pdf

The BCA's most recent purchase deal (2018) with the City of Boston for the Calderwood Pavillon – the BCA bought it for \$1 from the City of Boston – which is separate from the current lease they hold for other buildings on their campus including the artist studio building:

Boston Globe article covering the purchase of the Calderwood Pavillon:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater/dance/2018/09/26/bca-purchases-calderwood-pavilion-from-city-for/bPoEWNMrRHATAq3ahC2aTM/story.html>

3. Articles covering the resignation of the BCA's President & CEO:

WBUR coverage 10.5.19:

<https://www.wbur.org/artery/2019/10/05/bcd-investigates-allegations-gregory-ruffer>

Boston Globe article 10.6.19:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/10/06/boston-center-for-arts-head-resigns-amid-allegations-inappropriate-conduct/nHZ1LA4nxhOdmn5deTB6JN/story.html>

Additional WBUR 10.8.19 coverage:

<https://www.wbur.org/artery/2019/10/08/the-bca-will-continue-investigation-of-former-ceo-gregory-ruffer-following-resignation>

4. Links to articles on Green Street Studios closing:

Response from the Cambridge Arts Council – a Cambridge City agency:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/arts/News/detail.aspx?path=%2fsitecore%2fcontent%2fhome%2farts%2fNews%2f2019%2f10%2fcambidgeartsstandswiththedancecommunity>

Greg Cook's Wonderland coverage:

<https://gregcookland.com/wonderland/2019/10/02/green-st/>

Boston.com's coverage:

<https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2019/10/03/green-street-studios-closing-central-square-cambridge>

CambridgeDay's coverage:

<https://www.cambridgeday.com/2019/10/02/significant-rent-hike-at-green-street-studios-forces-closing-this-month-after-run-of-28-years/>

5. Links to key policies and recommendations for artist work spaces:

Press release for "2018 By Artists, For Artists" Report:

<http://artistsunderthedome.org/malc/reports/announcing-the-release-of-2018-by-artists-for-artists-report-and-the-10th-anniversary-of-malc/>

Link to the 2018 Report on Massachusetts Artists of All Disciplines, "By Artists For Artists", see page 33-36, Findings – Work/Living Space:

<http://artistsunderthedome.org/ByArtistsForArtistsReport.pdf>

Link to MALC's 2016 Labor Policy Paper (Section 8 has specific policy recommendations for artist workspaces etc.):

<http://artistsunderthedome.org/malc/policy/labor-policy-2016/>

Boston Creates – City of Boston's Cultural Plan:

<https://www.boston.gov/departments/arts-and-culture/boston-creates-cultural-plan/boston-creates-cultural-plan-plan>

Download of the Boston Cultural Plan

<https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/bccp.pdf>

October 2003 Creative Artist Space- Report to Boston LINC Working Group:

<http://www.lincnet.net/sites/linc/images/3862/Creating%20Artist%20Space%20A%20Report%20to%20the%20Boston%20LINC%20Working%20Group.pdf>