

ART WIRE

Local Language, Art Fabrication Studio, to Replace Vessel Gallery in Oakland



The interior of Vessel Gallery in October, 2018. (Courtesy Vessel Gallery)

Last month, Oakland's Vessel Gallery shuttered after landlord Matthew Iglehart [declined to renew](#) the Oakland Art Murmur fixture's lease, saying through his property management company that he wanted to take his

buildings in “another direction”—a chilling message for his many other gallerist tenants on 25th Street.

Now, however, KQED has learned that Local Language, a commercial art fabrication studio located next door in another Iglehart property, will expand into the upstairs space previously occupied by Vessel.

Local Language proprietor Jordan Bunnell said he leased the space in October, shortly after Vessel proprietor Lonnie Lee learned of her imminent displacement, but that he’d been working with Reynolds & Brown, the management company representing Iglehart’s properties in the area, for months prior.

Bunnell said he regrets Vessel’s displacement, calling the gallery an “anchor,” but he’s relieved not to have to move Local Language altogether.

“When we announced the expansion to our staff, one of the first things we said was losing a space like Vessel, the creative community really suffers,” he said.

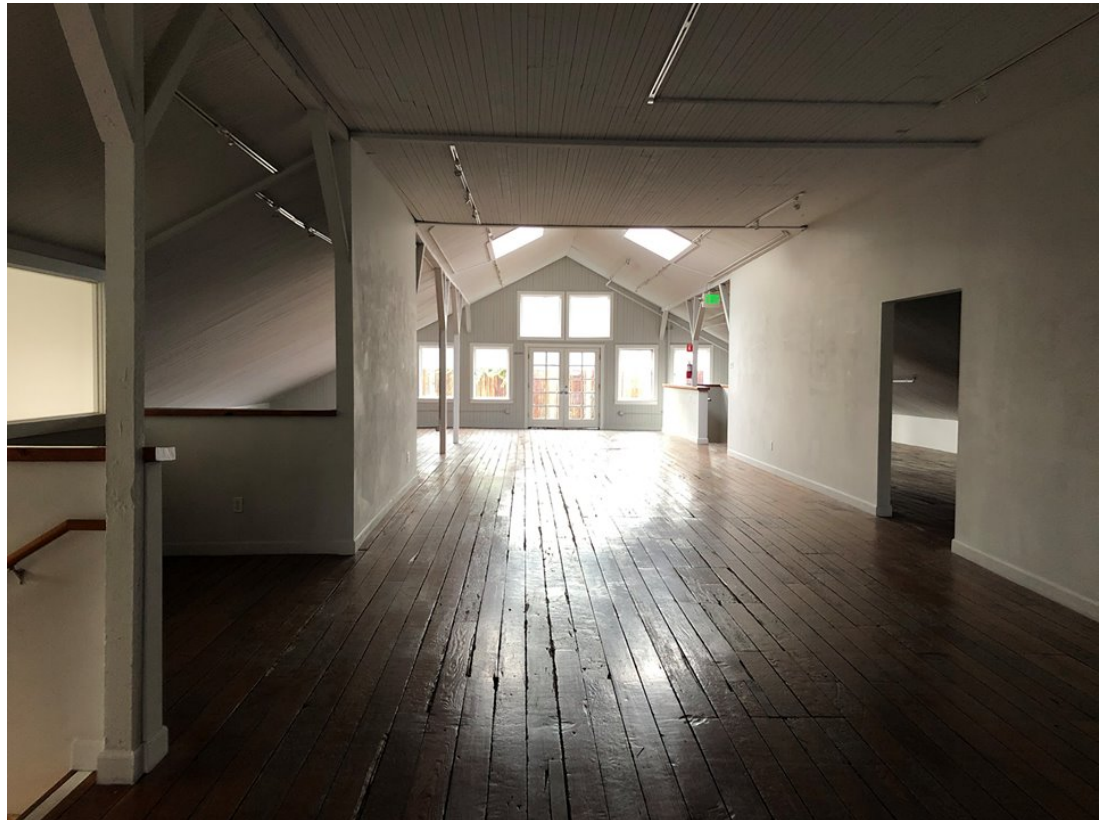
Although Bunnell declined to detail the terms of his lease, Lee suspects the space’s transition from exhibition to commercial fabrication space reflects the owner’s desire to increase rental revenue.



Vessel Gallery, Oakland Art Murmur Fixture, to Close Following Lease Termination

Iglehart didn't respond to an interview request for this report, but he previously said in a statement to KQED that he remains "interested in supporting creative people and business in Oakland." Lee received "courtesy" emails from both Bunnell and Reynolds & Brown about Local Language's lease on Nov. 6.

"That was an interesting neighborly gesture," she said.



Vessel Gallery proprietor Lonnie Lee is seeking a new brick-and-mortar. (Courtesy Vessel Gallery)

Bunnell moved to Oakland in 2009 and opened [Local Language](#) in 2015, specializing in "curating art collections for corporate, hospitality, healthcare, and residential environments around the US & Canada." Clients such as

Marriott and Hyatt generally commission the company, which employs fabricators in Oakland and subcontracts with artists around the country, to create artwork for common areas and offices. (One project description in the “open call” section of Local Language’s website reads, “Hill country vibes meets tech / modern!”)

Local Language also has artist residency and exhibition programs underwritten by the commercial work, but Bunnell said the former Vessel space will be dedicated to fabrication. Asked about the appearance of his business seizing on or hastening Vessel’s ouster, Bunnell said he hasn’t encountered that criticism.

He added, “We’re definitely on the side of ‘losing art spaces is a bad thing.’”

Since leaving the former hayloft she originally leased and renovated in 2010, Lee has been searching for a new brick-and-mortar gallery while continuing to work with dozens of artists [Vessel](#) still represents. In her first week at her interim office, for example, Lee placed a work by Oakland artist Iris Polos, *Narcissus, the Prince and the Frog*, in the permanent collection at Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive.



Lonnie Lee, director and curator at Vessel Gallery. Lee's landlord declined to renew the Oakland gallery's lease, citing a desire to take the building in a "different direction." (*Sam Lefebvre/KQED*)

To find a new location, Lee is working with Oakland City Councilmember Lynette Gibson-McElhaney's office as well Kelley Kahn, the city's policy director for art spaces. Kahn is optimistic that incoming mixed-use developments in the neighborhood can accommodate displaced galleries and nonprofits.

“We will work hard to find them a new space in Oakland, connecting them with property owners and real-estate developers that see the value in making space for Oakland's arts and culture,” Kahn said.

Beginning in 2014, Lee organized neighboring gallerists to pressure elected officials to formally recognize the Uptown Arts District, hoping the designation would begin fortifying its many cultural resources against rising rent

and redevelopment. Oakland City Council eventually scuttled the resolution entirely.

SPONSORED BY

The last founding Art Murmur participant, Rock Paper Scissors, closed its Telegraph Avenue gallery after a rent hike in 2015.

KQED ARTS Sign up for our newsletter.

SIGN UP

COPYRIGHT © 2018 KQED INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. | [TERMS OF SERVICE](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [CONTACT US](#)
