

Golden Belt artists adjust to studio's relocation

New gallery owners move artists to smaller studios with lower rent.

By Cameron Rogers & Johnny Sobczak

There is a new reign of ownership at the Golden Belt campus in downtown Durham, an art gallery that has commenced major artistic projects for the community. The Golden Belt is known for its textile factory, but the new ownership is embracing the many art cultures cultivated all over the world.

In 2016, Scientific Properties, LLC sold the Cordoba building on the Golden Belt campus to New York real estate investor, LRC Properties for \$4.5 million. In July 2017, LRC Properties invested over \$19 million into the Golden Belt.

According to Cushman & Wakefield, 85 percent of the buildings were leased at the time of purchase.

The vast changes to the Golden Belt have affected many people, including the artists at the Warehouse Artist Studios.

The Cordoba building was the first vision for LRC Properties and is roughly 190,000 square feet. The LRC is now offering about 10,000 square feet of space for artists at a lower price. Along with art studios, the Cordoba building now holds galleries and the Cordoba Arts Center.

Audrey Pinto, a box and book artist from Boston, is focusing on the positives.

"The studios are much smaller, but then the rent is also less which I'm good with," said Pinto.

Pinto is new to the life of a full-time artist, but she is a former artist who decided to renew her lease agreement under the new ownership and relocate. She has been at Golden Belt for about three years.

Her interest in art began in high school and she started taking more professional art classes in college.

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— Audrey Pinto, box and book artist at the Golden Belt



Oil painter Christine Long recalls creating some of her best work at the Golden Belt art studios in downtown Durham. Long enjoys the new art studios and how the move has led more artists to open there. (Staff photo by Cameron Rogers).

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The Cordoba building has a rustic industrial and aesthetic appearance with towering ceilings and exposed brick galore. The Durham Art Guild, established in 1948, is housed inside the art studios.

The Durham Art Guild's mission is to enrich and connect communities through the power of leadership for visual artists.

Kristin Gibson, a painter located on the second level of the new studio, is excited about how the new ownership in revolutionizing Golden Belt.

Pinto and Gibson believe that the new space has opened Golden Belt to a greater array of artists than ever before. Digital artists, performance artists and documentarians are calling the complex a home and a place to manifest their work.

"I love it here," said Christine Long, an oil painter who rents a studio at the Golden Belt. "There have been so many artists now opening up more since we moved here."

Formerly a nurse, Long's paintings

capture the struggles of adversity.

Her classic style and oil painting technique is inspired by Leonardo da Vinci.

"I enjoy what I do," said Long.

One of her most praised paintings is of a black man that is clothed from the waist down. In the painting, Long details the man's strong facial expression, physique and muscular structure. Long calls the painting, "The Triumph of Samson," inspired by one of her previous patients, a 19-year-old man diagnosed with cancer.

Long said some of her best work was made at the Golden Belt artist studios and she would not trade her studio for the world.

In December 2008, Long's artistic abilities were acknowledged by the American College of Medical Genetics. The ACMG wanted to use one of her abstract oil paintings for the cover of their volume 10, number 12 journal release.

"It could be more than vibrant here; it could be collaborative," Pinto said.

The sense of community is already beginning to show. Some of the artists now hold group drawing sessions, where they all use the same subject to improve their talent and save on costs.