222 BOWERY: THE BUNKER

For the last 50 years, this former YMCA building located in downtown Manhattan has provided work and living space for countless artists and writers, a list that includes Mark Rothko, Fernand Léger, Wynn Chamberlain, Michael Goldberg, and William Burroughs. Today, the building houses Buddhist meditation, and three artists keep permanent residences and continue to work at 222 Bowery: Lynda Benglis, John Giorno, and Lynn Umlauf. Declared a landmark in 1998, the building is safe from the recent rebuilding and development on the Lower East Side, and as the city twists and changes around it, we take a look back at the surprising history of the building.

TEXT BY ETHAN SWAN / PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORG GATSAS

In 1963 the painter Wynn Chamberlain threw a party for John Giorno, who had just reached his 27th birthday. Drawn from a loose community of young artists, most of whom lived nearby, eighty guests climbed six flights of stairs to reach Chamberlain's loft, a wide open salon that held his studio, his bed, his kitchen and his parlor. It was the top floor of a former YMCA building at 222 Bowery, one of several artists' studios in the building. In the three years since Chamberlain's arrival, the room had hosted countless dinner parties, but nothing quite at this scale. Billed as a "Pop birthday party for a young poet," the gathering marked one of the most incredible concentrations of American geniuses during the 20th century.

There were painters, sculptors, poets and dancers—Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Frank O'Hara and Jonas Mekas among them. Jasper Johns came early and left before the arrival of his estranged lover Robert Rauschenberg. Merce Cunningham and John Cage were perhaps the oldest guests, Frank Stella perhaps the youngest. Every one of them was connected to the next through a web of collaboration, inspiration, employment, and romance. Nearly all of them were under the age of 40—a generation of artists only just beginning to experience recognition.

In 1963, they were all at the cusp of unveiling their voices: Warhol had shown his first soup cans just 17 months previous; Lichtenstein had only been appropriating comic strip art in his paintings for two years. Frank O'Hara had yet to publish *Lunch Poems*. Wynn Chamberlain's major series of nude portraits, which included more than a few of the party's attendees, was still two years away. Johns was a few months from opening his retrospective exhibit at the Jewish Museum, and Rauschenberg was about to become the first American to win the Venice Biennale's International Grand Prize for Painting. In a few short years, nearly everyone at the party would have attained some amount of fame, but in 1963, none of them were yet household names. Giorno, who had just given up his job as a stockbroker to concentrate on his poetry, remembers the party less as a celebration of his birth and more as an opportunity for these creative energies to converge. "They didn't come to be with me, they couldn't care less about me; they came to be together."

Such occurrences of artistic concentration are not uncommon in avant-garde histories; echoes stretch back to the cafés of 1920s Paris and reach ahead into the artist squats of Mexico City today. But six stories below, at street level, this creative communion would be hard to envision.

As partygoers left Wynn Chamberlain's building, they emerged onto the Bowery, a 15-block avenue in downtown Manhattan that housed the single greatest concentration of homeless men in New York City. Opposite the building, The Bowery Mission, a Christian relief foundation established in 1879, provided hot food, clean beds, and prayer for men in need. To the right, The Prince Hotel offered 195 prison-sized cubicles for $2 a night. Across the street was another flophouse, the Sunshine Hotel, one of dozens of Bowery hotels that offered cubicles in the 1960s. "Maybe it's a little hard to imagine for those of you living in more affluent circumstances," explained Nathan Smith, manager of the Sunshine Hotel, in a 1998 interview. "Picture a long hallway, with a series of doors on either side. These are the cubicles. Four by six, no windows. The cubicle walls are only seven feet high, so there's chicken wire along the top to keep guys from climbing over into the next room. It's like living in a bird cage."

While several thousand men slept each night in flophouses, another 8,000 slept on the Bowery itself each night. Homelessness was not a new epidemic for the neighborhood, having peaked in 1900 when an estimated 25,000 men slept along the 15 blocks of the Bowery. Throughout the 20th century, a steady influx of out-of-work veterans and alcoholics stigmatized the neighborhood, chasing away businesses and

Entrance to the the Bunker building

families, leaving only pawnshops and bars. In the years following World War Two, half of the saloons below 14th Street were located on the Bowery. Harold Mazer, owner of Mazer Kitchen Equipment at 207 Bowery, recalled this uniformity along the street: "When I came down here [in 1946], it was bar, flophouse, bar, flophouse, bar, barber school—they used to use the unfortunates for training."

Mazer was one of several entrepreneurs who began trading in restaurant equipment along the Bowery in the 1940s, attracted to the cheap rent and convenient location. Reaching out to the Manhattan Bridge at Canal Street and a short distance from the Williamsburg Bridge at Delancey, for most New Yorkers, the Bowery was only good for one thing—getting out of the city. Delivery trucks rumbled up and down the street, moving cushioned chairs to restaurants uptown, and steel range tops to diners in New Jersey. The restaurant supply shops filled in the empty storefronts between the taverns, taking advantage of long-unwanted retail space. The sidewalks were dark and perpetually dirty, ever since the Third Avenue Subway Line was established in 1878, an elevated train that ran along the Bowery. While the train platform created a welcome shelter for the neighborhood's drifters, it drove businesses to nearby avenues like Lafayette and Broadway, ending the Bowery's draw for pedestrians.

In 1955 however, the Bowery's sidewalks saw daylight for the first time in the that century, when the Third Avenue El was dismantled and the elevated track pulled down. Windows boarded against the gaze of subway passengers were suddenly exposed to the sky, revealing a surprising number of vacant lofts. As much of the restaurant equipment was too heavy to carry up stairs, many of the upper stories on the Bowery were left vacant. Observing this emptiness on a walk through the neighborhood, the painter John Opper changed the history of 222 Bowery in 1957. Opper, a founding member of the American Abstract Artists and one of the earliest abstract painters in the country, returned to New York in 1957 after five years of teaching at the University of North Carolina. Settling with his family in what would eventually become SoHo, Opper was happy to return to the city. In a 1968 interview with the art historian Irving Sandler, Opper recalled what drew him back to New York: "I missed the companionship of the artists; I missed the discussions... And my work wouldn't be shown. And I would get careless with it. I just stuck it away."

After reconnecting with his community of artists, Opper began his search for a studio. His daughter, Jane Opper, recalled his method: "We lived at 32 King Street, and he walked over towards the Bowery, just started walking along with his head up, looking at various spaces. He had come across Prince Street, and he saw these magnificent windows above a store called Tip Top Chairs... He stopped and asked for the manager, and they started talking and he asked if anyone was using the space upstairs. 'Would you like to make some money in rent for that space? I'm an artist and I know a lot of other artists who would like to use that space.'"

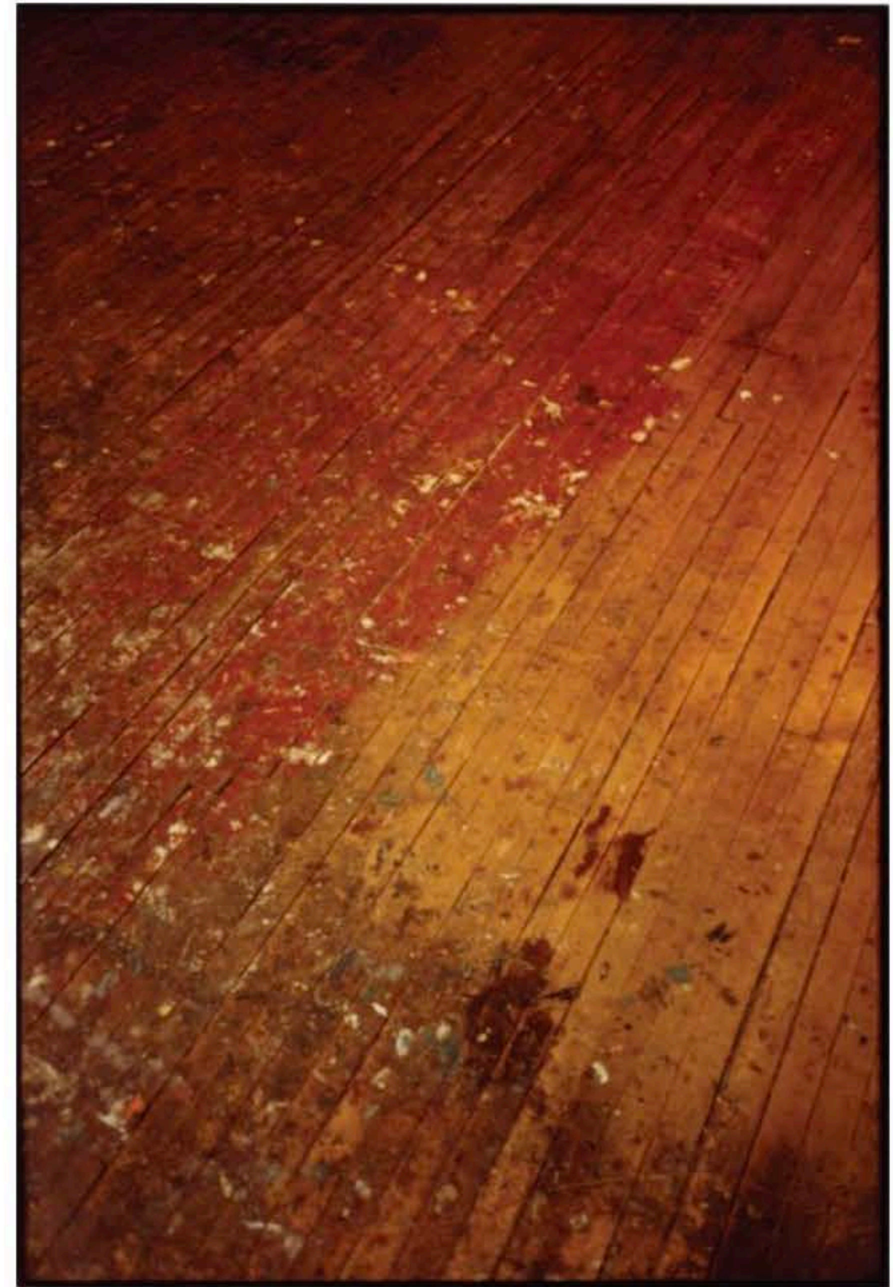
Opper took the third floor as his studio, an open loft, raw and spacious. His friends James Brooks and Mark Rothko follow the next year, the latter taking over the basketball court as his studio. Rothko had just taken a commission to create murals for the dining room of the Four Seasons restaurant, designed by Philip Johnson to be New York's most exclusive and expensive restaurant. Up until this commission, Rothko had always described his work as "painting in a scale of normal living": the canvases low to the ground, crowded together tightly, making the gallery into an intimate space. At the Four Seasons, the paintings would hang high on the wall, above seated diners at an unfamiliar distance. This geometry required a different scale,

John Giorno's entrance

Bunker hallway

John Giorno's restroom

View from Lynn Umlauf's studio window



Mark Rothko's paint splatter on Michael Goldberg's studio floor

as did Rothko's intentions: "I accepted this assignment as a challenge, with strictly malicious intentions. I hope to... make viewers feel that they are trapped in a room where all the doors and windows are bricked up, so that all they can do is butt their heads forever against the wall." Settling himself against the broad mortared walls of his basketball court, Rothko submerged into a room where all the doors and windows were bricked up in order to create a body of work that would feel the same. That would reach his aspirations to "paint something that will ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room."

Jane Opper acknowledged the effect of the building's open spaces on her father's painting as well. "Working in the big space on the Bowery," she explained, "it gave him the ability to stretch out the canvases and really be able to explore what he wanted to do, which was work with color." While the studios uptown were subdivided as rents increased, the lofts downtown stretched out for 2,000 to 4,000 square feet, making larger works possible. By 1958, Alfred Leslie, Tom Wesselmann, and Tom Doyle had all established studios in the neighborhood, realizing large-scale pieces in the vastness of their lofts.

Wynn Chamberlain became the next artist to move into 222 Bowery, in 1960. Unlike Opper, Brooks, and Rothko, Chamberlain chose to live in the building as well, establishing a kitchen and bathroom on his floor, while the rest of the residents shared a toilet on the landing. Although the loft was a haven, his wife Sally Chamberlain is quick to remember the discomfort lurking just outside the door. "An air of menace hung over the run down buildings and dismal streets strewn with garbage and broken glass," she recalls. The closest grocery stores were in Little Italy or the West Village, and the only restaurants were Moishe's Delicatessen on Grand, or Fenelli's, "a seedy bar surrounded by other seedy buildings on grimy Prince Street."

Although the Bowery wasn't exactly unsafe, walking the street was difficult. "Coming back at night," Sally Chamberlain remembers, "Wynn and I would have to push our way through a gauntlet of drunks or step over winos passed out in front of 222's tall iron gates." The Bowery Bums, as they came to be known, were rarely threatening, but their steady presence and unimaginable numbers defined the neighborhood. In addition, their relative helplessness and regular, if meager, pensions made them a target for robbery. The sculptor Tom Doyle described this threat: "The only time when you could have trouble would be around the first of the month, what's called 'Mother's Day,' when the guys got paid, they got their checks. And then hawks would come in, and rob them if they were drunk on the streets. They were called hawks, you know, gangsters."

But this had little affect on the growing number of artists, who saw only the cheap rents and high ceilings. As word spread about the spaciousness of the Bowery lofts, artists continued to migrate from uptown. Sol LeWitt, who'd been living at Bowery and Hester street since the mid-1950s, took a job at the Museum of Modern Art in 1960, where he worked alongside artists Robert Ryman and Robert Mangold, both of whom moved to the Bowery in the beginning of the 1960s. It was during this time that Ryman's wife Lucy Lippard began referring to the community of artists in the neighborhood as the "Bowery Boys," including Ryman, Mangold, Mel Bochner, Donald Judd, and Eva Hesse. Asked to define the term in a 2001 interview, Robert Mangold said simply, "there was this group of artists who visited each others' studio, knew each others' work, and maybe there were some shared attitudes but it was more a community group. There were not many places to go, no bars or hangouts that I recall outside of Moishe's." Although there was a suggestion of "shared attitudes," the defining feature of the "Bowery Boys" seemed to be location, a camaraderie that took the place of a public space.

Michael Goldberg's studio

Ironically, it was the absence of this sort of creative community that drew Mark Rothko to the Bowery in the first place. A biographer maintained that "Rothko did not like to work in neighborhoods where there were many other painters," and so in 1962 he left the Bowery to the influx of artists. Michael Goldberg, a young abstract painter, took over the gymnasium, his work electrified by the space.

Goldberg was a spry, active painter, foremost an abstractionist, but with a boldness that conveyed immense freedom in his work. In 1951, at 26, he participated in the historic, groundbreaking show The Ninth Street Art Exhibition. The defining exhibition of the New York School, The Ninth Street Show was organized and executed by artists, and included many of the era's most revered painters, including Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman. Although he was close with many of the other artists in the show, The Ninth Street Show was the artist's first public exhibition. Goldberg's gestural, abstract canvases referenced the improvisational spirit of jazz, and helped define the energy of post-World War Two New York.

Beyond his remarkable talent, Mike Goldberg was a tremendously loving and well-loved man. Upon his death in December of 2007, his friend and neighbor Max Gimblett described Goldberg as "the mayor amongst us artists here in this neighborhood." Born and raised in New York, Goldberg attended painting classes at the Art Students League of New York from his 14th year. By the time he was in his twenties, Goldberg was a member of the Eighth Street Club and a frequent visitor to the Cedar Bar. He thrived on the same community energy that called John Opper back to New York, and his presence on the Bowery inspired exchange and discussion between artists—artists who arrived in ever-greater numbers by the year.

In the very beginning of 1965, a *The New York Times* article appeared, titled "The Bowery Blossoms With Artists' Studios." Contrasting the horrors of the Bowery with the excitement of its new residents, the article declared, "more than a hundred young artists are quietly moving in and converting decayed lofts into studios and living quarters." Citing the natural light, the large spaces, the permissiveness, and above all, the low rents, a handful of artists offered testimonials to the Bowery's positive qualities. Most were unable to shut out the neighborhood's darker side, however; the sculptor Irwin Fleminger summed it up best: "Artists are supposed to be sensitive, yet you have to be more than tough to get through this. Most people just couldn't take this."

Although it was the first time the *Times* acknowledged the growing community of artists on the Bowery, the article did recognize a trend in the arrivals to the neighborhood: "Plagued by high rents and small apartments elsewhere, the artists moved onto the Bowery in three separate waves: first, along the northern edges near Cooper Union, second, around Broome and Grand Streets, and most recently in the central—and grimmest—portion of the Bowery, near East Houston Street." Dead center in this "grimmest" portion stood 222 Bowery.

The article spurred a series of letters and rebuttals, from neighborhood artists who resented the attention and others who denied any romanticism on the Bowery. Camille Norman, who had just moved out of her Bowery studio, described it in a letter to the editor dated January 12, 1965, as "an involuntary artists' ghetto community." In her conclusion, Norman asked a question that remained unresolved through the flurry of responses, a question that still remains relevant: "Whose responsibility will it be if ultimately there is no low-priced housing adequate to the visual artist's special needs? What then will happen to this nation's art?"

Michael Goldberg's studio

Michael Goldberg's work in his studio

John Giorno's work

Whether or not they considered it an involuntary ghetto, artists continued to flock to the neighborhood. At the beginning of 1965, the number of artists who had studios on the Bowery was well over 100, and the number of famous artists who worked on the Bowery guaranteed that a spotlight remained on the neighborhood.

Roy Lichtenstein separated from his wife in 1965 and took a studio at 190 Bowery, strengthening the neighborhood's ties to pop art. Vito Acconci and Amiri Baraka both lived on the Bowery in 1965, representing two edges of the mid-60s literary avant-garde. Alongside Bernadette Mayer, Acconci created the mimeographed, underground magazine *0 to 9* in his loft at 217 Bowery, while Amiri Baraka and his wife Hettie Jones produced the poetry journal *Yugen* from their loft at 27 Cooper Square. Eva Hesse, recently separated from her husband Tom Doyle, quietly and industriously pioneered Postminimalism in her studio at 134 Bowery. As the New York art world grew and branched out, the Bowery was flexible enough to grow with it, offering space to every discipline, every credo. This growth necessarily led to fragmentation, and this success fostered changes in the landscape. While recalling his 1963 birthday party at 222 Bowery, John Giorno acknowledged these changes: "[In 1963] the art world was small enough that artists went to other parties. By 1965, nobody would go to a party like that for an unknown person."

If in 1963, the birthday party of an unknown person was enough to draw the most creative and talented artists in the city to the Bowery, in 1965 a performance by an infamous writer would create an entirely different spectacle. An item in the Saturday *The New York Times* titled "The Bowery: Arty and Avant-Garde" reported on a reading given by William Burroughs and Mack Thomas at 222 Bowery. Again the night was hosted by Wynn Chamberlain, with many of the same attendees, but the atmosphere was entirely different.

While previous reports regarding artists on the Bowery focused on the extreme disparity between the homelessness outside and the creative capital within the studios, "Arty and Avant-Garde" invokes the contrast almost whimsically, remarking that a couple of derelicts babbled on the doorstep at 222, presumably juxtaposing their voices with that of Burroughs and Thomas. Gone is the spirit of Bowery artists as trailblazers and homesteaders—the attendees were dressed well and in furs, their fashion marking contemporary trends: "Beards are out, long hair is in."

Even the fact that the event warranted an article was new; in her memoirs, Sally Chamberlain recalls that they hadn't invited the press, "but somehow Harry Gilroy from *The New York Times* got in and reported who was there." This list of attendees was remarkable, and illustrated the wide swath of artists who frequented the Bowery: poets Frank O'Hara, Ted Berrigan, and Diane di Prima; artists Andy Warhol, Barnett Newman, and Larry Rivers; photographers Diane Arbus and Richard Avedon; the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen; and the writer/artist Brion Gysin. Less than a year and a half had passed since Giorno's birthday party, an event attended by many of the same people. In this short window of time, many of these artists made their names; perhaps more importantly, in the same short span, the Bowery was given a new identity as a home for artists.

By 1967, the neighborhood had taken notice. Lyons Houses, who owned a dozen Bowery flophouses, began to strip their hotels of cubicles, replacing them with open lofts. The Alabama Hotel, across the street from 222 Bowery, ousted the 300 men a night who slept in these cubicles to create eight 4000 square foot lofts, rented for $175 a month. A 1967 *Time Magazine* article noted that the project was so successful, Lyons Houses had already begun renovations on a second hotel, The Boston, at 103 Bowery.

Things were changing at 222 Bowery as well. In 1966, John Giorno returned to New York from Morocco, and Wynn Chamberlain cleared out the third-story loft that held his paintings so that Giorno had a place to sleep while searching for a new apartment. "I moved here after I got back from Tangiers, thinking I would be here for a month," he recalled in a 2008 interview. "Little did I know I would spend the rest of my life here."

Giorno occupied a unique space in the Bowery community; he identified as a poet, yet he took his primary inspiration from the neighborhood's community of visual artists. "The energy of the scene around the painters, sculptors, and musicians and how they all related to each other was extraordinary," he recalled in a 2002 interview. Building upon this notion of relations and network, Giorno established Giorno Poetry Systems in 1965. Giorno Poetry Systems is an artist collective, record label, and non-profit organization whose primary goal is to expand poetry beyond its limited audience through the use of new technology, and tactics. Similar to Warhol's utilization of commercial silkscreen techniques to engage painting, Giorno issued recordings of poetry, utilizing the most purely pop format of the era—LP records. Over the next twenty years, Giorno Poetry Systems issued over 20 LPs and compilations.

In 1968, from his third floor loft at 222 Bowery, John Giorno offered his most broadly populist and accessible project yet: Dial-a-Poem. Using simple, readily available technology—telephones and answering machines—Giorno was able to transmit his poetry throughout the city. Listeners simply called the listed number and the answering machine would play them a tape over the phone. "When it started *The New York Times* did a quarter page feature story with the phone number," Giorno recalled, "and instantly there were hundreds of thousands of calls. It was free." Sharing his poetry, and that of his peers—William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, John Cage, Jim Carroll, Vito Acconci—Giorno was able to spread wildly transgressive and otherwise silenced viewpoints.

"Dial-a-Poem in 1968 was very sexual," he explained. "Poems with sexual images, straight, or preferably gay, as I'm a gay man; and as political activism." As the project grew, this activism grew as well, and by 1970, Dial-a-Poem included "anti-Vietnam War material, civil rights, and radical politics. I had tapes from [radical anti-war group] The Weather Underground and Bernadette Dohrn, [Black Panthers] Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver. Diane Di Prima wrote a series of poems called 'Revolutionary Letters,' one was 'How to Make a Molotov Cocktail.'"

The New York art world was undergoing a similar radicalizing transformation, and new voices began to slip through the cracks between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. One such voice was that of Lynda Benglis, a sculptor who moved into

Burroughs' typewriter in John Giorno's place

John Giorno's living space

Michael Goldberg's unfinished piece in his studio

Lynn Umlauf's studio

Lynn Umlauf's & Michael Goldberg's bed

222 Bowery in 1972. Her agile sculpture is unmistakably corporeal, recalling the weight and form of the body, yet resisting recognition as any specific or known part of the body. Setting her work in opposition to the overtly masculine discipline of Minimalism with her process-oriented, tactile work, Benglis was able to disrupt its cool reductive air. While critics suggested that her poured-latex sculptures recalled Jackson Pollock's drip technique, Benglis created a far more critical, and personal, gesture in her work.

Another recent arrival at 222 Bowery was the sculptor Lynn Umlauf. She and Mike Goldberg met and fell in love in 1969, eventually marrying 10 years later. Born into a family of sculptors, poets, and artists, Umlauf quickly became a vital member in the Bowery community. As an artist, Umlauf works with a diverse palette of material, including Plexiglas, wire, mesh, rubber and fabric. Her sculpture evokes drawing in three dimensions, reaching out from the ceilings, walls, and floors of their sites, in both color and form. As a chef, Umlauf was a part of Gordon Matta-Clark and Carol Goodden's restaurant Food, managed and staffed entirely by artists. Situated in a SoHo storefront, Food acted as a community space as much as a restaurant, where visitors could stop by the kitchen during the day to discuss the evening menu and groups like the Philip Glass Ensemble met regularly.

In 1974, 222 Bowery welcomed an old friend back to the building. William Burroughs, newly arrived in the city from London, returned to the site of his 1965 reading and the home of his friend John Giorno. Giorno had alerted him to an empty loft in the building, and on the day of Burroughs' appointment to view the room, waited patiently to meet with him and the landlord. As the time passed, Giorno worried that Burroughs had missed the appointment. "All of a sudden he knocked," Giorno recalled, "this little knock on my door. I said, 'William, where have you been?' and he replied, 'I found my place!'"The landlord had shown him a storage area, and Burroughs decided it was an ideal space. "It was dark, and cool, and quiet, and he said, 'John, I've found my bunker!'"

"The Bunker" became Burroughs' affectionate nickname for the building, and from 1974 until his death in 1997, Burroughs would return to 222 Bowery every year to retreat and write from its safety.

When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, another influx of veterans made their way to the Bowery for cheap lodgings and distraction. For this generation, heroin replaced alcohol, and the neighborhood became a much more troubled place. Suddenly the lax policing that enabled thousands of men to sleep on the street and hundreds of artists to live in illegal lofts spiraled into complete lawlessness.

Drug sales were so prevalent and uninterrupted that addicts would form lines on the sidewalk, shamelessly waiting for their turn to score. The desperation of heroin addicts outstripped the tragedy of alcoholism, and muggings, break-ins, and prostitution became commonplace. Lynn Umlauf explained the effect: "Drug addicts have to have more money than alcoholics, and that's when it got dangerous."

In 1977, *The New York Times* returned to the Bowery. In the 12 years that had passed since "Arty and Avant-Garde," the neighborhood failed to transform into an artists' haven like nearby SoHo and the official report ran under the headline "The Bowery Would Be Chic, They Said—Ha!" Gone was the breathless gawking of 1965, the sense of excitement. What replaced it was a brutal observation: "The view from a Bowery loft is, after all, the Bowery—silhouettes of bodies curled around empty broken bottles. A walk home from the grocery store can mean repeated requests for change or finding that once you have made it home, the front door has temporarily become someone else's pillow."

At 222 Bowery, however, things continued to develop, and new relationships continued to be built. In 1976, at the invitation of John Giorno, the Tibetan Lama Dudjom Rinpoche arrived with his monks and family in order to establish a New York center for Tibetan Buddhism. Occupying Burroughs' space while he resided in Kansas, Dudjom offered teaching and meditation in the Bunker. At Dudjom's death in 1987, two of his monks, Palden Sherab and Tsewang Dongyal, picked up his practice, and continue to hold teaching and meditation sessions at 222 Bowery.

Again the artistic climate was changing on the Bowery. The neighborhood grew rougher, graffiti began to appear, and a new generation of aggressive artists began to haunt the streets. Just north of Houston, on the opposite side of the Bowery, CBGB provided a venue for punk and new wave to thrive in New York. The nearby streets began to host young musicians and artists, among them Debbie Harry, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Lenny Kaye, and Amos Poe. Although separated by generation, John Giorno recorded "Who You Staring At?" with guitarist and composer Glenn Branca, who lived around the corner at Spring Street.

By 1980, drug addiction had become an epidemic. Almost half of the individuals arrested for drugs between Houston and 14th Street gave the Third Street Shelter (at Bowery) as their address. Many artists left the neighborhood, many left New York all together. The generation coming of age in the 1980s was falling prey to AIDS and overdose, and many of the brightest young downtown artists died in their 30s, including David Wojnarowicz, Keith Haring, and Félix González-Torres.

In 1998, The Landmarks Preservation Society designated 222 Bowery as a Landmark, requiring that the Landmarks Preservation Commission approve any alteration, reconstruction, demolition, or new construction in advance. Citing the historical significance of the building and reputation of the architect, The Landmarks Preservation Society issued a lengthy statement documenting the relevant points. Among the evidence listed for this decision in their report is the item "since the YMCA left the building in 1932... the building has been converted to residential/studio space for world-renowned artists and a meditation and teaching center for Tibetan Buddhists."

Built in 1884, 222 Bowery was the first of the modern-day YMCAs. Before 1884, there were several YMCAs on the Bowery, but they were simply soup kitchens and shelters. 222 Bowery was distinct because of its specific aim: "To promote the physical, intellectual, and spiritual health of young working men in the densely crowded Bowery." Instead of reaching "fallen and destitute men," the YMCA at 222 Bowery was intended to "reach the larger class of hard-working independent young men." To this end, the YMCA offered a gymnasium with calisthenics classes, weekly cultural events such as lectures, concerts and debates, a circulating library with 1,000 volumes, and six educational classes. At the beginning of the 20th century, they began offering "English for Italians," reaching out to the immigrant population of the Lower East Side, and membership reached a high of 663 men. Membership slowly decreased over the next 30 years, until the YMCA's Board of Directors closed the building in 1932.

Looking back on the YMCA's aspirations for 222 Bowery, it's entirely possible that the Board of Directors would recognize the building today as a success. Standing at the heart of an ever-growing expanse of luxury lofts and nightclubs, The Bunker maintains itself as a site of calm, of friendship, and of creativity. Established by artists who yearned for a creative community, 222 Bowery outpaced any of John Opper's hopes for a vibrant scene. Continually occupied by artists for five decades, the Bunker has hosted a remarkably diverse set of individuals, working in a variety of media and movements. Throughout the building's history, the basic ideals of the YMCA have always remained intact—modesty, self-improvement, and hard work.

Simplicity reigns at 222 Bowery: "I did a lot of work here," remembered Lynda Benglis, "I did a lot of gold leafing here, and I was sleeping with all this plaster, sleeping with all this gold leaf, in this same bed. This same pull-out bed I've had since I got here. Nothing's changed. I've just gathered more furniture."

Dedication is well-loved at 222 Bowery; for all of Mike Goldberg's humor and charm, what truly drew people to him was his love of painting, and his commitment to his craft. In a 2001 interview, he described abstract painting as "still the primary visual challenge of our time. It might get harder and harder to make an abstract images that's believable, but I think that just makes the challenge greater." Goldberg dedicated his life to meeting this challenge, a task remembered by his friend Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe in a memorial tribute. "The studio was Mike's life in my opinion. Everything else was everything else. I think he really lived to work as much as any other artist I know or have known... I think he was very bound up in the idea that an artist is, more or less only, his or her work."

Michael Goldberg's paint splatter on his studio floor

Transience is a quality often associated with the Bowery. The lure of the flophouse is bound up with the opportunity to pay one night at a time, to cut loose whenever you want. Burroughs kept his bunker for nearly 15 years after leaving New York, returning as rarely as once a year, but content to hold onto the possibility of returning. In 1966, months shy of his 30th birthday, John Giorno set up a temporary room in Wynn Chamberlain's storage space, expecting to stay a month before heading off somewhere else. It would be impossible to pinpoint when the change occurred for Giorno, from short stay to lifelong home, but four decades later, he's still in the same room, and certain that's where he belongs.

Acknowledgement: This article would have been impossible without the research of The New Museum's Bowery Artist Tribute. The Bowery Artist Tribute, an initiative of the Education and Public Programs staff of the New Museum, preserves and records the history of the Bowery, chronicling the artists who have lived and worked on or near the Bowery over the past 50 years. For more information, please visit the Bowery Artist Tribute website at: *www.boweryartisttribute.org*

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 4

ANP QVARTERLY /RVCA