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URBS101

El Barrio's Artspace PS109

El Barrio's Artspace PS109 is located bordering on the Upper East Side and East Harlem.

I chose this particular spot for my final assignment due to wanting to learn more about this building and the history behind it. I originally came across this building due to having a dog walking client who lives there. Before any prior research, my own personal experiences of this building was always of awe.

As suggested by its name, the building used to be a school. When you look inside the apartment, you can tell with the very high ceilings that these used to be classrooms that were transformed into residential spaces instead. This space is affordable housing for anyone who works in the world of arts, whether it's painters, sculptors, photographers, musicians, etc. Within his building, there is a sense of community with each other. The building manager is more than that, she is someone who is practically family for the residents who reside there. There are two main art spaces within the building. The moment you walk in, you'll see an open space where there are usually works of art that one of the residents has displayed their works of art for the public or Friday nights where salsa night occurs and people from outside the building may join and celebrate. Downstairs there is another room where performance arts usually occurs. The display of works of art is not limited to those spaces however, on every floor in the hallways on the walls you'll see people proudly displaying what they've created with their own hands.

Through a simple Google search, I found that Artspace is actually an organization that has created many other buildings for artists nationwide. From Arizona to Washington, many of

these buildings have been established as quoted by Artspace “to keep working artists living in their own rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in very expensive cities such as New York.”

Though I cannot speak on behalf of other Artspaces, El Barrio’s Artspace in particular, it is a huge melting pot of people with different backgrounds. There are people of all racial backgrounds, from young to elderly, from the abled to disabled, and those who identify as LGBTQ. This is something which surprises me due to learning in class the weaponization of the arts usually paving way for gentrification.

The location of El Barrio’s Artspace is also intriguing due to its close proximity to the main part of the Upper East Side. There are a lot of projects that surround El Barrio’s Artspace but only a few blocks downtown is where the 96th Q train station is located. Rent prices have gone through the roof based on my own personal experience of living in the Upper East Side for a year, where rent in my old building used to be \$2,000 for a 1 bedroom has now increased to almost \$3,000 for a 1 bedroom. The completion of the 2nd Ave Q train line has really driven up rent prices for those who live close by. However, those who have their applications accepted by El Barrio’s Artspace are able to live without worry about those inflated rent prices. Since 2019, studio apartments are available for \$731 a month.

With some additional research, Artspace is a nonprofit organization based in Minnesota. Looking at their list of Artspaces in the United States, you notice that a lot of the cities that have Artspaces have a history of gentrification along with a large population of low income POC who have been possibly pushed out. Artspace does not seem to be a case where art has been weaponized to pave way for gentrification, instead art has paved safe spaces for artists of all backgrounds to have a place to call home. The divide that you see between the Upper East Side

and East Harlem is very drastic. You go from luxury building apartments with high end restaurants to a plethora of Puerto Rican culture emanating all around. The sounds are different as you can hear reggaeton or bachata playing in the streets of East Harlem with elderly people just sitting in chairs enjoying their lives compared to the Upper East Side's sounds of people just passing by (very quiet compared to East Harlem). The smells are different as well when you're smelling a mixture of Latin American food in the air whether it's from someone's home with the smell escaping from windows or the hole in the wall food spots. The amount of life and energy that's in East Harlem is brought out in El Barrio's Artspace, where they tend to combine a lot of East Harlem's culture and history into their works of art.

Before taking Urban Life, I never really had a second thought about certain aspects of the city. I never really thought about how businesses would close and a new business would take over. How people would get displaced due to raising rent prices because it was intentionally being done behind the scenes. I always had a distaste towards gentrification as someone who has been raised in NYC for most of my life. I've seen just how much not just my own neighborhood, but neighborhoods that I used to frequent as a child have now changed into something different. I've known about El Barrio's Artspace for a couple years now but I never really thought about who it helps, what it does, and how much of an impact it makes on the people who live in the neighborhood. Studying about urban life has opened my eyes and left me being even more open minded about what occurs in NYC whether at face value or behind the scenes. I realized, you can never really take things for granted at all when you live in NYC especially when living with people who have such a strong sense of community due to NYC having its own culture.