A different sanctuary: Former church now an arts-performance space

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Cliff Bellamy

DURHAM — Alicia Lange shows off the outdoor part of SPECTRE Arts, a recently renovated space on Morning Glory Avenue. A corrugated metal fence encloses the courtyard, which has hanging lights and a stage for performances.

“We’ve already had a few shows out here that have been super fun,” Lange said during a tour of SPECTRE, which opened in May. One of those events was a screening of films, with food trucks assembled on Morning Glory, accessible through a gate leading into the yard. The first thing a longtime resident of Durham likely will notice about SPECTRE is that it is a renovated former church. The sign that once told parishioners and visitors about services now advertises “Farmer Veteran,” an exhibit of prints by Jeremy Lange, Alicia’s husband. The front door opens into a different kind of sanctuary, a well-lighted, airy gallery space. The building also has two artists’ studios in the back, along with kitchen and other facilities for events.

For the past year and a half, the Langes have been working with a construction company, gutting the walls, lowering and refurbishing the floors, and where possible finding ways to reuse the old wood from the building.

Spectre Arts is a gallery and event space that opened in May. There is a stage and courtyard area on the side for concerts and shows. Spectre Arts is located at 1004 Morning Glory Avenue in Durham.

Spectre Arts was renovated from an old church and they are working to preserve some of the original wood and materials from the space.
Friday, during Third Friday Durham events, SPECTRE Arts will be open to the public. Kamara Thomas, a singer-songwriter, will perform in the outdoor area with a trio that includes husband Gordon Hartin on pedal steel guitar, and Steve Anderson on drums. Opening a space like SPECTRE Arts “has been a dream of mine since grad school,” said Alicia Lange, who has an MFA in design, photography and film. She always wanted to create a space where people could share art, she said. That mission includes reaching out to the community. “One of the things that’s really important at SPECTRE is we’re starting to do projects that engage with the community,” Lange said. The space has teamed with The Bridge Bus, a private transportation company that takes riders between galleries and venues in Durham and Raleigh. SPECTRE has raised about $1,800 from local businesses for The Bridge Bus, and is collecting data to take to Durham’s City Council to encourage possible funding of the service, she said. Having the bus stop every 10 to 15 minutes helps both cities’ arts areas, she said. In August, SPECTRE Arts will host a pie social to help raise money for public art projects in Durham. Re-use has been important to the renovation, Lange said. While some of the original bead board to the church was damaged, some was usable, and Lange pointed to a former piece of bead board she was sanding for possible future use. “My next mission is to see how we can incorporate it into the ceiling,” she said. The facing to the outdoor stage is made from re-used metal pieces from a tin roof from a nearby house being renovated. She and her husband plan to do more landscaping in the outdoor part in the fall. One job will be to pull up a concrete slab, which Lange wants to re-use in some way. One of the artists’ studios has already been rented. SPECTRE also can be rented for indoor and outdoor events, as well as exhibits. Asked if she considers herself a pioneer, Lange gave a definitive “no.” She cites examples of other cities like Chicago and Washington where neighborhoods have been revitalized. “Certainly, the model is not new,” she said. “I do think Durham was this hotbed of amazing spaces. … There are so many people in North Carolina who are artists who see something that’s run-down and have this vision,” she said. They are able to look at an old structure and say, ‘Oh, that’s amazing, here’s what we can do with this.’” SPECTRE Arts is kitty-corner to Golden Belt and near the Cordoba Center for the Arts. Along with those venues, SPECTRE Arts is one of the recent examples of artists refurbishing or reusing older spaces for galleries, shows, events, or combinations of all three. Dan Ellison started the process in 1996 with Durham Arts Place on Chapel Hill Street. Earlier this year, a group of artists christened a building on Washington Street as an event space called The Shadowbox. Thomas, who recently moved with her family from Brooklyn, said she found out about SPECTRE from Jeremy Lange, who photographed her for a local.

The Herald-Sun | Melissa Key
Alicia Lange co-owns Spectre Arts with her husband Jeremy Lange. Renovations are mostly complete and the space has been open since May.
newspaper. “I said, I'll play any time you want,” Thomas said. “It sounded like such a cool vision.”
During the tour of the space, Thomas got her first look at the stage where she will perform. As Alicia Lange opened the door to the area, Thomas said, “Oh, my God! This is amazing. … I've got all kinds of creative ideas,” she told Lange. “I have so much to talk to you about already.”

Go and Do
WHAT: Singer and songwriter Kamara Thomas performing music
WHEN: Friday, 6 to 10 p.m.
WHERE: SPECTRE Arts, 1004 Morning Glory Ave., Durham
ADMISSION: Free. For information, visit www.spectrearts.org.
as a resident of the Golden Belt area for over 6 years, I say, the more the merrier. It’s been nice to see our area bloom into such a vibrant expression of progression and re-use.
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