

# Supporting Artists: Acme's First Decade 1972–1982

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This exhibition explores the first decade of **Acme Studios**, the pioneering artists' initiative, which since 1972 has been pivotal in supporting the arts community. The organisation ran the legendary Acme Gallery from 1976 to 1981.

East London changed significantly in the 1970s. The national recession played a large role, but specifically the closure of the docks had a devastating impact on the local economy. Disused industrial spaces and boarded-up houses appeared and artists started moving to the area. The use of redundant and therefore cheap buildings was driven by necessity and was the only way that artists could afford an appropriate studio space to sustain their practice.

Jonathan Harvey and David Panton, founders of Acme Studios, realised that this seemingly grim landscape presented an exceptional opportunity for artists. Negotiating with local government, they temporarily secured derelict buildings and provided artists with spaces to live and work.

The archive material in this exhibition examines two areas of Acme's activity: the provision of houses and studios and The Acme Gallery.

The Acme Gallery presented a wide range of art practice including installation and performance work such as *An Eight Day Passage* (1977), where the artist Kerry Trengove tunnelled through the ground floor of the Gallery, emerging eight days later in the adjoining basement 20 feet away. This exhibition highlights the fascinating relationship between the spaces where art is created and where it is presented; derelict buildings are transformed into perfectly useable studios and when required, a white cube gallery is torn apart for the sake of an installation.

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The exhibition is co-curated by Acme Studios' Chief Executive Jonathan Harvey and Curator Archive Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki.

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40 YEARS SUPPORTING ARTISTS

