

Artist Loft Spaces & the Spirit of 100Grand

In the 1960's and 70's, Downtown Manhattan became a creative sanctuary. What used to be a deserted industrial zone became the epicenter of an incredibly vibrant artistic community in New York history. At the heart of this transformation were artist-occupied loft spaces, large former factories and warehouses that artists adapted into live-work studios. Initially, loft living was illegal. The buildings were zoned for manufacturing, lacked residential amenities, and the artists who moved in did so secretly. "Once the sun went down," wrote Wisniewski for *Curbed*, "those pioneers sealed off their oversize windows so that no light could seep through to catch the eye of a policeman or stray building inspector."

Some private spaces downtown were inhabited by the "who's who of Judson Postmodern" such as Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Douglas Dunn & Lucinda Childs. Other noted artists in this community included Randy Warshaw, Carla Maxwell, Merce Cunningham, & many, many more. Artists could go to and from different people's lofts to see what was being created. People held events where dance & theater happened; it could be viewed and afterwards there was sometimes participation or a party. **The scene was rich in community.** As the community grew, artists banded together to fight for legal recognition and rent protections. An early victory came in 1961, when New York's mayor permitted certified "Artists-in-Residence" to live in certain commercial buildings. In 1971, the City Planning Commission rezoned SoHo to officially permit certified artists to reside in their lofts. The 70s loft movement gave birth to an iconic New York art scene, one that influenced global contemporary art & reshaped the city's landscape. Yet, even legal victories couldn't stop the larger forces of gentrification. By the end of the decade developers were cashing in, converting buildings for wealthier tenants. Many were pushed out to Brooklyn, and today only a few hundred original residents remain.

Bill Young Studio at 100Grand was established in 1986, a loft in SoHo that has served as a rehearsal room, performance venue & creative space. Founded with his partner & fellow choreographer Colleen Thomas, the space began as a home for their dance company but quickly expanded into a haven for New York's downtown dance communities. The studio became more than a workspace—it became a gathering point. Performances were often intimate, informal, & immersive, blurring the line between viewer & performer. As Bill recalls, "You go to a theater to look at dance. You come to 100Grand to experience it." The studio's legacy includes the LIT (loft into theater) series, which showcased young emerging artists & immersive projects. From casual showings during parties to more structured seasons, 100Grand offered a direct, sensory experience that traditional theater settings often can't match. "By asking someone to go into a theater, you sit there and you cross your arms and watch some dancing," Bill notes. "Or you have them come in & be in the place where the dancing is created & you feel the whole zeitgeist. You feel the whole experience of what it is that these people do."

As waves of gentrification reshaped SoHo and pushed artists from neighborhood to neighborhood, Bill remained. Many fellow artists were displaced, yet 100Grand endured. While the rent has risen drastically, Bill refuses to sell out: "This space holds my soul. It's where I feel whole, clear, and creative." More than just a studio, 100Grand is a physical embodiment of an ethos: that art should be felt rather than explained, experienced rather than observed. The beauty of the artist's loft space is the quantity of empty space. Architectural aesthetics is not the physicality of the structure that you see, but the space of where the structure is not. When a guitarist plays, you're moved not by the note, but the millisecond before it. Dance is the same. It lives in the space between, & the space in which it is cultivated.