

The Allegretta Studios, Fremantle

by Bob Whyte

Fremantle has some surprising corners. One is 22 Pakenham Street. At first it looks like the door to just another anonymous, old warehouse, but look more closely and you'll find a distinctive, inviting sign outside, "Allegretta Artists' Studios".

Walk upstairs and the surprises multiply. There is a complete art gallery, with paintings, sculptures, craftworks, photographs on the walls, printed carpets and mats underfoot, all illuminated brightly from skylights. You will realise also that you are walking beside studios, all of them large, well-lit and well-used. There is a spirit of quiet creativity which crackles with energy.

Sue K. explains the attraction for her: "As a recent art graduate the need for contact and interaction with other artists is still a priority to me. Allegretta Studios provides this for me while at the same time I am able to enjoy the seclusion of my own studio space". Jenny Stacey is just as positive about her space: "I was interested because it was just starting. I didn't feel intimidated by a group already established... I like my light coming through the window. I like being in Fremantle. It has a sympathetic atmosphere for artists... What interests me most is my own work. My own obsessions. Which I'm free to follow as long as I pay my rent".

With 42 studios, upstairs and down, it is the largest such complex in Western Australia and possibly in Australia. All are in use.

The Allegretta Studios are also unique in at least two other ways. First, in the diversity of makers, the broad spectrum of creative people, working under the same roof. There are painters, craft artists, graphic artists (including computer graphics), print makers, a writer, a photographer and others.

Secondly, the whole enterprise is marked by a realistic awareness that artists are professionals whose work needs to come to the attention of potential buyers such as local businesses and galleries. The display area closes the traditional gap

between artists and purchasers. Art lovers and dealers can informally wander in and see the high and diverse quality of the work being done, and then personally approach the artists in their own creative environment.

A great deal of vision and a pooling of many talents led to this unique development. Only six months ago, the 1907 building was a gaping, run-down interior, its corrugated iron ceiling creaking empty in the summer heat. It certainly had a tradition of housing practising artists, but it took the collective faith and optimism of resident painter Alan Brown and the new proprietors, Frank and Jack Allegretta and co-owners James Paris and Helene Schairer who are practising artists themselves, to realise the enormous potential of the space. Studios appeared overnight, floors were stripped and polished, walls were painted, works of art appeared on the walls day by day, and suddenly there it was, transformed and created.

Frank and Jack still manage their company Western Australian Ship Supplies from the Studios, and this fact in itself says a lot about the easy blend of business and art which is possible, and these days necessary. The whole project has been privately funded and exists without government or council subsidies.

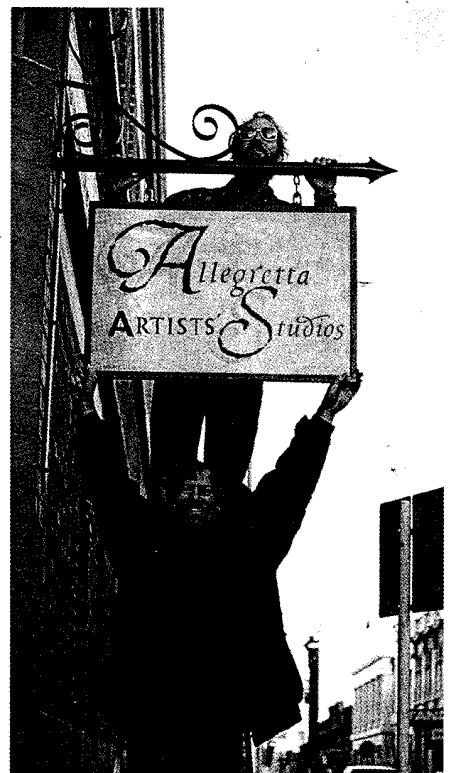
Vern Bartlett emphasizes that in such an environment artists can cooperate and help each other: "...the studio gives me a real opportunity to get my art together - gain contact with fellow artists and learn from them, as I begin to pursue my vocation." Robin Inkpen is also excited about the mutual sense of professionalism: "I find it stimulating working around other creative people, discussing how we structure our creative enterprises, and sharing marketing and promotional ideas. The collaboration in all areas is exciting."

Nor is the vision yet complete. As well as the stimulating interaction of different kinds of makers, and fruitful linking of them with the business community, it is hoped there will be national and international exchanges of ideas, artists and artworks. Subject to council approval,

the open spaces can be used to mount major exhibitions.

Craftworker Ariane Roemmele speaks for everybody working in the Studios when she explains what attracted her to them: "I found the Allegretta Studios by chance, being in the right place at the right time. I was attracted by the forthcoming opportunities like gallery space, shop, etc, and working with other like minded people. What I value most is the privacy, no prerequisites for entry. The choice to partake with others or remain private. The friendliness and non competitiveness of others. The range of skills, arts and crafts."

The Allegretta Artists' Studios in West End Fremantle have a bright future. There is no "house style", and cooperative diversity marks the work done in the Studios as a whole, and this in itself is something refreshingly new in the art world. The enterprise is distinctive enough to make a substantial impact on the artistic community in Fremantle, Western Australia and Australia.



Alan Brown and Greg James.