

Pearl Studio sets a gem in downtown Fresno

By Deborah Rivera Fujimoto

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Staff Writer

After six months of working with the city of Fresno to receive a permit allowing tenants to live in a commercial zone property, Reza Assemi and his partners will finally open Pearl Studio downtown. Pearl Studio is a work and live-in space building for artists as well as a public art show space. Pearl's first art exhibition entitled "The First Grain" will open with a reception November 30 and December 1, highlighting the works

of Assemi, Brandon Greer, Alex Trevino and Adam Longatti.

Assemi said his attraction to downtown and interest in revitalizing the area are the reasons he chose the 1939 Fulton Street building. "If we look at the examples of other cities across the state right now and in the past, bringing in the arts to downtown areas is one of the keys to revitalization," Assemi said.

The 3,000-square-foot building is owned by Assemi, his father, Massoud Assemi and his uncle, Said Assemi, who are both in the construction business. The three bought the former Red Cross building for \$70,000 in January 2000 and proceeded to apply for the permits. "The city was very helpful," Assemi said. The demolition of the structure started in May and was completed this month. Pearl Studio sits at 1841 Fulton St., south of Divisadero, next to the African American Museum.

Because most artists have difficulty finding a place to work, live and show their art, Assemi thought of the combination idea for

See Pearl, page 6



Reza Assemi's oil on canvas, *Barcelona*, adorns the artist's new downtown Fresno loft.

Photo/John Tenney

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Pearl

Continued from page 1

downtown. In addition to the space, this saves money for artists who display their work in galleries and cafes, where they take 50 percent of the sales. "This enables artists to be in control," Assemi said.

Of the artists who reside at Pearl Studio, Assemi said, "Each person here does different work." Assemi uses oil as his primary source and mixed media painting in his art; Greer creates large-scale metal sculptures; Trevino makes use of bronze and figurative distortions; and Longatti portrays landscapes dealing with changing the San Joaquin Valley.

Four separate units, which add 200 square feet each to the building per unit, house the artists at Pearl Studio, who pay \$550 each for rent. The revamping of the building included gutting it, leaving the foundation, a brick shell and the roof. New plumbing, electrical wiring and walls were then installed. "When I saw the space, I had an idea of how I wanted to lay it out," Assemi said. "We were really constricted on space so overcoming that was the biggest obstacle."

Down the middle of the four separate two-story lofts is a long central hallway, where a monthly show of guest artists will show their art. "We can always bring in fresh work and help local artists out by giving them a space to show in," Assemi said.

The studio includes a sculpture garden on the back patio that is deco-

rated with colored concrete and brick planters. A sculptured metal gate, created by Greer, is designed with a vulture sculpture, vines and roses that will surround the 2,500-square-foot patio. An additional 2,500 square feet of secured parking space that hides behind the decorated gate has a remote access. An outside mural of Marilyn Monroe by Brian Shabaglian adorns the side of the studio. "This is what Fresno needed," Assemi said.

The old Red Cross building was also a cash register company and later a sheet metal business. In 1972, the Red Cross remodeled it for office space until it moved last year.

Assemi hopes his art studio idea will catch on and appeal to other artists. "I am hoping this can help in the revitalization of downtown and start a chain reaction," Assemi said. ■