

Rude Mechs on the Move

Having left the Off Center, the theatre company is now planning to #crushAustin in all 10 council districts and opening new studios Downtown

BY ROBERT FAIRES, FRI., JUNE 30, 2017



Let's see: The Rude Mechs moved out of the Off Center on May 15, and just six weeks later the company is opening a new 5,000-square-foot space and plotting a 21st season that will see them making mischief in every council district across Austin. So much for going the Scarlett O'Hara route of weepily wondering, "Where shall we go? What shall we do?"

First, the space: Rude Studios is 5,000 square feet inside the *Austin American-Statesman* warehouse on South Congress that the company secured even as it was exiting the Off Center. The lease period is 18 months, giving the Rudes a base on the shores of Lady Bird Lake through December 2018.

Crucial note, though: The space isn't for performance, and it isn't just for them. It's intended for everyone – theatre artists, visual artists, filmmakers, dancemakers, musicians, et al. – with an eye toward being *affordable*. That was part of the Rudes' mission with the Off Center, so they're bringing it with them to Rude Studios. And since they nabbed the space at \$5/square foot, the Rudes are passing the savings on to you.

The Studios consist of five rooms of various shapes and sizes: two 1,600-square-foot rooms, one 700-square-foot conference room, and two 150-square-foot offices. (The remaining 300 square feet are being used by the Rudes for

their offices.) Knowing of the creative community's need for different kinds of spaces, the Rudes hosted an open house on June 14 to show off the studios and learn how people felt they should be used (rehearsal space, maker space, meeting space, storage, etc.). Rehearsal space came out as the top priority, and artists needed it cheap or free. ("No huge surprise there," notes Rudes co-producing artistic director Lana Lesley.) From that input, the Rudes adopted base rates for renting studios by the hour (\$15 per) and day (\$35-50), with some communal areas in Studio A available at no cost. None of the rooms are equipped for performance, but the Rudes are open to using the studios for things other than rehearsals, such as readings or workshop events if the audiences are small. And if the set rates are beyond the reach of artists or nonprofits, they'll work with them to find rates they can afford. All this info has gone up on the Rude Mechs website, and the spaces are already being booked.

But even as the Rudes are settling down Downtown, they're planning moves all over the city. Their response to being turned out of their home of 18 years is to embrace their displaced status and what it says about Austin now, using it to propel them and their art into every corner of the city – and by "corner," they mean City Council district. Each month for 10 months, the company will perform in a different district, maybe staging a full production, maybe doing a workshop, maybe presenting a salon. What they do is, they say, "wholly contingent on what kind of space we can find to work in that month. Ideally, everyone in the city will visit each district with us, to learn about a new exciting location and to learn a bit about that district."

They're calling the 21st season #crushAustin, because, they say, "we have a crush on Austin and we wanna crush the arts into the center of Austin's civic life." The concept reaffirms what the Rudes have long stated, that this city is where they want to stay and make work. "Austin has raised us, made us who we are, but now it needs some looking after, some care and attention as Austinites try to figure out who we are, what we value, and what our civic life looks like," the collective's explanation of #crushAustin states. "When space is valued in dollars and cents, when the future is reduced to capital accrued, our most important contribution as an arts organization is to provide alternative ways of engaging in the now. Our mission has always been to find the humor, the sacred, and the how-it-could-be-otherwise, and to shake up how problems are approached.

"We think staying dedicated to collective artmaking and creating original, live performance for the new canon is pretty fucking radical, so we're sticking with it. We are committed to making a deep and positive cultural impact on our city, and to embodying a model of collective creative leadership that results in kickass art."

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