Contemporary art has long outgrown the prim, white livery of the traditional gallery. Increasingly, artists are engaged in work that is interactive, performance-based, or process-oriented. At Recess in Soho, the studio and exhibition space converge, providing emerging artists with a flexible platform to produce, display and collaborate with the public, often all at once. Recess offers these artists a two to three month residency and license to transform an expansive, light-soaked storefront at 41 Grand Street into a dynamic workshop that engages constructively with the community.

Outside of Recess
Recess is a non-profit organization founded just over a year ago in May 2009 by Allison Weisberg. In the interest of full disclosure, I am Allison’s sister. If this relationship inevitably accounts for some small measure of my deep enthusiasm for Recess, I hope it does not altogether discredit my esteem for the unique and innovative program. Recess gives its residents critical exposure and visibility in a neighborhood that was once known for nurturing young artists but which has since seen the last of its affordable, rugged lofts replaced with luxury apartments and expensive boutiques. In her own words, Allison set out to establish an institution designed to "expand to fit the artist's goals rather than force the artist to shrink to fit the institution."

That is not to say that Recess is the right venue for every artist. An artist’s tenure at Recess can begin only after he or she has undergone a rigorous selection process conducted by a review panel of fellow artists, curators, and arts administrators. The panel is currently fielding applications through September 15th for residencies beginning in the spring of 2011. The aim, according to Allison, is to identify applicants who seek to take advantage of Recess's distinctive model by "viewing the visitor to the site as a participant" in the creative process. In its humble 14 months of existence, the space has played host to a diverse range of highly ambitious and inventive projects.

The first, known as Double Room, was the work of Corin Hewitt and Molly McFadden.

For Double Room, Recess opened its doors and invited the public to watch as Hewitt and McFadden separately constructed parallel spaces evoking a demure urban parlor. After building a new object to furnish their rooms or otherwise altering their respective spaces, the
artists slipped Polaroids of their changes under a door in the dividing wall and challenged one another to replicate the work. In raising "questions of production, reproduction, collaboration, studio-as-artwork, and labor-as-performance," writes Iyra Kilston in *Art in America*, "*Double Room* touched on weighty issues with a deft quartet of hands."

Since then, Recess has staged alternative "classes" for the Bruce High Quality Foundation University and served as a set and production studio for Kara Hearn's *TREMENDOUS*, a video art concept that enlisted visitors as actors. Currently, Recess is home to Dave Hardy and Siebren Versteeg's *Spirit Tours 11*, an ongoing sculptural event with a dry sense of humor. The artists are calling it a "bootleg transformational experience." Intrigued?

*Visit Recess, free of charge: Wednesday 12-6pm, Thursday 2-8pm, Friday 12-6pm, Saturday 12-6pm.*