

ART

Running on Empty

Artists explore abandoned spaces

By CANDACE JACKSON

In its heyday, Tower Records in Manhattan's East Village teemed with music-loving shoppers. But in 2006, with buyers rushing to online music stores and big-box retailers, the store closed. Starting this weekend, the place will fill up again—this time with performances, panel discussions and conceptual art installations, some lamenting the demise of music stores.

The project, called "Never Can Say Goodbye," is from No Longer Empty, a New York nonprofit that places public art projects in vacant retail spaces. (The group's first such exhibit was at an empty fishing-tackle store.)

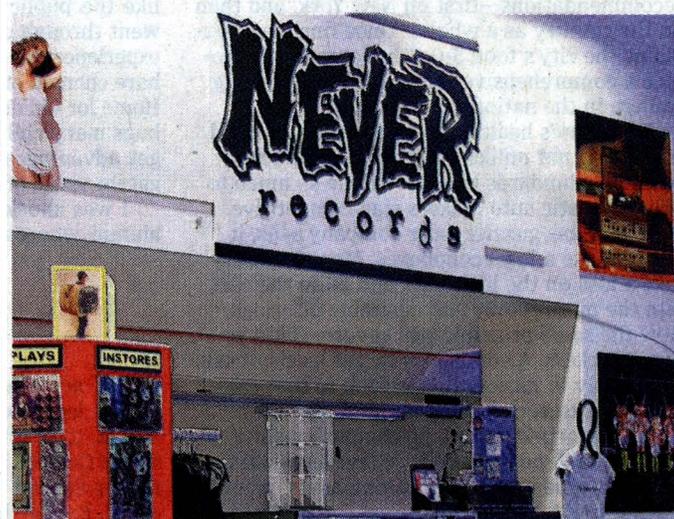
It's the latest in a wave of art galleries and theaters popping up in empty retail spaces around the country amid the recession. At a partly-vacant mall in suburban St. Louis, a program called ArtSpace has brought in theaters, art galleries and dance studios to occupy what were once beauty salons and chain stores like Abercrombie & Fitch. In the Los Angeles area, Phantom Galleries LA has placed temporary art installations in vacant shops and storefront windows.

The artists and curators behind the Tower Records proj-

ect in New York say it's partly meant as a look at what the art world can learn from the music world's troubles. To passersby, the site will look a lot like a lively music store, with racks of records, a cash register and promotional posters hung overhead. (Window-sized "For Lease" signs remain, however.)

Ted Riederer and 40 other artists have created the mock "shop," which will include record albums that have their covers blacked out except for a few words. Visitors flip through the stack to read a poem. It's a piece that Mr. Riederer calls a "love letter" to the dying concept of a record store. "My goal is ... to have them in the store for 30 minutes until they realize it's not a store," he says. Tower Records opened in Sacramento, Calif., in 1960, and by 2006 had 89 stores across the U.S.—all gone now, though a Web site still takes orders.

Opening night of the New York exhibition will include an appearance by a Vanilla Ice impersonator. Also participating is Paul Villinski, who says he used to spend Saturday nights in the store picking out \$7 New Wave albums. His work is made from his own record collection, sculpted to look like birds.



Ted Riederer

'Never Records' is a mock shop set up at a former store in New York.