

Community Redevelopment through Arts and Culture

In its broadest definition, one must acknowledge that art and culture transform ordinary materials into something meaningful in people's lives. Beyond the aesthetics, art and culture are educational tools that are not confined to any particular medium and therefore critical in representing complex concepts. Not surprisingly, art predates the written language and is often the only cultural remnant of lost civilizations. As one author put it, "Culture is the "glue," the shared values and meanings that bind us together, that shape our lives and, indeed, shape our attitudes about development and stewardship. Yet it is this intangible dimension of culture that is frequently ignored in public policy discussion, where culture is too often seen as a "soft" topic or an impediment to progress."¹ Cultural Planning has been crucial in infusing public spaces with cultural meaning, attracting other artists, local and foreign tourists, and businesses alike.



The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) is a cultural facility created using 100% of the percent for art requirement. The other two options are 60% of 1% to go on site, or a direct payment to the Cultural Trust Fund.

¹ Caroline Marshall, *Envisioning Convergence Cultural Conservation, Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Livelihoods*, Santa Fe, NM: The Fund for Folk Culture, 2004, 3.

CRA/LA and Public Art: Imagining a City

In 1948 the Community Redevelopment Law of the State of California prompted the creation of the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) to address the urban decay occurring in Downtown's Bunker Hill. The Housing Act of 1949 was a federal policy that followed in the footsteps of redevelopment policies set forth in states like California and New York. It created federal funds to match cities in their efforts to address urban issues that had become national problems, specifically housing shortages and blight. Since then, federal funds have dwindled but the troubles remain. It is now up to municipal governments and agencies, local organizations, and private citizens to find creative solutions to problems existing in our cities.

According to CRA/LA's mission statement, their strategies for successful urban redevelopment are to **attract** private investment into economically depressed communities, **eliminate** slums, abandoned or unsafe properties, and blight throughout Los Angeles, **revitalize** older neighborhoods through historic preservation, rehabilitation and new development, **build** housing for all income levels, **encourage** economic development, **create** and retain employment opportunities, **support** the best in urban design, architecture and the arts, **seek** the broadest possible citizen participation in its activities.



Jerome Kirk's *Aquarius* was one of the first public artworks in Bunker Hill.

In consideration of these multi-faceted problems requiring creative solutions, it is necessary to acknowledge the fundamental importance of art and the creative industries

as tools for successful urban redevelopment. For example, one national study on the nonprofit arts organizations and their audiences reported that expenditures by these two groups was about \$166.2 billion, supporting 5.7 million jobs, and generating \$29.6 billion in government revenue.² Furthermore, a study conducted on the more broadly defined “Creative Industries” revealed that more than 27,000 creative establishments exist in Los Angeles County, nearly 16,000 of which are located in Los Angeles City alone, supporting nearly 1 million jobs, making them the biggest employers in the area, and generating \$3.2 billion in government revenue just from California’s income and sales tax. Not only can many of the explicit strategies of CRA/LA be met through culturally conscious redevelopment, but also, to transform Los Angeles and its residents into a global competitive force, artists and cultural providers are the types of creative thinkers that will be required to find solutions to problems in our post-industrial, service sector based, and increasingly urban American economy.



The CRA/LA’s Cultural Arts policy creates popular artworks, like this bronze statue of Johnny Carson at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in Hollywood.

Beginning in the late 1960’s, CRA/LA became one of the first public agencies to set the groundwork for other cities creating policies that require developers to incorporate cultural art into their private projects. This was formalized in 1985 into the “Downtown Art in Public Places Policy” for three redevelopment project areas: Bunker Hill, the Central Business District, and Little Tokyo. However, because the redevelopment projects were concentrated around the Downtown

² Americans for the Arts, “Arts and Economic Prosperity III: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences,” 2007, <http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org/EconomicImpact>.

area, benefits of the policy were limited to the traditional core of the city. The CRA/LA addressed this inadequacy in 1993 by incorporating all of its redevelopment project areas throughout Los Angeles City into its "Public Art Policy." In 1989, following closely behind the CRA/LA's Downtown cultural art policy, Los Angeles City passed a law allocating one percent of all public works costs to commission public artwork, making it a percent for arts program for public development projects. Also in 1989, Metro's Art Department was established, armed with a policy allocating one half of one percent (0.5%) of rail construction costs to the creation of original art works. In 1991, the City of Los Angeles adopted the Arts Development Fee³ after years of experimenting with interim ordinances. It is a type of percent for art program for private development projects based on predetermined calculations using building type and square feet. This program is very similar in goals to the CRA/LA's percent for art program, but there are crucial differences in funding; the CRA/LA's calculations are based on a percentage of development costs for each project. This means that the CRA/LA's policy is more durable because the City's predetermined calculations must be constantly updated or contributions to the program will lose value from inflation. It is also more durable because unlike the loopholes in the City's art policy, which are due to the fact that the City puts a fee only on the shell of the building and developers can classify buildings and change their use later to pay a lower fee, the CRA/LA's Cultural Arts planning cannot be avoided if the developers seek to continue their relationship with CRA/LA. The *Silver Tower* in Little Tokyo serves as an example of the agency's dedication to its art policy; it was created because the CRA/LA refused to continue providing aid without the fulfillment of the cultural arts requirement. In 2005, with the City's Arts Development Fee (ADF) Ordinance and Procedures in place, the CRA/LA revised its Cultural Arts policy

³ Section 91.107.2.11 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code and Section 22.118 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code

under the new “Art Policy” to clarify the requirements and make it easier for developers to navigate the process of creating art for the public realm. Major 2005 changes to the CRA/LA’s Art Policy also included the capital requirement, designating funds for durable and permanent art, and a change from requiring all private developers in redevelopment zones to contribute to the CRA/LA’s cultural arts program to only those receiving aid from the CRA/LA.

Currently, the Art Policy has three options for the 1% of total development costs: 100% to a cultural facility, 60% on-site art and 40% to the trust fund, or 100% to the redevelopment area’s cultural trust fund. Besides being able to use the 60% on-site for original artwork, it can also be used to integrate art into the architecture, or to augment line item budgets by using artists to for those items. The agency’s dedication to cultural art has created nearly 200 traditional and contemporary art projects in 17 redevelopment areas of Los Angeles City, and no other major American metropolis is fortunate enough to have such a wide array of artists and communities available for the City’s creative engine.

Building Communities through Arts and Culture

Despite the subjectivity of art, artists create something of worth from ordinary materials. Like the alchemists trying to create gold from lead, artists use brushes, pigment, and earth to create valuable objects and moments. Redevelopment is very similar in its concept; planners take ordinary space and transform it into something beneficial and meaningful to the community. The importance

Casa Heiwa, an affordable housing complex, is receiving Cultural Trust Funds to replace deteriorating tiles containing community portraits.



of the CRA/LA as a public redevelopment agency is that it can act as a liaison between artists, developers, and community stakeholders to use the integration of permanent and publicly accessible works of art and cultural facilities as a tool to create spaces that are valuable, fulfill community needs, and forge a sense of identity. This process itself infuses space with meaning, and is most successful when the end result uses the assets that exist within the community.

When spaces are infused with culture through a collective process that begins with the assumption that the community has the capabilities to revitalize the area, what can be called “asset-based”⁴ cultural development, they have an immeasurable worth beyond the economic benefits of the fine arts, creative industries, non-profits, and the redeveloped spaces of Los Angeles alone. One example of a momentous cultural space created for Los Angeles with the help of CRA/LA’s cultural policy is the Museum of Contemporary Art



Inner City Arts is an oasis in an industrial sector of Los Angeles. Its campus was expanded with the help of the Downtown Cultural Trust

(MOCA). While this cultural facility is most beneficial on a global scale, there are more local endeavors dispersed throughout Los Angeles. Inner City Arts is a local arts education organization that received help from CRA/LA Downtown Cultural Trust Fund to expand its campus, which serves the inner city youth of Los Angeles.

⁴ For a walkthrough of asset-based community development see Chapter 4 of Tom Borrup and Partners for Livable Communities, *The Creative Community Builder’s Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Art, and Culture*, Saint Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance, 2006.

CRA/LA's dedication to capital projects is crucial in providing more permanent and durable artworks to the urban landscape. Arts funding for capital projects in public spaces is limited, leaving scarce resources for artists to make cultural art for the City that will last for decades, most likely because cultural works and spaces might not visibly bring in any direct profit. This view ignores the various public works projects, like sidewalks and lighting, which also do not bring in any direct profits but would never be ruled out as a necessity. The designation of funds for tangible art in combination with a community development process is necessary for a sustainable city as it gives artists a critical role in developing public spaces for the community and transfers a sense of stewardship to both artists and the community. Furthermore, capital art is immediately



This sculpture, containing Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech and replicated shoes, reflects the community and provides a vision.

available to our senses, giving the art a more concrete function in placemaking and creating significance for a redeveloped space. The importance of art and culture in making a city attractive to global investors is also downplayed when envisioning redevelopment, and it would be wise for planners and businesses to recognize this financial and social value of cultural art.

A Sustainable Development Model for Art and Culture

Sustainable development is not just about the environment, it is also about the social resources that are in a community and maintaining a relationship of trust and

respect with the members in that community to ensure future endeavors will not be stifled. In other words, without legitimacy in the eyes of public opinion, future projects are susceptible to failure. CRA/LA's Cultural Arts community process is very important in mitigating the distrust and resentment that can arise when drastic community change occurs. CRA/LA can bring the diverse elements of a community to the same table, invest time and resources into gathering input from developers, artists, and stakeholders, and present the Cultural Arts project to everyone involved. Although there is no full-proof method to avoiding conflict arising from community change, there are things that the CRA/LA can do, and has done in the past, to give legitimacy to the process and product.

First, community redevelopment is intended to benefit the community as a whole and should never favor developers, artists, or stakeholders in isolation from one another. Therefore, an asset-based process should be used to create something meaningful for the community, allowing artists to engage with the community, transforming space into something viewed by the community with a sense of stewardship, and usually giving developers a sense that it will be watched over by the community. An asset-based approach does not mean "looking at the world through rose-colored glasses, about putting positive spin on bad situations or about ignoring problems or deficiencies... Simply in terms of rallying people's energies to a cause, it's more effective to lead with vision and possibility rather than stories of defeat. This is one way artists' unique capacities have contributed to social movements."⁵ In other words, the community being redeveloped has resources to offer, find them and employ them in public art projects. With an asset-based approach, larger issues of displacement and cultural hegemony can be more easily addressed because there are so many elements involved in the dialogue, making it more likely that someone can find a creative solution to the issues

⁵ Borrup, What's Revolutionary About Valuing Assets as a Strategy in Cultural Work?

being undertaken. This method should be sustained throughout the entire project's lifespan.

Second, redevelopment should create public art that is seen as cultural empowerment and should avoid acting as the harbinger of cultural imperialism. One of the most important questions a public art project can ask is, "whose culture?" This takes us back to an asset-based approach, which has the community playing an integral role in the planning, design, and implementation of public art projects. The CRA/LA has completed various cultural art projects with the help of community input that compliment the area, including the CRA assisted cultural facilities of the California Afro-American Museum in Hoover and the Japanese American National Museum in Little Tokyo. The level of community input and dialogue that CRA/LA engages in gives it credibility in current projects and can be thought of as accumulating social capital for future projects as well.

Third, community change arising from redevelopment can sometimes have unintended consequences, including the displacement of deep-rooted residents, and this must be addressed in the larger redevelopment plan for the entire area. Furthermore,

El Portal Theatre was rehabilitated with the help of the CRA/LA's North Hollywood Cultural Trust Fund, preserving the community's historical landmark.





Los Angeles is home to many artists that contribute to our environment and economy. These elements coordinated to create this Outdoor Gallery in North Hollywood.

many discussions about gentrification place artists as the forerunners for gentrification, but this actually ignores that fact that artists and cultural institutions have always utilized cheap spaces and can also be displaced by rising property values and real estate speculation. That is why redevelopment using the arts and culture as a tool should create safe and affordable spaces for artists and cultural institutions along with creating affordable housing for the community at large. In fact, this is an area where the asset-based approach can be most fruitful in finding creative solutions to this problem of displacement through the dialogue undertaken by the developers, artists, and community stakeholders. The CRA/LA's Arts Organization Retention Program in Hollywood is one current example of how Cultural Arts has played a role in retaining crucial elements that would benefit the entire redevelopment area.

Balancing the Books for Art and Culture

Public art projects can bring more benefits than are readily measurable, but these benefits must be achieved through a critical process that incorporates various elements in the community, and to do this, there are a few things the CRA/LA can do to ensure it will continue to create meaningful public art. The most vital assets in any community redevelopment agency are its management and its planners. Management and planners must be held accountable for miscommunications, be able to facilitate dialogue between developers, artists, and community stakeholders, and be able to mediate between actors in the spheres of politics, business, community leadership, and

planners from other City departments. Beyond the employees of CRA/LA, there is one other critical element in the entire process that can make or break the entire project and smear the image of the agency for many years, and this is the element of community participation. In order to have a product that is favored by the community, they must be involved, and this is hardly an easy task. Community participation is something that must be done voluntarily, and there is not much CRA/LA can do to generate more participation besides think of creative strategies to get the community involved. Lack of community participation can be very frustrating, if not downright counter-productive, and may require more field work than any one team of planners can handle. Therefore, CRA/LA should always remain aware that it is bringing change to these communities and it is their responsibility to do everything it can to seek broad community participation, which is already one of the components of CRA/LA's mission statement, but also realize that there are only so many actions it can take to engage the community within its budget and timeframe.

In the end, is public art worth the costs? Imagine this scenario, the CRA/LA gives funds to an artist to design and create artwork for Bunker Hill. The artist then goes to the local hardware store to buy tile and grout for the artwork, which constitutes a large part of the artist's total expenditures. The hardware store then takes that money and uses it to pay their employees. Some of the employees then use that money to eat out for dinner. The restaurant they patronize uses that money to buy food from a local organic

Cultural Arts planning is not just about creating public art, it's also about creating public spaces where people feel comfortable and proud.



farmer. The farmer then reinvests some of that money into his home in the city, which creates government revenue and benefits neighboring property owners. This story traces money flowing from the cultural arts through the Los Angeles economy, of which CRA/LA's Cultural Arts policy supports through more ways than the traditional concept of art.

The social aspect of funding for the Cultural Arts and the benefits of having a vibrant arts community must be also highlighted. Frida and Diego live in Pasadena. They would like to experience the nightlife of the City and decide to see the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Downtown's Walt Disney Concert Hall. Beyond the price of their admissions, they must pay for parking and tip the attendant. After the concert, they visit the Water Park in California Plaza and enjoy the fountain, both created through the CRA/LA's cultural arts policy. They get hungry and dine at a local restaurant, pumping more revenue into the local economy. At the end of their meal, they do not want the night to end and decide to go to a local bar. There, they indulge in drinks and enjoy themselves a little too much, forcing them to acquire a room at the Otani Hotel. The next day they start to talk about moving downtown.



Biddy Mason Park was created to commemorate Biddy Mason, a former African-American slave and one of Los Angeles' first African American female landowners. The cultural arts allow us to acknowledge the mistakes of our past while pursuing the benefits of a more humane future.

Cultural Arts can also educate the public beyond attracting audiences and emigrates. *Biddy Mason Park* is one great example of how artists can find beauty and dignity while helping us remember a really difficult aspect of our history. The piece highlights Biddy Mason, a former slave and one of the first African American women to own land in Los Angeles. She was also co-founder of the Los Angeles branch of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first black church in Los Angeles. On a more modern note, *Miyatake' Camera* is another good example of how social healing can take place through the cultural arts program. It depicts the camera of Miyatake, a Japanese photographer who secretly documented the internment camps of WWII. His images are projected onto JANM through the replicated camera.

The nonprofit arts organizations, their audiences, and the creative industries have expenditures that create millions of jobs, making the creative industries the biggest employers in Los Angeles County, generate large amounts of government revenue, and produce and reproduce the arts and culture that hold communities together. Expenditures and jobs in the nonprofit arts and creative industries stay local longer and are harder to ship overseas, greatly benefiting the local economy. Furthermore, America is a service-sector economy set on finding creative solutions to complex problems like transoceanic logistics, Internet marketing, and urban blight, and the cultural arts create spaces that incubate these creative minds. In a very real way, creativity has become an employable skill. But beyond this emphasis on the cold hard numbers, there is a very human aspect to redevelopment, one that can be lost in the budgets, biddings, proposals, and board meetings. In a very real way, the cultural arts reflect the human element that exists in erecting concrete structures.