

Animating  
DEMOCRACY

The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue

AMERICANS FOR THE  
ARTS

*“Begin with art, because art tries to take us outside ourselves.*

*It is a matter of trying to create an atmosphere and context*

*so conversation can flow back and forth*

*and we can be influenced by each other.”*

**W. E. B. Du Bois**

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# **Animating** **DEMOCRACY**

**The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue**

**A Report Commissioned by The Ford Foundation**

*This report was commissioned by The Ford Foundation resulting from a study conducted by Americans for the Arts and its Institute for Community Development and the Arts. A condensed version is available in book form through Americans for the Arts and on its web site, [www.artusa.org](http://www.artusa.org).*

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**Consultants for  
Americans for the Arts  
Robert Lynch, President/CEO**

*Animating Democracy: The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue*

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## Prefaces

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Dialogue and the free exchange of ideas are the bedrock of democracy. Our newspapers are full of accounts of nations and communities struggling with this concept. Can the arts help? More important: What roles in this process of democracy can the arts play?

In 1996, the Ford Foundation awarded a grant to Americans for the Arts to study current activity and best practices among artists and cultural organizations whose work engages the public in dialogue on key civic issues. This resulting report, *Animating Democracy: The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue*, maps the current field, identifies issues and trends, and suggests opportunities for arts entities, policymakers, and funders to work together to strengthen the evolving activity in this sometimes volatile arena. The study reinforces the key and creative roles that the arts can play in the renewal of civic dialogue as well as challenges arts and cultural organizations face as they engage in this work.

This report best serves as a framework upon which to build. In publishing *Animating Democracy* through its Institute for Community Development and the Arts, Americans for the Arts is pleased to launch a broader effort: the Animating Democracy Initiative. Supported by the Ford Foundation, the Initiative will be a four-year endeavor to continue to chart and bolster this work.

At the heart of the initiative is the Lab, providing funding to support a collection of projects. Some 30 projects will be selected that advance the creation and presentation of arts-based civic dialogue work and that, individually and collectively, enhance field learning about the philosophical, practical, and social dimensions of that work. In addition to being provided funding support for projects, leaders of those projects will participate in learning exchanges and gain access to technical assistance to help meet their full potential for success. The initiative will document Lab projects, as well as many others, so that what is learned may be shared widely over the four years and beyond. An interactive web site and list serv, national convenings, and published materials will disseminate ideas, approaches, principles, and practices of arts-based civic dialogue with artists, cultural leaders, scholars, public policymakers, civic dialogue organizers, and funders.

For more than 40 years, Americans for the Arts —itself an evolving national entity —has held dear the concept that the success of the arts and the success of community in America are magnificently intertwined. With the publication of this study, we are excited to contribute to the continuing dialogue around this idea.

Robert L. Lynch  
*President and CEO*  
*Americans for the Arts*

Artists and their work play an important role in the civic dialogue and public life of societies around the world. This role is both alive and vibrant in current times, as well as deeply rooted in tradition and history, and its power is evidenced by the ways that a multitude of social forces—governments, pro-democracy movements, religious communities, and interest groups—choose to provide for or to limit the public voice and role of the arts. In our own country, debates about social values and the common good often manifest as controversies around provocative artistic works and new modes of expression, or as diagnoses of a declining national culture symbolic of broader social ills. This has been true historically and is certainly the case now as we approach the new century, challenged to understand the profound changes that are reshaping our families, communities, work, and spiritual lives. Some artists and arts institutions find themselves unexpectedly at the center of these debates. A growing number, however, are moving to claim an active, intentional role in public dialogue around the kinds of contemporary issues that provoke multiple viewpoints, finding that the artistic imagination is stimulated and the institution's links to the public are energized by this engagement. While this challenging role is not for every artist or arts institution, there is tremendous potential benefit to the arts and to society in recognizing and encouraging those for whom it is appropriate. The artistic imagination, stimulated by contemporary issues and deployed by artists and arts institutions, is an extraordinary civic force and one whose potential remains significantly underacknowledged. This publication represents one effort to shine a light on that potential, and to advance the efforts of artists and arts institution leaders as they come together to increase recognition and understanding of this valuable and stimulating work.

Christine J. Vincent  
*Deputy Director, Media, Arts and Culture*  
*Ford Foundation*





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## Acknowledgments

This investigation was informed and enriched through the participation of many individuals and organizations. The observations, findings, and recommendations reported within drew upon the important work of many artists, arts and cultural organizations, and community leaders. Their creative endeavors in the civic realm provided an essential foundation for understanding arts-based civic dialogue. We thank all those whose projects are profiled at the end of the publication and the many others who shared information for contributing such rich and diverse models from which to learn. These included the more than 100 individuals who participated in focus groups and who were interviewed during the course of the study.

Our National Advisory Committee (listed at the end of the report) included distinguished artists, arts and cultural leaders, civic dialogue organizers, humanists, and scholars. Their individual and collective wisdom and experience were invaluable in shaping the course of the study and debating its findings. We would like to thank Anna Deavere Smith, a national advisor and artistic director for the study, whose passionate conviction about the role of the arts in civic dialogue, and whose own work so richly reflects many perspectives on critical issues of our time, stimulated our investigation in important ways at every juncture.

We thank our colleague Cheryl Yuen, who was codirector during the first half of the project, until another professional opportunity summoned her. Her exceptional thinking and planning helped establish a strong foundation for the study. In addition, as consultants on the study, we acknowledge Americans for the Arts, particularly Bob Lynch and Nina Ozlu for their ideas and teamwork and for giving us the opportunity to be part of this project.

We would like to extend special thanks to Wayne Winborne, Liz Lerman, and Holly Sidford as readers of the report and for their thoughtful and incisive critique. We are indebted to our editors—John Fiscella for his intelligent coaching and shaping of the material at its many draft stages, and to Mary Moynihan and Alex Friend of M2 Communications for their expert refinements in preparing the report for publication. Many thanks to Jane Markarian for hours of painstaking revision and preparation of the text. Many thanks to Stephen Belliveau for his creative talents and speedy execution in designing a handsome publication that we are proud to present to the field, and to Bill Jones for expert execution in preparing it for the web.

Finally, the depth of this investigation was made possible with both funding and guidance from The Ford Foundation. Personally and on behalf of Americans for the Arts, we would like to thank the Foundation for its commitment to this work. We thank Dave Mazzoli for his gracious and resourceful assistance throughout the project. Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Christine Vincent, the Foundation's deputy director for media, arts, and culture, whose recognition of the importance of the arts as a force in civic dialogue and whose probing inquiry all along the way enhanced the process and product of this study immensely.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon & Pam Korza  
*Project Directors*

## Executive Summary

The arts and culture have long demonstrated a unique capacity for creating a public forum for discussing compelling social issues—such as rising youth crime rates, racial tensions, and the widening gap between rich and poor—where such forums do not exist. Recognizing the potential of art to illuminate civic experience, the Ford Foundation awarded a grant to Americans for the Arts to profile a representative selection of artists and arts and cultural organizations whose work, through its aesthetics and processes, engages the public in dialogue on key civic issues as a conscious, purposeful act of artistic creation and presentation. The aim of *Animating Democracy: The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue* is to map the current field, identify issues and trends, and highlight significant and timely opportunities for leaders in the field, policymakers, and funders to work together to strengthen activity in this lively arena.

## The Need for Civic Dialogue

**D**emocracy is animated by an informed public engaged in the issues affecting people's daily lives. Civic dialogue plays an essential role in the workings of democracy, giving voice to multiple perspectives on challenging issues; enabling people to develop more multifaceted, humane, and realistic views of issues and each other; and helping diverse groups find common ground.

Yet there is growing concern that opportunities for civic dialogue in this country have diminished in recent years. Polarization of opinion along ideological, racial, gender, and class lines; exclusive social structures separating rich from poor and majorities from minorities; a sense of individual disempowerment; and the overwhelming nature of many of society's problems are all factors contributing to this sense. Perhaps most fundamentally, the crosscutting nature of today's complex issues often places them outside of the traditional structures and settings, such as civic organizations, labor unions, and political parties, which have served in the past to organize civic discourse.

## A Role for the Arts

**T**he potential of art to create indelible images, to express difficult ideas through metaphor, and to communicate beyond the limits of language makes it a powerful force for illuminating civic experience.

American artists and cultural institutions have long engaged civic issues through a wide spectrum of activity. At one end of the spectrum, topical art articulates or comments on social issues; at the other end, artists and cultural institutions use the arts to engage people in action to effect change. But more recently, a vital midrange of activity has begun to emerge at the center of the spectrum. This body of work—the focus of this study—is stimulated by the belief that art offers a fresh approach to engaging people in civic issues. In this work, referred to here as “arts-based civic dialogue,” art consciously incorporates civic dialogue as part of an aesthetic strategy. By exploring multiple perspectives on critical concerns, arts-based civic dialogue projects seek to engage a broad diversity of publics in discussion and reflection on challenging issues.

In addition, the intersection of artistic imagination with the civic realm provides fertile ground for both aesthetic and programmatic innovation. For many artists and curators, the choice to venture into civic terrain yields powerful results—revitalized works from the traditional canon, as well as fresh approaches to form, content, and process in the creation of new work. Such innovations enhance an audience’s experience of the arts, in addition to providing a rich aesthetic basis for considering contemporary issues.

Beyond the basic role of producer, presenter, or exhibitor, cultural institutions are playing a key part in this work as catalysts, conveners, or forums for civic dialogue. They are offering space as well as organizational and interpretive capacity, and they are building local relationships to encourage various publics to participate in the process. In exercising this civic role, cultural institutions are expanding opportunities for both democratic participation and aesthetic experience, engaging a broader, more diverse public in giving voice to critical issues of our time.

## Civic Dialogue Across Arts Disciplines

**A**rts-based civic dialogue has developed most actively in such fields as museums, presenting, public art, public interest media, dance, and community-based theater. Artists, often working independently of institutions, have pioneered and advanced arts-based civic dialogue work, while cultural organizations have often provided key opportunities and support.

In theater, artists have fostered a movement of community-based work. In public art, artists have propelled a shift from the isolation of the studio to site-specific work that considers the physical and social context of its public site. In contrast, in the public-interest media and museum fields, institutional infrastructure and resources have advanced arts-based civic dialogue strategies. In dance and in presenting, there appears to be

**“The value of the artist is in the mind that sees things differently than a civil rights lawyer.”**

Anna Deavere Smith

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a more reciprocal relationship between artists and organizations, which has enabled fertile artistic and organizational exploration and development.

In many cases, within arts and cultural organizations exploring this work, innovative arts-based civic dialogue projects have been the initiative of individual curators, presenters, or other programmers rather than an institutional commitment. Like individual artists, these individuals often find themselves in the role of educating a cultural institution about community engagement and its value and extending what new skills they have learned to other staff, sometimes pushing the boundaries of the organization.

In the disciplines cited above, an underlying shift in the role of cultural institutions in their communities facilitated the emergence of this work. The earliest trend, pervasive throughout the arts, was the critical need to develop audiences. From this orientation, more deliberate efforts evolved to build ongoing relationships with the public. By reorienting toward achieving impact in such areas as community development, cultural identity, and social change, some cultural institutions and artists laid a groundwork for exploring arts-based civic dialogue activity. Community-based arts organizations and theaters operating close to their communities proved well positioned philosophically to engage in arts-based civic dialogue activity and to provide models for others. In addition, national service organizations, such as the American Association of Museums, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, the American Festival Project, Americans for the Arts, and the National Alliance of Media Arts and Culture, as well as regional groups such as Alternate Roots, have played key roles in convening their fields and cultivating resources.

Arts-based civic dialogue is emerging in other disciplines such as music and literature, but with less of a field-wide focus. Parallel trends in related areas have increased the potential for arts-based civic dialogue in various fields and disciplines. In the humanities, public programs that incorporate cultural components and discussions led by humanities scholars have established a trend in contextual programming and public dialogue about civic issues. The arts-in-education field, emphasizing the development of curriculum-based activity, has pressed cultural institutions to develop sophisticated approaches and methodologies to integrate the arts with other learning goals. Innovations in museum education, including inquiry-driven approaches to interpretive materials, have prompted more open-ended investigations of context and perspectives.

## Study Findings

### Common Factors for Effective Arts-based Civic Dialogue

**C**ultural organizations employ a variety of methods to stimulate civic dialogue. They may plan dialogue activities to *augment* the art experience, such as program notes, exhibition labeling, lectures, and panel discussions, with the intent to enhance the audience’s connection to the issue as well as the art.

In contrast, dialogue activities may be *integrated* throughout the development or implementation of the cultural project. Artists may include people as informants or actual cocreators in their artistic process, or facilitate participants’ own creative work. An integrated approach to dialogue is often characterized by sustained or cumulative activity.

Experienced planners of dialogue activities have learned that a knowledge of context, skill in designing and facilitating dialogue, and an understanding of obstacles that prevent people from engaging in dialogue are all critical to the work. Projects that effectively incorporate civic dialogue appear to consider, first and foremost, the unique qualities of the artist and dynamics of the community. The importance of understanding the history of dialogue on an issue within a community helps to ensure the integrity of goals, relationships, and credibility for new dialogue efforts.

Artists and cultural institutions cited a number of other common practices key to achieving quality civic dialogue:

*Neutral and “safe” space in which people feel comfortable enough to engage in difficult discussion.* To create “safe space for unsafe ideas,” cultural organizations have experimented with a variety of programs and discussion formats, ranging from social gatherings with a food focus to collaborative youth projects in the community. Some projects have used spaces other than arts institutions, such as religious facilities, libraries, and children’s museums, which are perceived as safe or neutral spaces for volatile issues.

*Engaging people in dialogue about issues and ideas can be made easier and the quality of dialogue made deeper when people are involved in the art-making process.* Personal expression through art-making opens up personal and collective channels for a rich dialogue.

*Meaningful dialogue depends on effective facilitation.* Substantive and transformative dialogues are facilitated by deft guides who create a sense of trust, respect, and safety; make perceptive connections between the art and the issue; assist participants in linking personal experiences with universal themes; and encourage participation. Choice and preparation of facilitator are crucial elements of effective civic dialogue.



*Frequent, varied, and sustained approaches to dialogue are important to engage multiple perspectives on an issue, promote adequate focus, involve people in various ways to accommodate differences, and, over the long term, establish an identity for the cultural institution as a place for civic dialogue.* Civically engaged art may be most successful when it involves people in the issue or topic over time. Arts and cultural organizations often need to realign internal philosophies and structures to support and sustain effective arts-based civic dialogue. They may also benefit from partnering with other groups to involve targeted participants, provide more comfortable venues for dialogue, tap expertise on a particular issue, and sustain dialogue beyond a single project.

## Civic Considerations in Undertaking Arts-based Civic Dialogue Projects

**A**s artists and cultural organizations seek to address civic concerns, the challenges of connecting their work to the civic realm have become apparent.

*Many artists and institutions are wary of taking on leadership, or “ownership,” of a civic issue.* Most cultural institutions see themselves as a catalyst or forum for dialogue rather than as advocate or agent for change.

*Both cultural and dialogue-sponsoring organizations have been cautious about the naming and framing of issues.* The label given to a project has the potential to encourage or discourage participation. The framing of issues should emerge from the project’s participants rather than from an outside entity.

*Attracting participation from diverse age, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups is a challenge.* Oftentimes, issues that do not affect people directly are not perceived as urgent, and social conditions such as illiteracy, race and class distinctions, and the demands of daily life can hinder active participation. Arts leaders must have an understanding of obstacles to participation and develop new efforts that transcend established audiences and marketing practices.

*An artwork or activity may not always provide a literal path to an issue or to dialogue about an issue.* Interpretation, education activities, and cumulative programming are all avenues that may help people to make the transition from the art experience to the discussion.

*Politically charged issues and differing politics can escalate into a confrontation rather than ease tensions.* Conflict can be an appropriate and positive aspect of exchange, and its absence can mean a lack of trust in the process or the facilitators, or that diverse perspectives have been excluded.

*There is potential for the art or resulting dialogue to cause controversy.* By its very nature, art has the power to elicit strong emotional reactions. Unprepared audiences and participants may be unable to move beyond the controversial and visceral impact of the art to a frame of mind in which constructive dialogue can occur. Arts leaders should prepare not only audiences but also funders and civic supporters for potential controversy.

While anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that artists and cultural institutions can be potent contributors to public discourse, there is a recognized lack of serious, outcome-based evaluation. The problem of identifying and evaluating civic impacts poses multiple challenges. One is the difficulty, if not sometimes the impossibility, of pre-determining explicit outcomes of arts-based civic dialogue work, given the variables and dynamics of human exchange and civic context. In addition, the long-term nature of many projects poses challenges in evaluating outcomes. There may be several endpoints to a project at which different outcomes could be assessed, or outcomes may not be evident for a long time. Finally, methods of assessing outcomes have been primarily informal. There is a need for feasible models of tracking and assessing outcomes.

## Aesthetic Considerations in Linking Art to Civic Dialogue

**T**he study reflected upon the aesthetic implications of linking art to civic dialogue and made some overarching observations.

*Innovation in the creation of new work as well as presentation of works from the canon occurs when artists and institutions connect their work to the civic realm.* Artists have expanded their formal vocabulary and have developed rich layers of social meaning in their work as they consider multiple perspectives on an issue or choose to engage with the public in developing their work. Curators and presenters have pursued imaginative themes and contextual approaches to presenting and interpreting existing work in linking it to contemporary civic issues and new publics. Many historic works have endured as significant contributions to the arts and contemporary works, such as *Twilight: Los Angeles* and the *Mining the Museum* exhibition, have received high critical acclaim.

*Civically engaged art requires a recognition of process—the process of public engagement involved in creating the work—as well as product as an aesthetic dimension of the work.* When community involvement is integral to the creation of an artwork or the development of a curatorial approach, artists and curators must determine the way they wish to incorporate community input and aesthetic with their own vision and aesthetics. Further, current aesthetic criteria and definitions for civically engaged art are inadequate for communicating about the multidimensional nature of the work. New criteria are necessary that consider the artwork in its entirety within its social contexts. Artists, curators and others in the field view new criteria as important to facilitating description and discourse about the work, and also to articulating standards by which to judge it.

Artists and presenters believe that, as interest in arts-based civic dialogue grows, creators and organizers should not lose sight of the essential role of metaphor in achieving aesthetic and dialogue goals. Study participants concurred that civically engaged work is stronger aesthetically when it creates the opportunity for personal interpretation of content and meaning. They express concern that art may become overly didactic or literal as it seeks to address civic issues. At the same time, they recognize that public expectations about aesthetic form may be challenged by unfamiliar styles and new genres, which could discredit the message and/or create obstacles to dialogue. Many types of work challenge the public's understanding of what art is; some post-modern artwork has proven particularly challenging. Therefore, a wide range of aesthetics and artistic approaches to the work is valuable in order to present the opportunity to engage many different publics in civic dialogue.

## Challenges and Opportunities

**T**he study revealed a number of challenges that require a creative response if this emergent field is to flourish. These challenges represent opportunities for arts leaders, scholars, public policy-makers, civic dialogue organizers, and funders to build on the important efforts to date and to decisively advance this valuable work.

**Foster exchange and knowledge-building across disciplines.** Arts-based civic dialogue tends to be isolated and confined within particular arts disciplines. As a consequence, there are few opportunities for counterparts in various disciplines to inform each other of innovations, draw on differing perspectives in discussions of best practices, or collaborate on advancing recognition of the work. Opportunities for artists, curators, and institutional leaders to meet across disciplines, and with other civic dialogue leaders, would further the sharing of innovations and study methodologies, including methods of evaluating impact.

**Enhance understanding of the historical precedents and global contexts of arts-based civic dialogue.** Much arts-based civic dialogue, and most criticism, has evolved without an understanding of historic precedents, related writing, and scholarship, or of comparable contemporary activity, except perhaps within specific disciplines. In addition, there is limited awareness of the established traditions of arts and civic dialogue in other societies, which could inform work in this country. Documentation and dissemination of current program models and methodologies and support for scholarly research and writing from many vantage points—art, history, sociology, and cultural anthropology—would provide the contextual knowledge required to advance the field.

**Promote institutional capacity-building by disseminating best practices.** Many institutions that engage in arts-based civic dialogue find that it challenges traditional staff structures and assumptions about audience development, public education, and outreach, as well as artistic production and curatorial decision-making. Few models are available to guide organizational leaders as they proceed by trial and error, and limited opportunities exist for the lessons they learn to benefit others. To help organizations consider aspects of organizational mission, policy, structure, and practice, provide models and commission case studies that illustrate what is needed to effectively implement arts-based civic dialogue.

**Cultivate innovation and collaboration.** Within the field's existing infrastructure, few structures and limited resources exist to nurture the projects of independent artists and curators who may be without an institutional affiliation during the early stages of an arts-based civic dialogue initiative. Likewise, there are few venues for framing the type of cross-disciplinary collaboration and experimentation among cultural institutions and with civic dialogue leaders. To help spur greater achievement, develop laboratories in which the artistic initiatives of artists and curators may be strengthened, and at the same time also encourage opportunities for cross-disciplinary efforts and exploration of new programming approaches.

**Advance training of young artists as well as the professional development of curators and institutional leaders.** An informal body of knowledge exists within certain arts disciplines concerning the principles, skills, and methodologies that contribute to successful arts-based civic dialogue work. But that



knowledge has not made its way into the professional training programs that shape young artists, and there are few venues in which practicing artists and leaders of arts institutions can access that expertise. To disseminate those insights, assist arts training programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels to experiment with curricula that enable young artists to integrate development of civic dialogue and aesthetic skills. For artists, curators, and institutional leaders, help to establish opportunities such as workshops and symposia through which they may advance their skills and learn from each other.

**Develop a vocabulary for criticism of and communicating about arts-based civic dialogue work.**

Existing aesthetic standards, terminology, and models for critical analysis and evaluation rarely recognize the unique features of civically engaged art and often are inadequate for communicating the multidimensional, process-oriented nature of the work. As with the isolation evident in creative work, the few critics, authors, and publications active in this area tend to address a limited audience within specific disciplines. To encourage development of a broader critical perspective, stimulate analysis, interpretation, and discussion about the work among critics and journalists, including those within the arts as well as those addressing broad audiences.

**Increase public awareness of the role of artists and cultural institutions in civic life.**

Despite a growing body of arts-based civic dialogue work, artists and cultural leaders in the U.S. often are viewed as qualified solely to address arts-specific issues and are not included among civic leaders. This contrasts with many other societies that have a long and respected tradition of artists and cultural leaders exercising leadership on important civic issues. Widely promoted national awards would draw attention to artists and cultural institutions that have demonstrated leadership and innovation in the emerging arts-based civic dialogue field and their role in civic life.

**A number of convergent factors signal this as an opportune time for advancing the arts-based civic dialogue field: Increasing recognition of the importance of dialogue to democracy; a lively array of artistic activity and aesthetic innovations nourishing dialogue on a wide range of critical issues; growing institutional interest in this arena; and a clearer picture beginning to take shape regarding the accomplishments, promise, and needs of this field and its leaders. The time is now to bolster the position of artists, curators, and cultural institutions whose imagination has proved a potent force in animating democracy through the arts and civic dialogue.**

## Introduction

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Although many artists and some cultural institutions have pioneered artistic investigations that intersect with civic issues, the role of the arts in contributing to public discourse on civic issues remains relatively uncharted territory. A significant opportunity exists to further explore the aesthetics and processes of art that promotes civic dialogue.

Recognizing this, the Ford Foundation awarded a grant to Americans for the Arts to undertake a study of current activity and best practices among artists and arts and cultural organizations whose work intends to engage the public in dialogue on key civic issues. The purpose of *Animating Democracy: The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue* is to map the current field of endeavor, identify issues and trends, and suggest opportunities for leaders in the field, policymakers, and funders to work together to support and strengthen work in this arena. A specific goal of the report is to stimulate a cross-fertilization of ideas and efforts as arts leaders learn the perspectives of those active in civic dialogue and as practitioners of civic dialogue are stimulated to consider the arts as integral facets of their efforts.

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**A specific goal of the report is to stimulate a cross-fertilization between arts leaders and practitioners of civic dialogue.**

This study acknowledges the varied ways, historically and in current times, that the arts have reflected on and prompted discourse on social, political, and civic matters. Within this broader role, however, the focus of this study is on a particular facet of activity and possibility—cultural organizations and artists who intend, through their work, to stimulate, support, and advance public discourse on matters of civic importance as a conscious, purposeful aspect of artistic innovation, creation, presentation, and dissemination. This specific focus amplifies civic dialogue as one of many ways by which cultural institutions might deploy their artistic resources to play a civic role.

## Scope

The study explored the following areas:

- Particular strengths and opportunities that different arts disciplines bring to the goal of engaging the public in and creating venues for dialogue;
- The aesthetic nature of work that seeks to embrace both artistic achievement and civic discourse;
- Social and practical factors influencing the success of artistic and cultural programming that engages people in civic dialogue;
- Challenges faced by artists, curators, producers, and leaders of arts and cultural institutions doing this type of work; and
- Opportunities to support and strengthen work in this arena.

Observations in these areas were based on the experiences of more than 70 artistic, organizational, and civic efforts relevant to the study of arts-based civic dialogue. A selection of more than 50 were briefly profiled. Abstracts of these profiles are organized by discipline and field in Appendix A and introduced by an overview of highlights within each discipline.

## Methods

This study was conducted under the auspices of Americans for the Arts' Institute for Community Development and the Arts. Anna Deavere Smith, noted performer, educator, and writer, served as artistic adviser to the project. Ms. Smith is a recent recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship and, during 1996, served as the first artist-in-residence at the Ford Foundation. The project team for this study included consultants Barbara Schaffer Bacon, Cheryl Yuen, and Pam Korza, with Americans for the Arts staff Robert Lynch, president/CEO; and Nina Ozlu, vice president. Guiding the study was a national advisory committee representing a range of cultural, civic, and artistic perspectives, including:

Judith Baca, artist and artistic director, Social and Public Art Resource Center, Los Angeles

Kim Chan, director of programming, Washington Performing Arts Society, Washington, D.C.

Anna Deavere Smith, theater artist, San Francisco

Zelda Fichandler, chair, Graduate Acting Program, New York University

Michael Hightower, commissioner, Fulton County Government, Atlanta

Kinshasha Holman Conwill, director, The Studio Museum, New York

David Kahn, executive director, Connecticut Historical Society; former director, Brooklyn Historical Society

Stanley Katz, director, Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies; former president, American Council of Learned Societies

Abel Lopez, associate producing director, GALA Hispanic Theatre, Washington, D.C.

William Siemering, public media consultant, a founder of National Public Radio

Wayne Winborne, director of Program and Policy Research, The National Conference, New York

The study was conducted from 1996 to 1998. Activities included:

- A national scan of arts and cultural institutions, artists, funders, civic groups, and literature to identify activity and trends;
- Interviews to learn about the experience of artists and arts and cultural institutions involved in this work, including those supported by the Ford Foundation and others whose work came to light (see Appendix C);
- Focus group discussions of arts and nonarts field leaders, funders, and policymakers (see Appendix C); and
- A report summarizing findings and recommendations for distribution among arts, cultural, philanthropic, and civic dialogue leaders.

## Key Concepts

Throughout the project, it proved challenging to clearly define key terms and concepts due to the variety and complexity of the work. Neat definitions are nearly impossible, and the study tended to broaden its definitions as arts-based civic dialogue activity was examined and better understood. The definitions that evolved are offered below.

**Civic issue**—For this study, civic issues of primary interest were characterized as being *complex* or multidimensional; *cross-cutting*, that is, of concern to multiple segments of a community; and *contested* by various stakeholders, eliciting multiple and often conflicting perspectives on the issue. Civic issues could be defined as specifically local or having a broader regional or national focus.

**Artistic work**—Artistic works in all disciplines were reviewed. Artworks that had been commissioned, artist-initiated, or were the result of artist or artist-community collaboration, in addition to the presentation of existing contemporary works or works of the Western canon, were studied.

**Public**—The study focused on how cultural institutions reach beyond existing arts audiences to engage a broader public. “Public” was defined inclusively as centering on ordinary citizens interested in or affected by a particular issue and representing multiple viewpoints.

**Public discourse** encompasses multiple streams of sustained, informed communication and ideas concerning a civic issue within the public sphere. Discourse may include dialogue. Public discourse reflects various and usually simultaneous levels of communication around a civic issue—private conversation, organized discussion forums, news media reporting and editorials, and political debate. Artists and institutional presenters may, in their programming, deliberately or inadvertently stimulate public discourse around a civic issue.

**Arts-based civic dialogue**—For this study, *dialogue* was understood to be a deliberative process. A definition of dialogue was adopted from the Study Circles Resource Center: *Two or more parties with differing viewpoints working toward common understanding in an open-ended, face-to-face discussion.* More specifically, *civic dialogue* refers to dialogue focused on civic issues. *Arts-based civic dialogue* refers to cultural projects in which the primary intent of dialogue is to focus on a civic issue. In particular, the study sought examples in which multiple perspectives on an issue were presented as a basis for discussion, either through the art presentation itself or as a deliberate aspect of the dialogue. Because civic dialogue is inherently political and often confrontational, debate and conflict were recognized as natural and useful aspects of civic dialogue. While the study examined dialogue projects that might be oriented toward influencing positive social change, it was not primarily focused on social activism.

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**The study highlights opportunities for the creation of new work that is of both artistic and civic significance.**

## Intended Outcomes

The dissemination of this study among cultural and civic leaders and those working in fields or organizations mounting public dialogue activities has several intended outcomes:

To recognize and make more visible artists and cultural and civic institutions that have done exemplary work in this arena; to introduce models and methodologies helpful in strengthening practice on the part of cultural institutions and dialogue sponsors; to catalyze connections between cultural institutions and civic dialogue sponsors that can result in more innovative and resonant dialogue and enrich public discourse; and to bring to light the increasing recognition that the civic arena is a powerful source of artistic motivation by inspiring work that is aesthetically innovative and that enhances audiences' experience of art through discussion of civic issues.

In sum, by highlighting and examining work in this arena, the study points to opportunities for the creation of new work that is of both artistic and civic significance.

## Animating Democracy

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### The Arts and Civic Dialogue: Four Cases

#### BACH'S ST. JOHN PASSION: Community Reconciliation

**S**econd-Century Text Creates Modern Cultural Dilemma”: Such was the headline in the *Eugene Weekly* prior to the opening of the 1995 Oregon Bach Festival. When organizers first selected Bach's *St. John Passion* to start the festival, they did not foresee the potency of that musical work, written in 1724, to catalyze discussion about religious-based prejudices in their own community.

The festival theme—War, Reconciliation, and Peace—had been chosen to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. Many people, however—particularly from the area's Jewish population—felt that the selection of the *St. John Passion* ran counter to the theme of reconciliation. Its narrative, based on the biblical Gospel of St. John, directly blames the Jews for the death of Jesus and was used for hundreds of years as justification for the denigration and persecution of Jews. In addition, the Eugene area was still in the wake of an earlier local incident—a gunfire attack by neo-Nazi skinheads on Temple Beth Israel. The *Eugene Weekly* summarized the festival dilemma for many: “How can reconciliation and peace be represented by a musical work whose text has been an incitement to genocide?”

War  
& Peace  
Reconciliation

When questions about the *St. John Passion* first arose, festival directors painstakingly considered their options. Their decision to retain the work was motivated by recognition that the music, in fact, offered “a potent opportunity to grapple with the ethical and moral questions involved in the process of reconciliation.” In a letter to the community, executive director Neill Archer Roan asked: How do people determine appropriate action when sacred texts of one culture or creed are interpreted to negatively characterize people of another culture or creed? ...How do we relate to historical works of art when those works illustrate conflicts between peoples, values, or cultures? Do we judge them by the standards of our time or by the standards of the times in which they were written? In addition, Roan wrote, “Rather than arbitrarily consign a work of art to the dustbin of history, we hope to renew its craft and beauty by freshening and enlivening the dialogue of the people who hear it.”



*Helmut Rilling, artistic director and conductor, Oregon Bach Festival. Photo, Hugh Barton*

Assisted by partnerships with local churches, veterans' groups, and other organizations, festival organizers developed forums for deliberating over the meaning of the *St. John Passion* and the theme of reconciliation. Public discussions, called "Gatherings," were convened during the months before the festival at various sites. People listened to music from the program and discussed the festival theme and the text of the *St. John Passion*, remarking on how "meaningful and unifying the dialogue was between complete strangers." Many expressed greater appreciation for the "vast differences in people's perceptions of significant issues." The Gatherings, as well as carefully annotated program notes, keyed people into the music's lyrics, heightening awareness and understanding of this element of the total musical experience. The evening before the performance, an interfaith service of reconciliation was sponsored by the Two Rivers Ecumenical Ministries and representatives from Jewish temples, in cooperation with the festival. In many churches, sermons were delivered exploring the issues. Opinions also circulated through letters to the editor and in protest leaflets at the opening performance. A festival journal, *Creative Journeys*, compiled perspectives from people in the community and was widely distributed.

**"Rather than arbitrarily consign a work of art to the dustbin of history, we hope to renew its craft and beauty by freshening and enlivening the dialogue of the people who hear it."**

Neill Archer Roan,  
former executive director,  
Oregon Bach Festival

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On the night of the performance, the *St. John Passion* was picketed by an Orthodox Jewish rabbi who passed out a handbill fervently appealing to audience members to stand and turn their backs to the performers during the anti-Semitic parts of the work. He closed his statement with the words, "I pray that we all have our consciousness raised about this most important issue." Festival staff endorsed the rabbi's efforts with the conviction that it was crucial for conflicting perspectives to be heard.

The Bach Festival's *St. John Passion* demonstrates the potential of an enduring work of art to reflect meaning over time and to find renewal, in effect, within a contemporary context.

## THE SHIPYARD PROJECT: Coping with Transition

**A**t the launching of the *Shipyards Project* residency, nine dancers offered a preview to an audience of retired nuclear engineers, Rotary Club members, teachers, and real estate appraisers at Portsmouth, New Hampshire's Music Hall. The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange transformed its initial impressions of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyards into a captivating dance. According to the *Portsmouth Herald*, audience response suggested that the dance company had already elicited a "new respect" for the shipyard. The company also seemed ready for the challenges of its upcoming residency. The *Herald* reported, "During a question-and-answer period near the end of the program, Liz Lerman was asked the potentially tricky question about how the issue of toxic wastes would be addressed. 'I don't think we'll have a point of view,' said Lerman. 'But this will be a place where different points of view can be heard.' Even if people hear a point of view they do not like, Lerman said, 'we have to stay in the room together. If people here can talk about it, listen to it, then that's a start. Art is good at that.'"

The purpose of the *Shipyards Project* was to explore the significance of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyards to the lives of people in Portsmouth. As the country's oldest naval base and a facility that repairs nuclear submarines, the shipyard had been at the center of many issues. The project was conceived by the Music Hall of Portsmouth as a way to address anxieties in the community resulting from recent downsizing and efforts to close the yard.

**"This will be a place where different points of view can be heard. . . . If people here can talk about it, listen to it, then that's a start. Art is good at that."**

Liz Lerman, director,  
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

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Throughout the two-year residency, Lerman and her dancers, current and retired shipyard workers, officers' wives, youth, and local citizens told their stories to one another. Dance Exchange members and local participants trained in collecting oral histories led story workshops. Although the initial goal was to focus the residency on the implications of closing the yard, other issues emerged through the dialogue process: The shipyard's nuclear waste storage and fears of contamination; racism and sexism in the military; the challenges and fears faced by military wives; and recollections of traumatic historic events. These issues and themes became the framework for discussions and the raw material from which the Dance Exchange developed a commissioned dance piece.

The project culminated in a three-week event featuring an opening ceremony, performances by Lerman's company involving middle-school students and local guest performers, seacoast songs composed and performed by musicians from Portsmouth, a shipyard fashion show "annotated" with stories collected for the project, and a culminating dance on boats and bridges performed by the Liz Lerman dancers and community members. Music Hall project director Jane Hirshberg recapped the results. Project principals noted its transformative powers. Dancer Peter DiMuro described the artistic impact of the project on the



company: “Portsmouth feeds our art. We are pushed to explore new metaphors because we work with different stories and different sites at the yard.” For Hirshberg, the project catalyzed a “profound change” in her feelings about the military. It served to humanize the shipyard for her, and she gained respect for the generations of families that have relied on it for their livelihood.



*Liz Lerman Dance Exchange performing during the Shipyard Project. Photo, George Barker*

Participants found an entry to contemporary dance through the project. Early on, many had admitted to feeling puzzled as to how their experiences could translate into movement. Their questions became the focus of discussions. Those who participated in storytelling and dance activities clearly came to see their gestures and experiences in terms of movement metaphors. Lerman observes,

“Once you’ve followed the process of hearing and telling stories, and then turning those stories into a series of movements, you’ve changed your ability to be an audience.” Through the *Shipyard Project*, community members also discovered unexpected connections between people as they explored value systems and beliefs different from their own. A shipyard employee commented, “... The way Liz presents things, you open up and trust. Liz says, ‘Come play,’ and you are participating ... I never would have done anything like this if I hadn’t gotten involved in the project. Through the medium of dance, we can tackle threatening issues without threatening anyone.”

**“Through the medium of dance,  
we can tackle threatening issues  
without threatening anyone.”**

Employee, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard

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## MINING THE MUSEUM: Excavating History

**M**ining the Museum, which opened in April 1992 at the Maryland Historical Society, was a groundbreaking exhibit, not only for the career of artist Fred Wilson, but for the Historical Society and the museum field as a whole. Now recognized internationally for his installations—collaborations with museums to reexamine their past and present roles in society—this was Wilson’s first opportunity to apply his views on institutional racism to a museum and its own collection. Previously, he had created mock museum installations in alternative spaces. *Mining the Museum* altered fundamentally the Maryland Historical Society’s understanding of itself as an institution. Winner of the 1992 Best Museum Exhibition Award from the American Association of Museums, *Mining* urged museum professionals to “investigate their perceptions of race, history, and the role [of] cultural institutions in shaping our views,” wrote Susannah Cassidy in *Museum News*.

Wilson was invited to Baltimore by Lisa Corrin of The Contemporary, the city’s alternative museum-without-walls. Corrin introduced Wilson to the city’s museums and invited him to choose one with which he would like to work. He chose the historical society, founded in 1844 and holding a collection of more than 100,000 artifacts, because it seemed the archetypal museum that had not changed. In fact, the historical society had been considering ways it could become more relevant and regarded the opportunity to work with Wilson as “a way of gaining credibility for ideas which the staff had identified as important new directions for the institution,” according to chief curator Jennifer Goldsborough. In a spirit of mutual commitment to an as-yet undetermined exhibition, the historical society, The Contemporary, and Wilson established the framework for an extended residency in which Wilson had access to the historical society’s entire collection, as well as its personnel.



*“Metal Work,” silver tea service and slave shackles, installation by artist Fred Wilson as part of the Mining the Museum exhibition.*

Wilson spent a year getting to know the museum, the community it served, its structure, how it worked, and the people who worked there, from the maintenance staff to the executive director. The collection was a central focus of the residency as well. “Going through the storage rooms was as important as understanding what was on view.

I let the objects and paintings speak to me, let them tell me their story,” said Wilson. Wilson’s goal was to enhance the institution’s and the public’s awareness that museums can validate or diminish human experience through what is on display—or what is not.

*Mining the Museum* occupied eight linked rooms of the historical society. Wilson resurrected long-hidden items and juxtaposed them with other more conventional objects and art from the society's collections. The result was jarring and thought-provoking. In a standard exhibition case labeled simply, "Metalwork, 1793-1880," slave shackles appeared in a case alongside an ornate silver tea service. Elsewhere, Victorian chairs were positioned in front of a whipping post. In still another installation, Wilson turned a dainty Victorian dollhouse into a scene of mayhem, playing out a slave's fantasy rebellion against slave owners. Labeling was intentionally spare to encourage visitors to reach their own conclusions. Through the element of surprise, Wilson caused visitors to rethink their history and attitudes, as well as to consider how the museum as an institution portrays the past.

**"Art can make a difference in people's lives,  
museums can make a difference in society,  
and I can make a difference as an artist."**

Fred Wilson

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During Wilson's residency, students and educators were invited to meet with the artist, and when the show opened, gallery talks and a panel entitled, "Mainstreaming Cultures on the Margins in Museum Practices" included the artist, museum professionals, and local artists in discussion of the work. The exhibit transformed the Maryland Historical Society. National news media coverage, as well as the national museum community's attention on the exhibit, sparked public curiosity. The subject of the exhibit drew to the historical society members of Baltimore's African American community who had never previously set foot inside. Attendance for *Mining the Museum* set an all-time record. The visitor's book conveyed messages from descendants of slaves and slave owners who said they were able to connect to the artist's vision of history. The historical society invited Wilson back to recreate a segment of the exhibit for permanent display. Since *Mining*, the society's new exhibits have become more culturally inclusive than those of the past, and exhibits have been developed to specifically feature African American history in Maryland. The museum's relationship to its collection and its community has been fundamentally changed.

When *Mining the Museum* closed after an extended 11-month run, Fred Wilson reflected on the overwhelming response to it. He called the Maryland Historical Society and The Contemporary "daring and open-minded, risk-taking and intelligent museums" in their collaboration to make this landmark project happen. "It made my faith and trust in others bloom—and my faith that art can make a difference in people's lives, museums can make a difference in society, and I can make a difference as an artist."

## TWILIGHT: LOS ANGELES, 1992 Looking for the Humanness

**I**t would have been criminal to have simply produced *Twilight* as a stage play without capturing the opportunity for community dialogue,” recalls Laura Penn, managing director of the Intiman Theatre in Seattle, about its 1996 presentation of Anna Deavere Smith in her provocative one-person play, *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*. *Twilight* is the product of Deavere Smith’s search for the character of Los Angeles in the wake of the initial Rodney King verdict. In it, she plays 36 characters based on verbatim transcripts of interviews she conducted with individuals directly or indirectly involved in the Los Angeles disturbances. About the play, she says, “In such a time as this, when our national conversation about race has become, to an extent, merely fragments of monologues, the theater of *Twilight* seeks to suggest that a conversation can be created from these fragments.” Recognizing the play’s capacity to stimulate such a conversation, Intiman Theatre seized the opportunity *Twilight* afforded for discussion of issues about race and identity in Seattle and, at the same time, sought to build on its reputation for working creatively with playwrights.

**“Perhaps  
the solutions lie,  
in part, in the humanness  
of the audience, and in  
the potential for dialogue  
and action after the  
curtain goes down.”**

Anna Deavere Smith

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In addition to its regular mainstage performances of *Twilight*, Intiman Theatre designed a program that brought together 250 young people and 250 members of Seattle’s business community to explore together how race and identity influence their perspectives of life in Seattle. It first assembled a steering committee composed of youth and adults from the school district, as well as members of the police department and business community. The steering committee helped to identify and invite participants for a daylong program that began with an interactive drama workshop and culminated with a performance of *Twilight* by Anna Deavere Smith and a post-performance discussion. Youth were invited from local high schools and the Seattle Center Peace Academy, which trains high school youth to be facilitators of conflict resolution in the schools. The Chamber of Commerce, a collaborator on the event, invited its members as well as employees of the Boeing Corporation. Then Mayor Norman Rice also participated.

In the morning, youth and adults participated side-by-side in workshops based on Intiman’s *Living History* program, an arts-in-education program that introduces students to the arts, humanities, and ethical issues through theater and that encourages the development of critical thinking skills. Intiman actors staged a scene of a shooting and participants were asked to interpret what they saw. Discussion facilitated by the artists led to the participants’ realization that there can be many different stories depending on the observer’s or the character’s point of view and demonstrated how race and class influence people’s perspectives of current events.

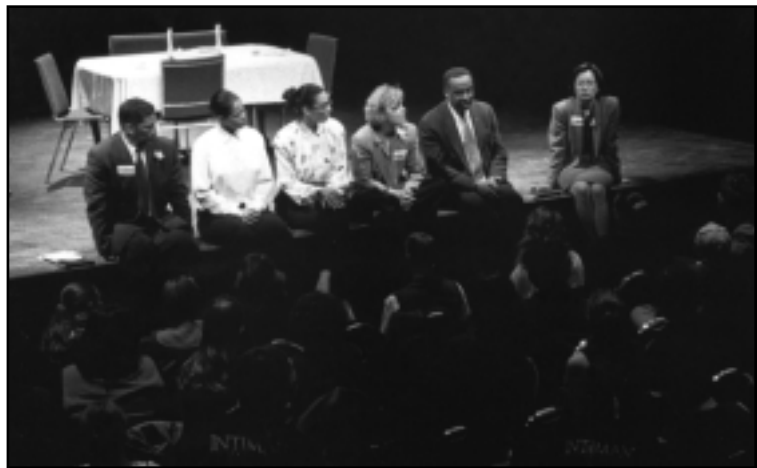
After lunch, participants watched the performance, *Twilight*. While the morning workshop had succeeded in prompting participants to intellectually explore issues of race, the experience of seeing *Twilight* prompted, for many, a direct and emotional connection to the issues. Post-performance discussion gave evidence to the power of the play. The discussion began tentatively as Anna Deavere Smith, the superintendent of schools, the mayor, and the chief of police fielded somewhat typical audience questions. At one point, an audience member challenged an official whose response she found to be rote and unsatisfactory. On the spot, the official delivered a more personal answer, which changed the tenor of the dialogue from that point on to one that was deeper and more authentic. One white girl in the audience offered that she had noticed the black girl next to her crying during a particular scene in the play. It made her understand how background and experience influence interpretation and feelings about an issue. In many ways, this one child's observation achieved Deavere Smith's intent. "I am looking for the humanness inside the problems or the crises ... Perhaps, the solutions lie, in part, in the humanness of the audience, and in the potential for dialogue and action after the curtain goes down."

For participants, the intensity of the experience resonated long after the event, according to conversations Laura Penn had with many of them. Intiman Theatre maintains a commitment to connecting theater to local issues, although the intensity of labor involved in mounting efforts such as the *Twilight* program allows only a few productions to receive such attention in a given year. It is about "finding the heartbeat within a particular play," explains Penn, "and then finding ways of linking that power to audiences for whom it is relevant."

**It is about "finding the heartbeat within a particular play, and then finding ways of linking that power to audiences for whom it is relevant."**

Laura Penn, managing director,  
Intiman Theatre, Seattle

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*Discussion after a special performance of Twilight at Seattle's Intiman Theatre.  
Photo, Chris Bennion*

## Why Civic Dialogue?

*“What is the meaning of dialogue in an era when people don’t have time to talk to each other? Engagements in the public realm tend to be specialized or single-interest. Public dialogue has devolved to unanswered salvos almost in a kind of random way. The challenge is to redefine what a public dialogue is in this day and age.”*

**Jerry Allen, City of San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs**

**D**emocracy is animated by an informed public engaged in the issues affecting people’s daily lives. It draws its power from a public that is both responsible and responsive: Responsible for articulating its own interests; responsive to the need to balance conflicting interests both within and across cultures. Democracy is as vital as the means by which it educates people to value civic life and to practice active citizenship. Civic dialogue is one such means.

Dialogue plays a crucial role in civic life, giving voice to multiple perspectives on challenging civic issues and deepening understanding among those who participate. Dialogue’s crucial role threads throughout the country’s history, reaching back to Thomas Jefferson’s emphasis on the importance of a deliberative public possessing the freedom to express, discuss, and decide. A high level of public discourse has been viewed as necessary for democracy to function well.

Civic dialogue helps individuals relate their self-interests to the interest of the community. Dialogue can help diverse groups find common ground on a particular issue. Face-to-face exchange prompts people to develop a more multifaceted, human, realistic picture of their fellow citizens and of an issue, in the absence of which there is a tendency to stereotype opponents and reduce issues to extremes.

Yet, there is growing concern that opportunities for civic dialogue in this country have diminished in recent years. Polarization of opinion along ideological, racial, gender, and class lines; exclusive social structures that separate rich from poor and majorities from minorities; a sense of individual disempowerment; and the overwhelming nature of many of society’s problems are all factors contributing to this sense. Likewise, partisan politics and commercially driven news media engender an atmosphere of antagonism rather than education and exchange. Talk shows sensationalize and trivialize issues with sound-bite treatments. The failure of the political process and the media to engage local-level issues that speak directly to what people care about most is a key source of Americans’ disengagement from the civic realm.

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**Face-to-face exchange prompts people to develop a more multifaceted, human, realistic picture of their fellow citizens and of an issue.**

**The failure of the political process and the media to engage local-level issues that speak directly to what people care about most is a key source of Americans' disengagement from the civic realm.**

Perhaps most basically, the crosscutting nature of today's complex issues often places them outside of the traditional structures and settings such as civic organizations, labor unions, and political parties, which have served to organize civic discourse in the past.

## What is the Role of Artists and Cultural Institutions?

**R**ejuvenation of democracy is a concern at all levels of society, and in the renewal of civic dialogue, the arts can play a pivotal role. The arts and culture have long demonstrated a unique capacity to create public space for discussion of important civic issues where such space does not exist. In the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, in the summer of 1991, long-simmering interracial and interethnic tensions came to a head when an African American child was killed by a car in the entourage of the local Hasidic religious leader. In apparent retribution, a young rabbinical scholar was stabbed to death while surrounded by a group of black men. No immediately apparent neutral ground for constructive dialogue existed. The news media further inflamed the situation with negative and one-dimensional images of Crown Heights.

Two arts projects—one a cooperative effort of three cultural institutions and the other artist-driven—sought in different ways to play a constructive role. Theater artist Anna Deavere Smith created the Obie award-winning play *Fires in the Mirror* (see Appendix A) based on verbatim excerpts from interviews conducted with Crown Heights residents about the incidents. The piece premiered at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in New York City and was later adapted for film, along with a study guide for use in public and classroom discussions about racism. Her direct interaction with people in the community powerfully validated that many voices on the racial issue in Crown Heights should be heard. Continuing presentation of the play throughout the country, and the video made from it, provides an ongoing opportunity for the piece to stimulate discussion about this difficult issue.



*"Crown Heights: Perceptions and Realities," exhibition at the Brooklyn Historical Society; one part of the Crown Heights History Project.*

The Crown Heights History Project (see Appendix A-2), an effort of the Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn Children’s Museum and the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History, was developed to draw people together in a common endeavor and to facilitate dialogue and understanding. Cultural and historical exhibitions, public programs, and a video exploring the cultural histories of the different racial and ethnic groups in Crown Heights were produced by the three organizations and presented to residents, helping them to learn about each other. Exhibitions and other components were later used as classroom teaching tools and as permanent exhibits at the Children’s Museum.

Both projects demonstrate the unique capacity of the arts and culture to contribute to public discourse. These projects articulate complex issues in human terms and reframe preconceived notions in ways that reveal new understandings. The arts in general can express difficult ideas through metaphor; transcend the obvious to imagine solutions; communicate beyond the limits of language; serve as a herald to raise awareness about an issue; gather diverse publics for interaction at a common physical site; and transcend established social and political boundaries.

These contemporary examples emanate from a rich tradition in which artists have applied the power of art to reflect and explore both individual and common societal concerns. Many assert that the creation of art, in and of itself, is a civic act, consciously or unconsciously linked to and reflecting social and political context. Innumerable artists have assumed a more explicit role as social commentators, making political and social concerns the subject of their work. Through the power of their expression, artists continue to offer new ways of seeing and thinking about the world. The unique power of art lies in its ability to create indelible images; transcend rational thinking and intellectual process to elicit a more emotional and visceral response; transport the viewer or listener beyond one’s personal circumstances; portray simultaneously the personal and universal in the human condition; promote empathy for others’ circumstances; and validate or alter one’s perception of self.

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**Many assert that the creation of art, in and of itself, is a civic act, consciously or unconsciously linked to and reflecting social and political context.**

*“Art enables one to see oneself in another person’s place and [in doing so], promotes attitudes that are compatible with democratic discourse.”*

**Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center**



**Cultural institutions can offer the facilities, the organizational and interpretive capacity, and local connections to enable various publics to convene and engage in dialogue based on the experience of creative expression.**

Cultural institutions can also offer the facilities, organizational and interpretive capacity, and local connections to enable various publics to convene and engage in dialogue based on the experience of creative expression. Increasingly, art and cultural institutions are both volunteering and being called upon to play a role in public discourse on contemporary civic issues. The projects presented at the opening of this report—the *Oregon Bach Festival*, the *Shipyards Project*, *Mining the Museum*, and *Twilight*—succeeded in stimulating and supporting public dialogue in ways that other civic efforts did not and, perhaps, could not. These and other cultural institutions are experimenting with artistic forms that encourage audiences to explore through dialogue diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives on core issues. Surveys indicate that audiences, too, respond positively to cultural opportunities that provide greater depth of experience and understanding of the art they see and that engage issues that relate to their lives.

Beyond the basic role of producer, presenter, or exhibitor, cultural institutions are playing an important role as catalysts, conveners, or forums for civic dialogue. This capacity has been demonstrated by the experiences of the participants in this study, but it clearly has not been tapped to its potential. Public libraries, the field of journalism, and religious institutions have increasingly come to see themselves as having a civic function. Although arts and cultural institutions are recognized as contributors to community cultural life, they are not yet widely perceived as active players in civic discourse. In fact, many of these may not perceive themselves as civic institutions or leaders. Similarly, programs to promote civic discourse have occasionally tapped the arts as a catalyst for dialogue but have not involved artists and cultural institutions in more integrated ways. As Martha McCoy of the Study Circles Resource Center stated, “The arts world is rarely mentioned in the world of civic engagement. That can, and should, change.”

*“The role of the arts is in creating resonance. . . . Our job [as cultural institutions] is to validate the artist in creating that resonance.”*

**Neill Archer Roan, former director of the Oregon Bach Festival**

At the same time, this intersection of artistic imagination with the civic realm offers fertile ground for both aesthetic and programmatic innovation. For many artists and curators, the choice to venture into civic terrain yields powerful results—revitalized works from the traditional canon, as well as fresh approaches to form, content, and process. Such innovations enhance an audience’s experience of the arts, in addition to providing a rich aesthetic basis for considering contemporary issues.

## Historical Perspectives and Current Trends

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### America's Tradition of Civic Dialogue

**C**urrent efforts to foster civic dialogue have significant historic precedent. In Alexis de Tocqueville's chronicle of midnineteenth-century American life, *Democracy in America*, he noted the American tendency to join associations. James S. Fishkin comments in *The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy* that de Tocqueville was struck by the fact that "ordinary citizens without special power, status, or wealth could combine into groups that would seriously grapple with public problems even on a national stage." This view is echoed in the more contemporary concept of social capital—the idea that by association, people have power to facilitate other goals, such as civil rights or economic development.

De Tocqueville observed that this propensity for association, combined with freedom of the press, permitted a new kind of democracy.

Those who advocate for the need to revitalize democracy today refer directly to the key values or principles of democracy put forth by the authors of the Federalist papers. These include:

- **Political equality:** All citizens' views should count equally in an inclusive, representative process.
- **Deliberation:** A wide range of competing arguments should be considered through meeting and discussion.
- **Participation:** A significant proportion of the citizenry should be engaged in the democratic process.
- **Non-tyranny:** No sector of the citizenry should be deprived of rights or essential interests; the political process must avoid a tyranny of the majority.

The Federalists embodied these principles in their primary governmental structures—the Constitutional Convention and the town meeting. For a time, given the country's size, communication systems, and population, these principles seemed to work. But what de Tocqueville and some of the founding fathers had anticipated did come to pass. As the nation matured, society began to outgrow government as the primary means of democratic participation.

By the late 1800s, as the country's awareness of its own diversity grew, discontent arose that the structures of government, which ostensibly reflected these principles, left many people out. Basic values—equality and participation—were not being universally realized. Women in New York protested their exclusion from voting privileges, for example, and formed the League for Political Education, a forum for education and discussion. By the 1930s, the League was

addressing problems it saw with the mass media to advance citizen deliberation and created “Town Meeting of the Air,” a radio broadcast concept adapted to the new technology.

As sentiment spread that democratic participation needed to expand, various streams of activity emerged to address social concerns. Through the civil rights, feminist, peace, labor, adult education, and citizen participation movements, people related their individual interests to broader areas of public concern. In so doing, they renewed democratic participation.

## Current Trends in Civic Dialogue

**C**urrent efforts to increase and improve opportunities for civic dialogue have been initiated by local, regional, and national organizations whose goal is to encourage ordinary citizens to become involved in the processes of democracy and public life.

Democracy and political action are the focus, for example, of Citizen Jury, based at the Jefferson Center in Minneapolis. Citizen Jury convenes nationally representative groups of voters to debate public policy and character issues facing candidates for public office. The community convention model, inspired by James Fishkin’s “deliberative opinion poll,” adapts the original town meeting format to large communities by breaking down into multiple small forums. These later converge at a convention at which the community determines its position on an issue and identifies specific actions to take.

Certain national organizations have focused on developing methods of public dialogue while involving a cross section of the public. Dialogue is viewed by these groups as critical to eliciting multiple and nuanced perspectives around complex, crosscutting issues. Organizations such as the Study Circles Resource Center (see Appendix A-45) and the National Issues Forums (see Appendix A-46) facilitate structured dialogue with the intent of deepening participants’ understanding and judgment on an issue and fostering respect for competing views. Study Circles and National Issues Forums provide materials in advance that prepare participants to consider various sides of an issue. Qualified facilitators monitor the integrity of the process.

Two national organizations have developed sophisticated approaches to facilitate dialogue on the issue of racism.

Facing History and Ourselves is a national educational organization that engages students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. The arts and humanities stimulate discussion, which challenges students to think beyond simple solutions to complex questions and to make connections between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.

The National Conference for Community and Justice (formerly the National Conference of Christians and Jews) is a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, bigotry, and racism in America. Its recent initiative, the National Conversation on Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in America, modeled focused discussion in workplace and community settings by bringing together a range of leading American thinkers for dialogue. The National Conference has made use of technology to telecast such discussions nationally, enabling both live and distant audience interaction. The National Endowment for the Humanities' *National Conversations in Pluralism and Identity* project (see Appendix A-50) was an intensive, three-year effort in which conversations across the country addressed the question, "What does it mean to be American?" The arts and humanities were utilized to inform and catalyze discussions.

Service and research organizations have sought to mobilize institutions and fields such as libraries, churches, and journalism to play an increased role in public dialogue. Libraries for the Future (see Appendix A-48), a national service organization for public libraries, assists libraries in developing projects that encourage public dialogue on civic issues and redefine the civic role of the library in a community. Libraries employ literature, film, and the humanities and frequently develop partnerships with art museums, public radio stations, and other agencies.

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism (Appendix A-47), the Project on Public Life and the Press, and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies are leading efforts in *civic journalism*. The Pew Center, for example, brings together major newspapers and television and radio stations and helps them to develop ways to reconnect with their communities by making coverage of local issues more meaningful. Using polls, surveys, focus groups, "living room conversations," and old-fashioned shoe leather reporting, local news media coalitions have found a number of ways to include citizen voices in their coverage.

## The Tradition of Civic Dialogue Within the Arts

**A**rtists traditionally have commented on or depicted contemporary issues through their work. As the following historical examples illustrate, art has proven powerful in its ability to stimulate or contribute to public discourse on civic issues. Moreover, artworks that address issues often represent aesthetic innovations of their time. Many have endured the test of time and continue to be presented, attesting to artistic excellence and the resonance of the original ideas embodied in the work. While historical antecedents in this type of work are typically not intended as formal, intentional vehicles of civic dialogue, four early 20th-century works nonetheless display in various ways the potential dimensions of such work.

- Issues of women's rights and gender equity have been powerfully articulated and brought to public awareness by artistic means. According to theater historians B. Donald Grose and O. Franklin Kenworthy, in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), Nora's decision to leave her home, husband, and children was hailed then, as now, as a call for women's rights in a male-dominated society. As well, the innovative realism of the play reflected the rise of the middle class and the movement toward a "theater of the people" that could effectively communicate its message to this audience. People throughout Europe reacted in disbelief that any woman would ever abandon her family, and for its German production, Ibsen was even required to change the ending of the play so that Nora would remain with her family. Nonetheless, *A Doll's House* continues to probe questions of gender, identity, and the social structures of marriage and family more than a century after it was first performed.
- In his hallmark film, *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein attempted to interpret and give emotional reinforcement to Soviet spectators and Bolshevik sympathizers. *Potemkin* depicts a mutiny aboard a naval ship, drawing on events that occurred during an unsuccessful uprising against the Russian monarchy in 1905. According to film historian Robert Sklar, Eisenstein emphasized, in this and other films, the centrality of the spectator's response, "creating a shock that would lead to audience perception and knowledge." Stylistically, Eisenstein developed the use of what he termed "intellectual montage—the juxtaposition of unrelated images to generate associations in the spectator's mind—conveying his message in powerful, metaphoric ways that still influence film and theater today.
- *The Green Table*, a ballet created in 1932 by Kurt Jooss, reflects the German choreographer's foretelling disquiet with the prevailing social currents during the interlude between the two World Wars. Addressing the perpetuation of war, Jooss dramatizes the moral and psychological dilemmas of violent conflict in which, ultimately, the only winner is death. His artistic concept for *The Green Table* was to treat this problem through allegory and archetypal characters and situations. The result was a groundbreaking modernist ballet. The piece opens and closes with the same scene, a green gaming table around which opposing leaders have reduced war and their industrial interests to a game of sorts, arguing but never finding resolution, symbolizing the ritualized cycle of war throughout history. In between, according to dance critic Marcia Siegel, the character of Death becomes "everyone's partner, effectively seducing them into his dance on the same terms by which they lived their lives." The Joffrey Ballet revived *The Green Table* in 1967 as the U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated, demonstrating the power of art not only to embody concerns of its own time but to find resonance in another period.

- The musical compositions of Antonin Dvorak during his two-and-a-half-year sojourn in the United States demonstrate the mirroring of artistic currents and civic issues. From the late 1890s to the beginning of World War II, the search for a national identity in concert music paralleled America's determination to establish its own cultural identity separate from Europe. Dvorak, a Czech composer who had come to America to lead the National Conservatory in New York, sought out African American and Native American music as sources for a new American musical vocabulary. Within the concert music world, the idea of introducing American folk and common musical forms to concert hall repertoire previously fixed in European classical traditions was a major aesthetic innovation, and it incited vigorous debate, particularly upon performance of Dvorak's *New World Symphony*. This debate about what is American music was made public in numerous articles in *The New York Times* and other newspapers and contributed to a broader public debate about American cultural identity.

In addition to the impact of individual works of art, certain artistic/humanistic traditions have spawned art which has supported or advanced civic ideals and interests of particular social groups.

Both the local arts field and the civic dialogue field trace their roots to the chautauqua and the lyceum movements. The chautauqua and the tent chautauqua circuit (1874-1924) brought theater and other touring arts to rural and small communities. Following the chautauqua the community theater movement developed, encouraging a shift from interested spectator to active participant, often with the goal of building community. The lyceum and lyceum speaker's bureaus (1826-1865) were aimed at the self-improvement of members through exposure to lectures by touring writers, philosophers, and scientists. The chautauqua and lyceum initiatives made existing communities the focus of their activity, encouraging participation and discussion at the grassroots level.

Later movements were stimulated by economic and political conditions. The Depression-era Federal Art Project and Federal Theater Project of the WPA employed artists in all disciplines, emphasizing their social role. WPA art often documented or addressed contemporary issues. Movements of the 1950s and 1960s, especially the civil rights movement and the black consciousness era, were significant in linking the arts with advances toward social justice. The Free Southern Theater, created in 1963 by John O'Neal and Gilm Moses, aimed to "stimulate creative and reflective thought among Negroes in the South . . . [and] to serve as an educational and cultural wing of the Freedom Movement" through a focus on community involvement, educational work, and touring. Efforts in 1965 by Cesar Chavez to unionize California farm workers launched a national mobilization of Chicanos known as La Causa, and art became closely aligned with the movement's political goal of economic democracy. The barrio mural

movement, reaching back to Diego Rivera, is perhaps the most enduring social art movement nationwide, creating murals that promote an awareness of the past, proposing strategies for the future, and involving community members in a form of broad-based public education. Such an integral relationship between art and political and social expression goes back centuries in many cultures in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, for example. There art provides a means for dialogue about community life while also connecting people to broad perspectives and divergent views.

## Current Trends Toward Arts-based Civic Dialogue

### A spectrum of approaches

**C**ontemporary artists and cultural institutions have continued and expanded upon these traditions, engaging with civic issues through a wide spectrum of activity. At one end of this spectrum, topical art articulates or comments on civic issues; at the other end, artists and cultural institutions roll up their sleeves and use the arts to engage people in action to affect change.

More recently, at the center of the spectrum, a vital midrange of activity has begun to emerge, distinct from these two ends. This body of work—the focus of this study—is stimulated by artists and institutions who believe that, in a society struggling to regain its faith in democracy, art offers a fresh approach to engaging people in civic issues. In this work, art consciously incorporates civic dialogue as part of an aesthetic strategy.

By exploring multiple perspectives on critical concerns, dialogue projects seek to engage more diverse publics in discussion of challenging issues. At the same time, this intersection of artistic imagination with the civic realm offers fertile ground for both aesthetic and programmatic innovation. The following chart depicts the spectrum of these three approaches—commentary, dialogue, and action—which art may take in connecting with civic concerns.

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**In this work, art consciously incorporates civic dialogue as part of an aesthetic strategy.**

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## Spectrum of Approaches for Civically Engaged Art

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### Commentary

An issue is the subject or theme of the art, and the art further articulates the issue in aesthetic terms. The art may convey a particular position or seek to explore many perspectives.

### Dialogue

Art is created or presented to explore or examine an issue through dialogue and to enhance awareness. There is intent by the artist and/or presenter to engage at a level that is more than theme-based or commentary, but which does not advocate a specific action. A goal of dialogue is to increase the public's capacity to deal with complex issues.

### Action

The art, and often the artistic process, may intend to have various social impacts: For example, to empower people to respond or act on the issue, change negative behaviors, foster cross-cultural communication, or even change policy.

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**Commentary**—At one end of the spectrum, an array of historic and contemporary artists and art offer commentary that serves to further articulate an issue. The full gamut of social, political, and civic issues is fair game. Projects about cultural identity, representation, and self-determination have accounted for a significant portion of socially themed work over the past three decades. Playwright Athol Fugard, for instance, as well as Ousmane Sembene, the father of feature filmmaking in Africa, critique colonialism and neocolonialism in their works. In Wynton Marsalis' *Blood in the Field*, the artist relies on the power of his music and libretto to make social commentary. In this epic on slavery, one man's story serves as a parable for contemporary lessons about how human caring can redeem even the most malevolent injustices.

**Action**—At the other end of the spectrum, there has long been a vigorous artistic movement which applies art to stimulate action for social change on critical issues. The art, and often the artistic process, actively engages people toward making social impact. For example, New York-based Elders Share the Arts (ESTA) seeks solutions to intergenerational issues which manifest in broader community issues such as crime and neighborhood fragmentation. ESTA involves the old and young together to transform life stories into dramatic, literary, and visual presentations. In the *Environmental Justice Project*, a multiyear effort of John O'Neal's New Orleans-based Junebug Productions, the city's low-income African American neighborhoods exposed to toxic chemicals were mobilized by theater and other artistic activities for grassroots organizing efforts to impact public policy and advocate for systemic change.

**Dialogue**—In the center of this spectrum, art is created to stimulate people toward dialogue on multiple dimensions of an issue. *The Shipyard Project*, through dance, provided a way for residents of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to discuss difficult issues: A threatened local economy,



the military, and a complex history that colored residents' views of themselves and their neighbors. Similarly, the Oregon Bach Festival achieved extensive public dialogue about religious-based prejudice catalyzed by the controversial choice of the *St. John Passion*. In both instances extraordinary artworks were at the center of an enriched civic dialogue stimulated through thoughtfully conceived community activities, significant news media coverage, and the use of partner organizations to facilitate dialogue in a range of community settings.

It is this emergent midrange of activity, referred to subsequently as arts-based civic dialogue, that is the focus of this study. A distinct field of arts-based civic dialogue is evolving in vital pockets of activity within various arts disciplines. Considering the field's evolution across disciplines provides further context for examining the challenges inherent in this work and opportunities to strengthen it.

*“Museums must not look to educate visitors to a singular point of view. Rather, the goal is to create an informed public that can analyze, criticize, understand, and manipulate history, culture, art, and science so that it informs their lives and aids them in addressing the issues, problems, and normal dilemmas of life.”*

**Lonnie Bunch, assistant director for curatorial affairs,  
National Museum of American History, *Museum News*, March/April 1995**

## Comparative Overview Across Arts Disciplines

**A**rts-based civic dialogue has developed most actively in such fields as museums, presenting, public art, public interest media, dance, and community-based theater. How and why has this work evolved in these areas and what role have artists and cultural organizations played?

### The pioneering role of artists

Artists, often working independently of institutions, have pioneered and advanced arts-based civic dialogue work, while cultural organizations have often provided key opportunities and support. In theater, artists fostered a movement of community-based work. In public art, artists who were concerned with creating work that was meaningful to its public propelled a shift from artworks created in the isolation of the studio to site-specific work which considered the



*Liz Lerman works with local citizens of Portsmouth, New Hampshire in a story circle as part of The Shipyard Project. Photo George Barker.*

physical and social context of its public site. By contrast, in the public interest media and museum fields, institutional infrastructure and resources have advanced arts-based civic dialogue strategies. In dance and in presenting there appears to be a more reciprocal relationship between artists and organizations which has enabled fertile artistic and organizational exploration and development. In many cases, experienced artists have played a role in teaching cultural institutions how to do this work. It is safe to say that, if not for the pioneering work of artists such as Fred Wilson, Suzanne Lacy, Judy Baca, John O’Neal, and Liz Lerman, who demonstrated exciting possibilities in their fields, neither cultural institutions nor funders would have followed suit.

## The evolution of arts-based dialogue within arts disciplines

In leading disciplines, early and continuing field discussions among artists and cultural institutions have served to recognize and validate individual efforts of artists, as well as to explore artistic and social implications and practical challenges which this work presents. National service organizations, such as the American Association of Museums, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Americans for the Arts, and the National Alliance of Media Arts and Culture, as well as regional groups such as Alternate Roots, have played key roles in convening their fields and cultivating resources. In the public art field, committed artists and administrators have sustained fieldwide discussion, sometimes in cooperation with universities, the National Endowment for the Arts, Americans for the Arts, discipline-based service organizations, or local/state arts agencies.

In these disciplines an underlying shift in the role of cultural institutions in their communities has facilitated the emergence of this work. This shift has gained momentum from several trends, each of which has prompted rethinking of the cultural institution’s mission, its relationship to its public, and its relevance to community interests.

The earliest trend, pervasive throughout the arts, was the critical need to develop audiences. Concerns within the museum and presenting fields, for instance, were largely about attracting larger and more diverse audiences in order to increase earned income. From this orientation evolved more deliberate efforts to build ongoing relationships with the public. Major cultural institutions realized that more than effective marketing strategies would be necessary to dispel

elitist images of the arts and to connect more meaningfully to broader constituencies. As a result, programming gravitated to themes or subjects relevant to local contexts, often including outreach efforts conducted in collaboration with community-based organizations. The proliferation of ethnically based work, especially in theater, performance art, media arts, and literature, spurred more institutions to develop culturally diverse programming. In addition, a priority of much public funding—to reach wide audiences—called for accountability regarding local representation in planning, as well as among audiences. By reorienting toward achieving impact in such areas as community development, cultural identity, or social change, some cultural institutions and artists laid a groundwork for exploring arts-based civic dialogue activity.

## The role of cultural organizations

Certain types of cultural organizations have come to arts-based dialogue work more readily than others. Within the museum field, history, children's, ethnic, and community-based museums, by virtue of mission and constituency, have more often established ongoing relationships with their communities and more easily met the related organizational challenges of arts-based civic dialogue work. Art museums, with exceptions, have made slower progress as they have sought to free their approach from an overreliance on collections, bureaucracies, and curatorial tradition. Regional theaters, too, have been driven by the need to sustain large subscriber bases in order to support the high costs of productions and facilities.

By contrast, in the dance field less institutional infrastructure appears to have allowed for greater flexibility, imposing fewer constraints on choreographers and dance presenters. Further, unlike theater's concern with sustaining audiences, the dance field has been engaged in a long-term process of building new audiences for dance. As part of this, a strong network of dance presenters has encouraged and supported joint commissions which have helped to reduce the financial and marketing burdens of arts-based dialogue work. For example, organizations such as Dancing in the Streets and Dance Theater Workshop have nurtured site-specific opportunities and commissions with funding and training support.

Once considered marginal, community-based arts organizations and theaters, operating close to their communities, are better-poised philosophically to engage in arts-based civic dialogue activity and provide models for community engagement and dialogue drawn from their tradition of involving local people directly in the art-making process. The community-based theater field has evolved organizational structures and support systems, such as Alternate Roots and the American Festival Project (see Appendix A-29), to connect theaters' work with local audiences. While many have been constrained from meeting their full potential by small staffs and overly stretched budgets, model community-based arts organizations are increasingly called upon to share their experience with other cultural institutions seeking to engage in arts-based civic dialogue.

## Redefinition of roles for arts professionals

The emergence of arts-based civic dialogue in each of these leading fields has pressed arts professionals to develop skills beyond their areas of expertise. Museum curators and symphony music directors have been challenged to rethink assumptions about their roles as professionals and to develop approaches to programming and interpretation which consider broader public audiences and issues. Presenters have adopted community organizing skills, becoming adept in building partnerships and in facilitating dialogue. Programmers in media arts and theater organizations, which have traditionally mounted post-performance and post-screening discussions, have developed ways to maximize these opportunities by learning to be effective dialogue facilitators and/or by involving other experts on the issues to thoughtfully catalyze and engage audiences in civic dialogue. Public interest media broadcasters, often envied for their relatively wide audiences, look for localized and humanized contact and impact. They increasingly link broadcasts to listeners and viewers via interactive technologies or by organizing live discussions with local partners. Public artists, composers, theater directors, and choreographers have needed to master community politics, negotiation, and facilitation skills as they plan and implement arts-based dialogue projects.



*Dialogue activities have been incorporated in association with many Houston Grand Opera productions; here, the 1995 world premier of Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie's Harvey Milk (see Appendix A-35). Photo Jim Caldwell.*

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**Arts professionals, challenged to stretch their traditional roles, have had to master community politics, negotiation, and facilitation skills as they plan and implement arts-based dialogue projects.**

In many cases, innovative arts-based civic dialogue projects have been the initiative of individual curators, presenters, or other programmers rather than an institutional commitment. Like individual artists, these individuals often find themselves in the role of educating a cultural institution about this work and its value, and extending what new skills they have learned to other staff, sometimes pushing the boundaries of the organization.

## Activities to assist field development

The experiences of those who have pioneered arts-based civic dialogue are now beginning to be articulated in training programs, discussions of best practices, and opportunities for the development of new work. In each of these leading fields, veteran artists, cultural organizations, and service organizations have begun to document their work and to evolve theoretical and

practical foundations. Through the Urban Bush Women's Summer Dance Institute, a training program in dance and community engagement, participants explore how choreography, cultural history, and community work are connected to the artist's public role. The Institute for Visual and Public Art at California State University, developed by public artists Amalia Mesa-Bains, Judith Baca, and Suzanne Lacy, prepares students to develop artistic and community engagement skills, and provides a theoretical base for the creation of public art and arts-based civic dialogue. The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and the American Festival Project have developed training programs and documentation strategies based on their years of experience in promoting civic dialogue. Most recently, the Institute for Arts and Civic Dialogue, based at Harvard University and headed by theater artist Anna Deavere Smith, has been established to provide project support for professional artists whose work seeks to investigate the link between artistic creativity and the civic realm and promote more vital communication about critical civic issues.

## Emerging arts-based civic dialogue in other arts disciplines

Arts-based civic dialogue is emerging in other disciplines as well, but with less of a field-wide focus. Exemplary efforts have been made in music and literature, including community-based composer residencies stimulated by Meet the Composer, thematic music programming innovations by orchestras, and literature initiatives such as the National YMCA's *Writer's Voice* project. Arts-based dialogue activity is nascent in these fields as a whole, bubbling up less by intention and more because the nature and form of artistic activity are prompting it. Poetry slams and new media, for example, each with a high degree of audience interactivity, suggest potential for arts-based civic dialogue.

Parallel trends in related areas have increased the potential for arts-based civic dialogue in various fields and disciplines. In the public humanities field, the idea of a role for the humanities in increasing public understanding of contemporary issues has set significant precedent. Public programs that incorporate cultural components and discussions led by humanities scholars have established a trend in contextual programming and public dialogue about civic issues



*Discussion circle and Internet station, part of Re: public/Listening to San Diego, an installation by Richard Bolton (see Appendix A-6). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego.*

The arts-in-education field, emphasizing the development of curriculum-based activity, has pressed cultural institutions to develop sophisticated approaches and methodologies to integrate the arts with other learning goals. The Philadelphia Opera Company, Glimmerglass Opera, and others link social issues inherent in traditional and contemporary operas to history and social studies, as well as to discussion of contemporary issues.

Innovations in museum education, including inquiry-driven approaches to interpretive materials, have prompted more open-ended investigations of context and perspectives.

New interactive technologies, such as those used by art and museum educators, now enable visitors to choose from various paths of information and control their learning experience. Artists are exploring not only the aesthetic frontiers of new technologies but also interactive capabilities that welcome people as active partners in the creative outcome and/or in dialogue about the work and its content and form. Such advances in technologies have expanded the potential of public interest media fields and hold promise for other disciplines as well.

*Abstracts of a sampling of projects, organized by discipline or field, are provided in Appendix A. Introductions to each discipline highlight significant influences, activities, and movements that have prepared a basis for arts-based civic dialogue in that field.*

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# Observations About Arts-based Civic Dialogue Work

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**W**hat is the nature of artistic activity that stimulates civic dialogue? Artists and cultural institutions have embraced a wide range of aesthetics, artistic approaches, and issues as they have engaged in this work. Projects highlighted in this section (and detailed in Appendix A) provide insights on approaches and practices, with a particular emphasis on the character, methods, and challenges of arts-based civic dialogue activity.

In the course of this study, two areas of inquiry proved to be particularly provocative and suggest important areas of future attention. The first is the aesthetic dimensions of civically engaged art, including a recognition of the process-orientation of much of the work. This recognition evoked a call from study participants for new aesthetic standards, definitions, and criteria by which work might be discussed and judged. The second is that, while the civic impact of this work has been observed in anecdotal ways, there is a need for more formal evaluation methods to truly illuminate the short- and long-term effects of arts-based civic dialogue.

## Types of Civic Issues Engaged by the Arts

**W**hile a focus on particular issues was observed within certain arts disciplines—for example, the ecological theater movement, and intercultural understanding within the presenting field—a wide range of civic issues have been addressed by artists and cultural institutions. These include: Reexamination of history; the environment, ecology and land use; crime and violence; gender roles and relations; generations; war; health and diseases; the impact of technology and science; and immigration, among others.

Race relations and intercultural understanding, however, have been the most prominent themes, as these continue to be pressing, unresolved issues demanding society's attention. Because art inherently embodies cultural, political, and social ideas, and because many artists and cultural leaders draw from their experience of civil rights activism, issues of racial relations and equity remain strong. In addition, the principles and mandates of initiatives such as American Dialogue within the performance presenting field (1988) and Excellence and Equity within the museum field (1992) have urged cultural organizations to address issues of cultural diversity.

A review of projects cited in this report reveals that the choice of issue most often emerges from concern about a local issue, a critical incident, or personal experiences of the artist or of someone in the community. Sometimes arts-based dialogue activities seek to translate local issues into a broader understanding of regional or national significance, or conversely, to look at the local

implications of national issues. For instance, highlighting the local relevance of national issues is a focus of POV's High Impact Television (HIT) campaigns (see Appendix A-17), which give human voice to an issue by focusing on the stories of individuals through national broadcasts of first-rate independent film and video documentaries. In tandem with national broadcasts, HIT catalyzes reflection and discussion through interactive programming coordinated by local agencies in selected communities.

## Motivations for the Work

**A**rts and cultural institutions undertake arts-based civic dialogue projects for a diversity of reasons from a need to extend the relevance of art to a broader constituency to looking to effect change in society by inspiring more people to engage in civic issues. Institutions and artists may also be motivated to explore aesthetic possibilities afforded by the social and political variables of civic context. It is often characteristic of arts-based civic dialogue work that multiple goals drive a project, reflecting the crosscutting interests of various participants. In addition, artists and cultural institutions may begin with a general sense of a goal, but define more specific outcomes as the artistic and/or dialogue process further clarifies the issue. Sometimes dialogue happens unintentionally as a result of unanticipated reaction to the creation or presentation of the art. In any case, it is possible to identify several key motivating forces behind arts-based civic dialogue projects:



Composer Judith Shatin researches for her commissioned work, *COAL*, in Eagles Nest Mine, Twilight, West Virginia. Photo courtesy of WSWP-TV.

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**Successful arts-based civic dialogue projects can build a cultural organization's civic identity, from a sponsor of mainstage productions to a civic institution that stimulates collective exchange.**

**Engage new audiences**—In the process of seeking to make connections with new and more varied audiences, audience/community discussion formats often are used to interest and educate audiences about the form, process, and content of art. The purpose of *COAL* (see Appendix A-28)—a residency and commissioned musical piece by Judith Shatin conducted at Shepherd College in West Virginia—was to deepen the community's knowledge of contemporary music through a project that also resonated for the region. The artist talked with miners during her research and incorporated their stories into the final oratorio. The project gained momentum as college and community collaborators discovered opportunities to explore issues of coal-mining history, mine safety, and unions through panels, photography exhibitions, and other programs. Projects such as *COAL* can build a cultural organization's civic identity, changing its public perception from a sponsor of mainstage productions, for example, to a civic institution that stimulates collective exchange.



**Raise awareness about an issue**—Arts-based civic dialogue may be incorporated when an artist or institution wishes to heighten public awareness about an issue, sometimes in response to a particular incident. The Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford has focused two public art projects on the city’s continuing, critical issue of urban violence: Artist Peggy Diggs’ *Hartford Grandmothers’ Project* (1993-94) (see Appendix A-3) addressed the fear of city streets experienced by elderly women living in the city. Diggs spent one year interviewing elderly women and teenagers, then incorporated their personal stories into her artwork—lottery-like scratch tickets featuring quotes from the women on one side and from the teens on the other. The tickets were distributed by the city’s major daily newspaper.

*The Manhole Cover Project* (1996-97) by Bradley McCallum (see Appendix A-4). linked the issue of gun violence to Hartford’s history as a gun manufacturer. Through the art projects, dialogue activities, community partnerships, and high-profile news media coverage, the museum sought to depict the full dimensions of Hartford’s violence and achieve a cumulative impact on public consciousness.

**Foster intergroup communication**—The arts have demonstrated their capacity as a bridge or platform from which to explore both the differences between and common experiences of or between different cultures, classes, and groups. For example, black-Jewish relations are at the heart of *The Moses Project* (see Appendix A-37), a residency involving four Massachusetts organizations, including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, in which composer Walter Robinson is writing a gospel opera on the life of Moses. The goal of the project, launched in 1995, is to educate and sensitize African American and Jewish communities about their common links and to encourage dialogue.



*The Manhole Cover Project by Bradley McCallum on display at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford.*

*“Arts organizations have the role and long-term effect of validation, documentation, and interpretation of cultural histories. Cultural history is always in the making. The next generation’s perceptions of itself will be colored by what institutions are saying is art.”*

**Marlena Gonzales-Tamrong, Walker Art Center**

Not all motivations driving this work have proved well-founded. The trend of arts for social change has spawned a host of programs and projects, often well-meaning, but many of which are naïve both in approach and in understanding of the complex politics and processes involved in this work. In some cases, organizations are primarily interested in advancing audience development goals or their own image of social responsibility, rather than operating from a genuine desire to serve the public’s needs to better understand and engage a particular issue. The reality of competing with human services for limited private and public dollars also may have enticed some organizations to stretch beyond their core mission.

Artists may be similarly compelled. Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, who developed the *Tele-Vecindario* project (see Appendix A-16) within Chicago's larger *Culture in Action* (see Appendix A-11) public art project cautioned that artists who do community-based work should remain "critically suspect" of their intentions and actions if they are to orchestrate responsible community process and artworks. He observes that institutions rarely display either the inclination or the apparatus to sustain such self-critique throughout a project.

*Artists who do community-based work should remain "critically suspect" of their intentions and actions if they are to orchestrate responsible community process and artworks.*

**Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, artist, *Tele-Vecindario* project, Chicago**

Finally, the role of funding sources in advancing, inhibiting, or directing this work in various fields has been significant, and the availability and thrust of funding seems to have enabled the development of various forms of civically engaged art. Funding initiatives such as New Residencies (a "Meet the Composer" program), Opera for a New World (an "Opera America" program), the American Festival Project, and production grants through the Independent Television Service have been influential within the presenting, music, and independent media arts fields. When it is most effective, funding support meets field interest and need in a timely juncture. The great impact of the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Fund's Arts Partners program (administered by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters) on the presenting field has been attributed to a preexisting readiness in that discipline. Broad conversation among leaders of the presenting world stimulated by the American Dialogue project helped to define the principles and standards of a new approach for presenting, setting a course that the funder was then able to support and advance.

Some artists and cultural institutions note that funders have not necessarily been moved to support arts-based civic dialogue efforts. It was not until local crises exploded, such as the Crown Heights incident and the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, that some funders finally supported projects previously proposed by cultural organizations to address mounting racial tensions. In addition, some artists and cultural organization leaders have felt that by setting specific priorities, funders may even alter the natural course of development, which artists and cultural institutions strongly believe should be self-determined.

*"Art has to have its own rhythms, too. There are galvanizing moments that happen which help focus and change things forever. The Olympic Arts Festival in 1984 contributed to a new way the city [of Los Angeles] looked at itself, for example, but you can't necessarily repeat that kind of thing. Not everything you do in art has to cause an action."*

**Gordon Davidson, Mark Taper Forum**

## Points of Opportunity and Methods of Dialogue

It is, of course, true that the arts stimulate spontaneous, incidental dialogue all the time. Individuals who experience art together are likely to talk about what they have seen. Their conversations may be anticipated but are *unplanned* by the presenter, museum, or artist. Public discourse may also be sparked unintentionally by controversy incited by the art and/or the social theme of the work. Robert Graham's *Quetzalcoatl*, a sculpture of a Mayan god placed in a central location in San Jose, California, elicited two quite unanticipated public dialogues: Debates about abortion rights were catalyzed by some who found symbolic reference in this statue of a god to whom human sacrifice was made; others took issue with the placement of the sculpture in a prime central location of the city where every cultural group might wish to have a monument. Such dialogue represents a rich opportunity for guided public discourse about the issues and the art. The challenge for cultural institutions, which often must deal with the controversy, is to try to productively facilitate such spontaneous *incidental* dialogue toward increased public understanding of the issue and the art.

When they act deliberately, however, cultural institutions and artists employ dialogue as a key method by which to engage people in civic issues. Such a planned approach to dialogue might be characterized as either *augmented* or *integrated*. Cultural organizations may plan dialogue activities to augment the art experience, with the intent to enhance the audience's connection to the issue as well as the art. Program notes, exhibition labeling, lectures, and panel discussions direct attention to and deepen understanding of, the issue, although dialogue is often limited to a single or a few opportunities, as opposed to sustained over a period of time. For example, the Oregon Bach Festival augmented the presentation of the *St. John Passion* with multiple opportunities for audience and community discussion.

In contrast, dialogue activities may be *integrated* throughout the development or implementation of the cultural project. *The Shipyard Project* and *Mining the Museum* reflect an integrated approach. Artists may include people as informants or actual cocreators in their artistic process, or facilitate participants' own creative work. An integrated approach to dialogue is often characterized by sustained or cumulative activity.

When and how dialogue might be linked to the creation or presentation of an artwork were observed to be quite variable. Approaches range from a singular activity, such as a post-performance discussion, to combinations of activities throughout the stages of a project's development and presentation. Opportunities for augmented and integrated dialogue activities exist at every stage. The choice of approach to dialogue appears related to a number of factors, including who is being engaged—for example, a targeted segment of the community, an arts audience, or a broad cross-section of the public; the desired tenor and effect of the dialogue itself; and the

## Typical Points of Opportunity and Methods of Dialogue

Stage	Points in the Development of an Artistic Work	Activities and Forums for Civic Dialogue
<b>Design and Planning</b>	The artist, curator, presenter or organization seeks input and participation from partners or collaborators, which includes dialogue about issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advisory groups</li> <li>● Interviews and focus groups</li> <li>● Public forums</li> <li>● Partner meetings</li> </ul>
<b>Research</b>	Artists and curators seek contextual information that stimulates dialogue about issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviews</li> <li>● Story circles; oral histories</li> <li>● Meetings with community agencies</li> </ul>
<b>Artistic Creation and Development</b>	Artists and curators involve the public or targeted segments of the public in making the art or designing the event/exhibit; or the public is invited to interact with the artist on the work-in-progress. Feedback from the public may alter the artwork or creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Studio workshops</li> <li>● Residency activities</li> <li>● Lecture/demonstrations</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-Presentation</b>	Before a performance or viewing of a film or exhibition, the audience is engaged in dialogue about relevant issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitated discussions</li> <li>● Related programs offered in advance</li> </ul>
<b>Presentation</b>	The actual presentation offers an opportunity for public engagement on issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Individuals are participants in presentation</li> <li>● Interactive exhibition or presentations</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Presentation</b>	After a performance or viewing of a film or exhibition, audiences are engaged in dialogue about relevant issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitated discussions</li> <li>● Panel discussions</li> <li>● Call-in shows</li> </ul>
<b>Distribution</b>	The work is distributed via touring, publication, media adaptation, etc., offering further opportunity for dialogue about issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Video or broadcast showings with facilitated discussions</li> <li>● Communication via interactive media (such as the Internet)</li> <li>● Touring</li> </ul>

artist's availability, interest, and/or skill in engaging in dialogue. The nature of dialogue activities employed at different stages of a project is summarized in the table on the preceding page.

During the planning and research stages, many arts-based civic dialogue projects incorporate dialogue in order to inform the work and the project and/or to contribute to the actual art with imagery, symbols, etc. These two purposes are not mutually exclusive. At the planning stage, as in the *Shipyard Project*, the artist and/or cultural organization may seek advice on or involvement in structuring the project, connecting with prospective participants, choosing settings, and developing approaches to dialogue. Dialogue may occur in the context of advisory groups, meetings with community organizations, or interviews with stakeholders, and may present the first opportunity for focusing on the civic issue. Artists may view dialogue in the developmental stages as a way by which to understand a civic issue and to collect information that might be incorporated into their work. Many artists and cultural organizations cited the challenge inherent in engaging people in dialogue during the early stages of a project, when goals are still being formulated and the project may appear abstract.

At the creative or artmaking stage, artists and cultural organizations may seek to capitalize on the direct relationship of art-making to dialogue and dialogue to art-making. Dialogue on an issue may inform, influence, or even become part of the artwork. Works such as the environmentally themed play, *upRooted/reRooted*, by the Ukiah Players (see Appendix A-40), gauged community feedback at several points in the play's development. The company continued to make changes even after a point at which it felt the work had been "completed." Conversely, the artistic process often engages participants on a level that opens up a nonthreatening path to dialogue.

*"If we're talking about dialogue, this may only be able to happen incrementally, little by little. We have a nation of talkers but not a nation of listeners. If dialogue is going to be genuine, it's going to be small."*

**Holly Sidford, Lila Wallace Readers Digest Fund**

Pre- and post-presentation dialogue often is used to help audiences grapple with the complexity of a civic issue or the challenging aesthetics of a work. Dialogue activities held prior to the presentation of the work, such as the "Gatherings" held in advance of the *St. John Passion*, may be geared to deepen audience members' aesthetic experience as well as to discuss historical and social background that can enhance understanding of an issue. Pre-presentation dialogue may offer a common ground from which people can share the artistic experience. Post-presentation discussion, as with the Intiman Theatre's special *Twilight* program, also often expands understanding of the artwork and the issue.

**The artistic process often engages participants on a level that opens up a nonthreatening path to dialogue.**

## Common Factors in Effective Arts-based Civic Dialogue

**E**xperienced planners of dialogue activities have learned that a knowledge of context, skill in designing and facilitating dialogue, and an understanding of obstacles that prevent people from engaging in dialogue are all critical to this work. Those projects that effectively incorporate civic dialogue appear to consider, first and foremost, the unique qualities of the artist and dynamics of the community. Artists and cultural institutions also recognize that there may already be a “river of dialogue” taking place within a community about a particular issue and that their own efforts to engage people can occur at any stage of public discussion. The importance of understanding the history of dialogue on an issue within a community helps to ensure the integrity of goals, relationships, and credibility for new dialogue efforts. Artists and cultural institutions cited a number of other common practices key to achieving quality civic dialogue, including:

*Neutral and “safe” space in which people feel comfortable enough to engage in difficult discussion is important:* To create “safe space for unsafe ideas,” the Walker Art Center film department has experimented with a variety of programs and discussion formats, ranging from social gatherings with a food focus to collaborative youth projects in the community. Some projects have used spaces other than arts institutions. The Oregon Bach Festival and the Los Angeles Festival’s Sacred Landmarks program demonstrated that religious facilities are perceived as safe spaces for volatile issues. In two projects—the *Crown Heights History Project* and the *Prejudice and Discrimination* exhibit at the Chicago Children’s Museum—children’s museums were identified as safe environments for discussions following racial incidents. Neutral spaces that are not viewed as politicized, such as libraries, have been increasingly used for dialogue.

*Engaging people in dialogue about issues and ideas can be made easier and the quality of dialogue made deeper when people are involved in the art-making process:* When the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange engages participants in movement and dance



One of 10 banners from the Echoes of the Heart Project created by Chicago residents with artist Olivia Gude to discuss issues of race and neighborhood. A Catholic-based antiracism group provided leadership on the project (see Appendix A-13). Photo Chicago Public Art Group.

during its research stage, not only do participants tend to become more “dance literate,” but the quality of the dialogue on civic issues is often richer. Personal expression through art-making opens up personal and collective channels for a rich dialogue.

**Meaningful dialogue depends on effective facilitation:** Those dialogues deemed substantive and transformative have deft guides who are able to create a sense of trust, respect, and safety; make perceptive connections between the art and the issue; assist participants to link personal experiences and universal themes; and provide the type of welcome and orientation that encourage audiences/participants to find a reason to engage in the dialogue in the first place. Choice and preparation of facilitator are crucial. Some artists, curators/presenters, and cultural institution leaders are effective facilitators, but in many cases, others may serve more effectively based on skill or knowledge. Involving specialists who have an understanding of local context and issues helps to ensure the depth and integrity of the discussion at any stage.

**Although most arts-based civic dialogue projects are oriented to face-to-face dialogue, some have used technology and the news media as alternative venues:** The anonymity offered by the Internet and other interactive technologies may be attractive to people who are uncomfortable expressing themselves in a public forum. Artists and cultural institutions have used the news media to extend public discourse beyond in-person participants and to build awareness about the issues. Artist Peggy Diggs enlisted the news media as a partner in advancing the communication goals of her *Hartford Grandmothers Project* at the Wadsworth Atheneum. POV’s High Impact Media Campaign maximizes news media coverage through feature stories, radio and television talk shows, and related reporting to build awareness around the issue portrayed in its documentary broadcasts.

*“There is some connection between projects that blow up and the issues of audience preparation and evaluation. It begs the idea of an ongoing series of presentations over time that helps to set context. Does the ability to present programs over months or years mitigate against the individual success or failure of particular events?”*

**Rebecca Leary-Safon, former performing arts director, Arts Festival of Atlanta**

*Frequent, varied, and sustained approaches to dialogue are considered important to engage multiple perspectives on an issue, promote adequate focus, involve people in various ways to accommodate differences, and over the long-term, establish an*

**Civically engaged art may be most successful when it involves people in the issue or topic over time.**



*POV’s broadcast of Girls Like Us, a documentary film by Jane C. Wagner and Tina DiFeliciano, addressed issues of parenting, sexuality, loss, and relationships through POV’s High Impact Media Campaign (see Appendix A-16). Photo Vladimir Hartman.*

*identity for the cultural institution as a place for civic dialogue:* Civically engaged art may be most successful when it involves people in the issue or topic over time. This may be accomplished through thematic programming or residencies. Artist residencies—even repeated residencies with the same artist—offer extended time in one place and the opportunity to build relationships. Presenters commented that, although pressured by budgets and other factors to continually move on to the next project, they nonetheless recognize the positive cumulative effect of sustained attention on a given issue with particular artists.

*To meet public expectations for continued dialogue, artists and cultural institutions try to plan for how dialogue will continue, what support mechanisms exist to perpetuate it, and what their involvement will be.* The Social and Public Art Resource Center, with its long history of mural development in Los Angeles, has formally “rededicated” some of its murals created years ago in an effort to reinvigorate civic dialogue. Issues such as gentrification, which were addressed within the murals when they were created, are revisited in light of what has transpired since then. In most institutions, however, demands of new projects and limited staff and funding resources typically prevent sustained dialogue. In addition, artists—especially those who have created work away from their home community—may depart and have little to do with projects after they are completed.

*“There is institutional pressure as a multicultural presenter that you have to move on to something else. Sometimes you can’t. You hit on [an issue] that no one has wanted to deal with. What is our responsibility to artists and the people with whom we’ve started the dialogue? Who are the partners to continue the work, to sustain the dialogue?”*

**Kim Chan, Washington (D.C.) Performing Arts Society**

Arts and cultural organizations often need to realign internal philosophies and structures to support and sustain effective engagement in arts-based civic dialogue work. Much of this work within institutions is the result of initiative by individuals within the institution as opposed to sustained agencywide commitment. The implications for the whole institution of engaging in this work may not be fully understood, nor sufficiently considered. Paradigm shifts in curatorial approach, from a primarily thesis-based academic approach to one that allows for multiple viewpoints, should be considered. Marketing and education departments, too, may be inadequate or inappropriately prepared to conduct this work.

Partnerships with other groups have enabled cultural organizations to involve targeted participants, provide more comfortable venues for dialogue, tap expertise on a particular issue, and offer ways to sustain dialogue beyond a single project. When the Intiman Theatre in Seattle presented Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight*, the theater first assembled a steering committee com-



posed of youth and adults from the school district; and members of the police department, the business community, the Seattle Center Peace Academy, and the Boeing Corporation. The committee helped to identify and invite participants for the daylong program, which culminated in a performance of *Twilight*. Intiman organizers have credited such partnerships as critical factors in the project's success.

The roles and expectations of cultural institutions, artists, and partner organizations need to be established and then continually assessed during the course of a project. Arts-based civic dialogue projects evolve organically. This demands a constant reassessment of roles and expectations. Clarifying conflicting expectations and setting clearly defined parameters and outcomes need to occur at the outset of the project, but may also need to be rethought as changes occur midstream.

**Partnerships with other groups have enabled cultural organizations to involve targeted participants, provide more comfortable venues for dialogue, tap expertise on a particular issue, and offer ways to sustain dialogue beyond a single project.**

## Civic Considerations of the Work

**A**s artists and cultural organizations seek to address civic concerns, the challenges of connecting their work to the civic realm have become apparent. Some of the considerations they face include:

*Many artists and institutions are wary of taking on leadership or “ownership” of a civic issue.* They recognize that others in the community may be closer to an issue, or that they lack appropriate knowledge or expertise to advance dialogue, do not have the capacity to sustain a longer-term involvement, or do not wish to take a particular position. For example, although choreographer Bill T. Jones has explored the subject of AIDS and illness in his dance, as an artist he emphasizes the power of the work as dance and resists a role as standard-bearer for the AIDS issue.

*“Sometimes the naming of what we are doing can get in the way of engaging the broadest range of participants.”*

**Martha McCoy, Study Circles Resource Center**

*Most cultural institutions see themselves as a catalyst or forum for dialogue, rather than as advocate or agent for change.* During the planning stage for the *Shipyard Project*, the president of the Shipyard Association asked project director Jane Hirshberg to testify before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission in support of the naval base. Hirshberg struggled with this request because of her opposition to the war-oriented purpose of the shipyard and because some in the local arts community questioned how the Music Hall could support a project at the yard. The Music Hall board president thought that to be invited to testify in support

of the base was recognition of the Music Hall as part of the broader community. In her final assessment, Hirshberg realized her participation would not be a reflection of hers or the Music Hall's political position, but of what is important to and for the community. As a result of making this public statement of support, the *Shipyards Project* gained support from people affiliated with the shipyard.

***Both cultural and dialogue-sponsoring organizations have been cautious about the naming and framing of issues.*** Any label assigned to a project has the potential to encourage or discourage participation. For example, *Bridging Eastern Parkway*, the original title for the *Crown Heights History Project*, was intensely resisted by Crown Heights residents who were not yet interested in "joining together," as the early title implied.

***"You have to be willing to go out with a kernel of an idea and engage in conversation about what could happen rather than a prescribed program idea."***

**Laura Penn, managing director, Intiman Theatre, Seattle**

Many arts leaders believe that the framing of the issues should emerge from the project's public participants rather than be imposed by an outside entity. They observe that issues should be framed to reflect local understanding and perceptions and should avoid jargonistic or "loaded" language derived from specialized fields or national discourse. Most citizens involved in the Study Circles Resource Center's successful race relations dialogues in Lima, Ohio, for example, did not consider themselves to be involved in a "civic dialogue," nor did they view poet Maya Angelou's poetry reading at an event celebrating the community's progress as an "arts-based civic dialogue" opportunity.

***Cynicism, negativism, and the demands of daily life prevent many from participating in dialogue opportunities.*** Some issues are not perceived by the public as urgent because people do not see themselves as directly affected by them. Social conditions, such as illiteracy or race and class distinctions, can make active participation in conversation an elusive goal. Individuals do not always have a clear perspective or the ability to articulate their point of view on an issue. Deborah Tannen, noted author of *The Argument Culture* and other books about the nature of communication, argues that habits of speech that are based on class, race, gender, region, and history can sometimes severely limit one's ability to get real meaning across.

***Attracting the participation of diverse age, racial and ethnic, and socioeconomic groups is a challenge.*** Arts leaders must have an understanding of obstacles to participation and develop new efforts that transcend established audiences and marketing practices. The Brooklyn Historical Society, for example, developed a joint project on new Chinese immigrants

with the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas. When it held community meetings in the evening in local libraries, only interested middle-class whites attended. The new immigrants the society hoped to engage were too busy working seven days a week to have time to participate, and only when discussions were held in Chinese restaurants at dinnertime was the organization able to engage some members of this community.

***An artwork or activity may not always provide a literal path to an issue or to dialogue about an issue.*** Since it is sometimes difficult for people to move from an aesthetic experience to a discussion, time to assimilate the work may be necessary. Interpretation, educational activities, and cumulative programming can all help people to make the transition from the art experience to the discussion.

***Politically charged issues and differing politics can escalate an intended discussion into a confrontation, rather than mitigate tensions.*** Organizations specializing in public dialogue emphasize that civic dialogue is not about high-minded conversations and polite exchanges. Conflict can be an appropriate and positive aspect of exchange. Its absence can mean a lack of trust in the process or the facilitators, or that diverse perspectives have been excluded. A skilled facilitator can move “dangerous conversation” to productive deliberation in which multiple perspectives are understood and respected.

***“Civic dialogue does not necessarily mean civil dialogue.”***

**Wayne Winborne, National Conference**

Tension may also occur when dialogue participants hold different expectations about where dialogue will lead. A disenfranchised group may be tired of yet more talk without action, while a privileged segment may be gratified by the “social or psychological capital” resulting from dialogue.

***There is potential for the art or resulting dialogue to cause controversy.***

By its very nature, art has the power to elicit strong emotional reactions. Unprepared audiences and participants may be unable to move beyond the controversial and visceral impact of the art to a frame of mind in which focused dialogue can occur constructively. When Ron Athey presented his highly controversial performance art piece about AIDS at the Walker Art Center, the audience was unable to move beyond the artist’s self-mutilation, which was central to the performance. In hindsight, Marlena Gonzales-Tamrong of the Walker agrees that more could have been done to prepare audiences regarding the cultural ritual origins of this work.

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**A disenfranchised group may be tired of yet more talk without action, while a privileged segment may be gratified by the “social or psychological capital” resulting from dialogue.**

*“Should a public agency precipitate dialogue on any particular subject? . . . I have suspicion that there is futility in attempting to set the agenda for public dialogue. At best we can create safe environments.”*

**Jerry Allen, City of San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs**

Cultural leaders need to prepare not only audiences but also funders and civic supporters for potential controversy. As cultural leaders urge funders to increase their risk-taking threshold and support civically engaged work, many have recognized the importance of providing supporters with information that helps them to anticipate and respond to controversy.

*The news media can help to advance or subvert public awareness and understanding of arts and dialogue activities.* Because the news media has a tendency to present an oversimplified perspective, its portrayal can subvert public awareness of an issue by ignoring its nuances or complexity. In addition, public attitudes toward the news media can serve to validate or invalidate the credibility of an arts-based civic dialogue project. By contrast, the news media has been successfully utilized as a partner to frame dialogue around an issue and to achieve greater public access and impact. These types of activities are currently limited but have significant potential for enhancing art and public discourse.

## Aesthetic Considerations of the Work

**T**his study has sought to explore the aesthetic considerations of arts-based civic dialogue work as they exist within the full spectrum of civically engaged art, and to examine the implications of linking art to civic dialogue. Four overarching observations have been noted:

- Arts-based civic dialogue fosters innovation in the creation of new work as well as the innovative presentation of works from the canon.
- The wide range of aesthetics and artistic approaches to this work opens the opportunity to engage many different publics in civic dialogue.
- Civically engaged art requires a recognition of process as well as product as an aesthetic dimension of the work.
- Current aesthetic criteria and definitions for civically engaged art are inadequate for effectively communicating the multidimensional nature of the work.

## Artistic innovation

Civically engaged work fosters the creation of new art as well as innovative presentation of works from the canon. Kurt Jooss' *Green Table* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (see Section II) and many other historic works support the case that artistic innovation and works of enduring importance result when artists explore social and civic issues. The choice by artists to connect their work to the civic realm and, in particular, to communicate civic issues through their work has resulted in significant contemporary works of art. In their own time, *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight: Los Angeles* have received high critical acclaim. *Mining the Museum* won not only the American Association of Museums' highest award but is considered one of the most influential exhibitions mounted by an artist and a historical museum in this century.

*“We need to keep in mind the spontaneity of imagination. James Dickey said, ‘While inventing a story about grass, I found a young horse deep inside it.’ If we focus too much on the subject, we may lose spontaneity.”*

**William Siemering, public media consultant**

Aesthetic innovation occurs as artists seek to address civic issues and often as a result of public dialogue built into the developmental stages of the creative process. For example, choreographers such as Bill T. Jones, Liz Lerman, and Donald Byrd have used text, video, and other media as a means for layering social meaning into their choreographic work. Byrd acknowledges that his efforts to address civic issues through his dance have directly influenced his art-making and aesthetic. He further emphasizes the importance of artistic excellence in engaging audiences in socially oriented art: “The artistic problem is to take a subject and make it artistically engaging, expressive, but not so frightening that the audience walks out . . . . The dancing was exquisite, which made the subject bearable.”

In their efforts to engage audiences and publics in civic issues, curators and presenters have also had to rethink their approaches to programming works from the canon, both classical and modern. Often such fresh approaches make available to audiences new or rediscovered meaning derived from the social and historical context of the art. The American Symphony Orchestra's thematic *Concerts with a Concept*, for example, provide in-depth historical contextual information about the musical selections grouped in a concert while drawing parallels to contemporary issues. Through program notes and lively audience exchange with the conductor,



*Performance of The Beast by Donald Byrd/The Group  
(see Appendix A-29). Photo Chris Bennion.*

performers, and scholars, the meaning and aesthetic achievement of the music is enhanced for audiences and, at the same time, awareness of contemporary issues is heightened.

Participants in the study concurred that civically engaged work is stronger aesthetically when it creates the opportunity for personal interpretation of content and meaning. The most powerful art has great suggestive power. It employs metaphor and shades of meaning that elicit multiple interpretations. These qualities are as key to the success of civically engaged art as they are to other genres. Artists and presenters believe that, as interest in arts-based civic dialogue grows, creators and organizers should not lose sight of the essential role of metaphor in achieving aesthetic and dialogue goals. They express concern that art may become overly didactic or literal as it seeks to address civic issues.

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**Artists and presenters believe that, as interest in arts-based civic dialogue grows, creators and organizers should not lose sight of the essential role of metaphor in achieving aesthetic and dialogue goals.**

Public expectations about aesthetic form may be challenged by unfamiliar styles and new genres, which could discredit the message and/or create obstacles to dialogue. Many types of work challenge the public's understanding of what art is, and some post-modern art-work has proven particularly challenging. In a residency in Lewiston, Maine, presented jointly by the Bates College Dance Festival and LA (Lewiston-Auburn) Arts, the Doug Varone Company created a new dance, *A Momentary Order*, (see Appendix A-26) aimed to help local Franco-American residents reclaim a cultural identity repressed by years of discrimination and assimilation. Their artistic approach was to transform the local culture through the filter of their own aesthetics into something new—not a reproduction. Ironically, some residents were baffled by the company's aesthetic and wished the final dance work had shown a more direct connection to their French heritage. Since this experience, Varone has incorporated pre- and post-performance discussions to help audiences better connect to the form and content of his work.

## Aesthetic range

The wide range of aesthetics and artistic approaches to this work opens the opportunity to engage many different publics in civic dialogue. The coexisting Vietnam Memorials on the mall in Washington, D.C., demonstrate in one glance two extremely different styles, each of which has its proponents. Maya Lin's minimalist wall and the figurative realism of Frederick Hart's soldiers represent not only the divergent aesthetics of their sculptors but the result of public debate about what is an appropriate style and spirit for this prominent national monument.

*“Together, these monuments represent a dialogue between our subliminal expectations about what public sculpture ought to be and a new form of art, which is truly the art of our own time.”*

**Richard Andrews, former director of the Visual Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts**

Film festivals, such as the critically acclaimed Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema (see Appendix A-22), underscore the effectiveness of programming that mixes documentary, experimental, animated, and narrative genres around social themes in attracting and engaging audiences. Likewise, the American Festival Project relies on a richly diverse core of performing artists working in a variety of disciplines and forms to engage a wide range of communities in festival activities and discussions.

## Process and product

Because of the process orientation of much art-based civic dialogue work, an aesthetic exchange takes place in which the public has an impact on the artwork, just as the artwork has an impact on the public. When community involvement is integral to the creation of an artwork or the development of a curatorial approach, artists and curators must determine the way they wish to incorporate community input and aesthetic with their own vision and aesthetics. The public voice might, in some cases, inform the final work, with the artist or curator maintaining aesthetic control. Bill T. Jones, for example, retains his distinctive personal aesthetic, whether he is creating alone or collaborating with community members, as in *Still/Here* (see Appendix A-32). In other cases, the public is empowered to moderate the artwork. In directing *Swamp Gravy* (see Appendix A-39), the community-based theater project addressing race relations in rural Colquitt, Georgia, theater director Richard Owen Geer was challenged to respect other aesthetic systems beyond the academic discipline's to gain trust and to empower community participants.

Those working in this arena advocate for a more integrative aesthetic language that considers the social dimensions and the public engagement processes of the work. Traditional aesthetic theory emphasizes product and does not encompass the social goals and public engagement processes of civically oriented art. Jeff Kelley, in *Mapping the Terrain*, states, "Processes are metaphors. They are powerful containers of meaning. You have to have people [critics] who can evaluate the qualities of a process, just as they evaluate the qualities of a product."

## Critical standards and criteria

Evaluating arts-based civic dialogue requires new aesthetic standards, definitions, and criteria. Most of the study's advisors agreed that it is, in fact, possible to make sound judgment about the aesthetic quality of civically engaged work. Some pointed out, though, that critics have taken the easy way out—either failing to apply high standards or dismissing the work out of hand—and have not been duly challenged by artists and cultural institutions. Others observed that less rigorous standards are sometimes applied in favor of giving new artists and new work a chance to map new terrain.

Those involved in this work believe that new criteria are necessary that consider the artwork in its entirety and in its social contexts. Such criteria would value the processes of public engagement central to this work as part of an aesthetic language. They view new criteria as important to providing a framework that will facilitate description and discourse about the work, and also to articulating standards by which to judge it.

## Civic Impact

**I**n January 1997, Seattle's then-Mayor Norm Rice delivered his State of the City address. In closing his speech, he referred to his participation in the event held in conjunction with a performance at Seattle's Intiman Theatre that brought together city youth, businesspeople, Boeing Company employees, and the police department to discuss racism and violence:

*Last year, I was deeply affected by the message of a brilliant woman who brought her remarkable play, *Twilight: Los Angeles, to Seattle*. Through words and actions, Anna Deavere Smith endeavored to help a nation find a new understanding of a defining time in our history. To help explore our feelings in the wake of an unjust jury verdict in southern California, Smith held up a mirror to help us see our lives and our community in a different light. The message was about the need for communities to communicate and work together before difficult problems become crises. It was a powerful play that helped me see our world a little differently.*

Advisors to this study noted Seattle as a model city in which art and artists stimulate civic imagination and civic concerns stimulate creative work. They attribute the capacity for art to capture the public's attention and to catalyze and advance public discourse, in large part, to this city's history of artists and cultural organizations, which have consistently addressed civic issues through their work. Long-standing public art programs based in both city and county arts commissions have introduced citizens to a wide range of aesthetics and civic issues, from land reclamation, to class inequities, to Native American injustices. Intiman Theatre, and the theater community as a whole, is noted for its topical work. In many ways, Seattle, with its mix of artists, cultural institutions, and civic leaders, demonstrates a merging of civic and cultural sensibilities that have prepared the public for enriched aesthetic experiences and a ready cultural link to civic issues.

Many of the projects cited in this study illustrate the potential effects of arts-based civic dialogue work. These effects can be characterized in terms of impact, first, on cultural institutions and audiences; and second, on public discourse.



## Impact on audiences and cultural institutions

An audience's experience of the art itself can be enriched through exploration of civic issues. It might be said that the ability for the public to draw meaning from the artistic experience is, in part, a measure of success of civically engaged art. In talking about the *Shipyards Project*, Liz Lerman describes the relationship between the community storytelling and dialogue activities to her dance performances as setting the stage for meaningful connections to be made:

*One of the most powerful creative acts that human beings do is make connections. What will make the audience feel excited is their ability to make a connection. . . . There are many clues in a Dance Exchange performance to which you can connect. If people don't make any connection whatsoever, that's when they go away saying, 'I don't get it.'*

Citizens and community leaders may also change their perceptions of cultural institutions as the latter address civic concerns, serve as conveners, and partner with other civic organizations. Projects that genuinely address civic concerns can help to build trust between a cultural institution and segments of the community. Many arts presenters within colleges and universities have positioned themselves outside the academic boundaries of the university and as active civic partners through the American Festival Project and other presenting models. Artist residencies and performances that address civic concerns by engaging local people and organizations have enabled such relationships to be built. The effect of the *Mining the Museum* exhibition on the Maryland Historical Society in terms of building trust with the local African American audience was noted previously.

Art that stimulates civic dialogue can enhance relations between people within a community. Sustained efforts by cultural organizations, such as those of the Social and Public Art Resource Center in Los Angeles, have realized this potential as has the *Swamp Gravy* theater project. Due, in part, to its extended nature, *Swamp Gravy* has restored a degraded local cultural identity through a process of ongoing dialogue and art-making. The project's humanistic effect of healing long-internalized historical conflicts and separations has been recognized by other communities that have adopted the model, and by the Georgia legislature, which proclaimed it the state's official folklife play.

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**The ability for the public to draw meaning from the artistic experience is, in part, a measure of success of civically engaged art.**

## Impact on civic dialogue

Both arts and civic dialogue leaders have observed that the arts can create conditions that are conducive to productive civic dialogue. They cite the arts' ability to attract new people to participate, foster face-to-face exchange, and provide a nonthreatening context that can help to defuse and depolarize heated debate.

In broadest terms, cultural institutions expand the variety and number of settings in which civic dialogue can occur. More particularly, though, the arts create public space for dialogue about civic issues where it may not otherwise exist. Such was the case in the Chicago neighborhood of West Town, which suffered the range of urban problems, including gang activity. Video artist Inigo Manglano-Ovalle aimed to transform and reclaim a neighborhood street through a video project called *Tele-Vecindario*, a component of the Culture in Action public art project mounted

by Sculpture Chicago. Yearlong work with neighborhood youth and adults culminated in *A Street Level Video Block Party*, an event encompassing one residential street, 75 video monitors, four rival gangs, and an audience of more than 1,000. The event, and the activities leading up to it, enabled a face-to-face exchange that had previously seemed too risky for neighborhood residents.



*Tele-Vecindario*, by artist Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, within "Culture in Action," Sculpture Chicago.  
Photo, Antonio Perez

Art can attract new people to discussions of civic issues. It can jointly engage audiences typically separated by economic, social, educational, and cultural differences. The creative process involved in rehearsing and performing the play, *Swamp Gravy*, offered community residents an intimate opportunity to get to know their neighbors and created an environment in which blacks and whites, who had not interacted with each other for generations, found common ground in their stories. The *Hartford Grandmother's Project*, the *Crown Heights History Project*, and others have demonstrated how art can bring new participants to civic dialogue by validating previously disenfranchised voices; transcending the limits of language through emotional, visceral, and sensory qualities; and humanizing an issue through the portrayal of both the individual and universal human condition.

*“A funder’s need for accountability requires applicants to manage and to anticipate outcomes. Our ability to let something happen accidentally or spontaneously is lost.”*

**Neill Archer Roan, former director, Oregon Bach Festival**

The quality of dialogue is enhanced by bringing multiple perspectives to an issue. The integrity of planned dialogue rests on a commitment to allow multiple perspectives to be voiced and considered. The arts bring a human perspective and mitigating effect to conflicting opinions and promote an understanding of the human dimensions of civic issues. Martha McCoy observes in “Art for Democracy’s Sake,” (*Public Art Review*, fall/winter 1997):

*The effectiveness of raising alternative views for the purposes of supporting civic dialogue is frequently related to an artwork’s capacity to generate empathy. . . . This observation is key to the work of Anna Deavere Smith . . . . When an audience experiences her performance, they enter—through her—into a sense of what it would be like to be each person.”*

Deavere Smith herself goes on to say, “Few people speak a language about race that is not their own. If more of us could actually speak from another point of view, like speaking another language, we could accelerate the flow of ideas.” Through consideration of multiple perspectives, presentation of works like Deavere Smith’s, paired with dialogue opportunities, can illuminate the complex and multidimensional nature of civic issues.

*“We don’t have a seismometer that measures the effect of public debate.”*

**Jerry Allen, City of San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs**

Cultural institutions, by helping to sustain attention on civic issues, can contribute to extended public discourse. The *Shipyard*, *Swamp Gravy*, *Great Wall*, (see Appendix A-8) and other long-term projects demonstrate this capacity. In tandem with other community organizations, there is even greater potential. In Hartford, Connecticut, the Wadsworth Atheneum has not been alone in addressing the city’s issue of inner-city violence. In addition to the Atheneum’s *Grandmothers Project* and the *Manhole Cover Project*, Real Arts Ways, an alternative multiarts center, has mounted public art projects by Carl Pope and by Pepon Osorio on the same issue. While neither institution claims a central role in advancing public discourse, their combined efforts, and the media’s extension of their work into an even broader public realm, makes their presence important to sustained public discourse on inner-city violence.

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**Rehearsing and performing *Swamp Gravy* created an environment in which blacks and whites—who had not interacted with each other for generations—found common ground in their stories.**

**The arts bring a human perspective and mitigating effect to conflicting opinions and promote an understanding of the human dimensions of civic issues.**

*“How do you get the institution to evaluate challenging new directions objectively? When they don’t work there is a tendency to want to gloss over in order to justify doing more. There is little room for experimentation and failure.”*

**Andrea Miller-Keller, Wadsworth Atheneum**

## Challenges in evaluating civic impact

While anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that artists and cultural institutions can be potent contributors to public discourse, there is a recognized lack of serious, outcome-based evaluation. Some study participants agreed that it is important to begin to track outcomes with formal methodology. Yet, many questioned the validity of measurable outcome-based evaluation in this realm of work, particularly because the intention is not to promote policy change but, instead, to increase society’s capacity to engage difficult, complex issues.

The problem of identifying and evaluating civic impacts poses multiple challenges.

*It is difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to predetermine explicit outcomes of arts-based civic dialogue work*, given the variables and dynamics of human exchange and civic context. Trustees and funders are concerned that arts-based civic dialogue projects identify clear goals and outcomes at the outset to establish benchmarks by which to evaluate the success of a project. Many project organizers have found it impossible to predict outcomes because projects evolve organically and are often intangible.

*The long-term nature of many projects poses challenges in evaluating outcomes.* There may be several endpoints to a project at which different outcomes could be assessed—for example, at the creation of the artwork, or five years after its presentation, when residual effects become apparent. In many cases, outcomes may not be evident for a long time. In addition, cultural institutions may define their role in certain projects or as a general principle as convener or catalyst, and not necessarily for the duration of a particular arts-based civic dialogue effort. This suggests the merit of short-, mid-, and long-term objectives.



*Spectators view Carl Pope’s Silent Wishes, Unconscious Dreams and Prayers. . . Fulfilled, a public art work sponsored by Real Art Ways, Hartford (see Appendix A-9). Photo John Groo.*

*“Civic discourse as an outcome is long-term, subtle, and immeasurable. Long-term personalized change is what civic discourse is all about.”*

**Elaine Gurian, museum consultant**

Methods of assessing outcomes have been primarily informal. Evidence of outcomes have been largely based on anecdotes, “eavesdropping,” or observations of continuing or related activity and dialogue carried on by others in the community. In hindsight, *Shipyards Project* director Jane Hirshberg sees that opportunities to collect qualitative data were missed. In planning the project again, she would collect at the outset more baseline information from community people regarding attitudes and understandings, and then ask again later to assess changes. Years after working on the Great Wall murals in Los Angeles, young people, now grown, come back to tell SPARC (Social and Public Art Resource Center) leader Judith Baca how important that experience was for them. An interracial marriage, according to Baca, is an indicator that an attitude change has taken place. But such evidence is elusive; “unmeasurable,” according to Baca. “We have not been able to claim our victories.” There is a need for feasible models of tracking and assessing outcomes.

**There is a need for feasible models of tracking and assessing outcomes.**



*Top: Artistic director Judith F. Baca leading field discussion with youth assistants on the Great Wall of Los Angeles.  
Above: Detail, “Vision to Voice,” Great Wall of Los Angeles, Division of the Barrios and Chavez Ravine, 1976-1983.*

## Opportunities for Advancing Arts-based Civic Dialogue Work

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**O**ur scan of the field reveals that a rich array of innovative activity has emerged among both artists and cultural institutions, surfacing in vibrant but isolated pockets within various arts disciplines. As well, growing public awareness and efforts by organizations devoted to the humanities and to civic dialogue, such as libraries, have helped to create an environment conducive to this activity. Despite its energy and promise, however, this emergent field faces a number of challenges that require a creative response.

Among these, the following are key:

While vital arts-based civic dialogue work is under way in many quarters, activity tends to be isolated and confined within particular arts disciplines. As a consequence, there are few opportunities for counterparts in various disciplines to inform each other of innovations, draw on differing perspectives in discussions of best practices, or act together to advance recognition of the work. The value of discussion and analysis of planning, programming, dialogue, and evaluation practices is critical to advancing the quality and impact of efforts.

Much arts-based civic dialogue, and most criticism of the work, has evolved without an understanding of historic precedents, related writing, and scholarship; or of comparable contemporary activity, except perhaps within specific disciplines. New research and writing that enriches current perspectives on historical and contemporary activity and fosters greater awareness of the established traditions of arts and civic dialogue in other cultures and societies might inform work in this country.

Many institutions that engage in arts-based civic dialogue find that it challenges traditional staff structures and assumptions about audience development, public education, and outreach, as well as artistic production and curatorial decision-making. The effort is largely the result of initiative by individuals within the institution as opposed to sustained agencywide commitment. The implications for the whole institution of engaging in this work may not be fully understood nor sufficiently considered. Few models are available to guide organizational leaders as they proceed by trial and error, and there are limited opportunities to apply the lessons they have learned to benefit others.

Within the field's existing infrastructure, there are few structures and limited resources for nurturing the projects of independent artists and curators who may be without an institutional affiliation during the early stages of an arts-based civic dialogue initiative. Likewise, there are few venues in which to frame the type of cross-disciplinary collaboration and experimentation among cultural institutions, as well as with civic dialogue leaders, that would help to spur

greater achievement. Cultural organizations can help artists to make connections within a community, provide administrative support, and play a key role in designing and/or facilitating dialogue activities in conjunction with artistic presentations, commissions, and residencies.

An informal body of knowledge exists within certain arts disciplines concerning the principles, skills, and methodologies that contribute to successful arts-based civic dialogue work. That knowledge has not made its way into the professional training programs that shape young artists, however, and there are few venues at which practicing artists and leaders of arts institutions can access that expertise. Proficiencies can be developed. A combination of strong traditional art training and training in the methods and politics of community-based work is viewed as important.

Existing aesthetic standards, terminology, and models for critical analysis and evaluation rarely recognize the unique features of civically engaged art and often are inadequate for communicating the multidimensional, process-oriented nature of the work. In addition, as with the isolation evident in creative work, the few critics, authors, and publications active in this area tend to address a limited audience within specific disciplines.

Focused opportunity for critical writing and discussion about the aesthetic dimensions of civically engaged art is needed. The importance of new criteria lies not only in facilitating description and discourse about the work, but also in defining standards by which to evaluate it and allow it its rightful place in the critical review of contemporary art.

In many societies, there is a long and respected tradition of artists and cultural leaders exercising leadership on important civic issues. In the U.S., however, despite a growing body of arts-based civic dialogue work, artists and cultural leaders often are viewed as qualified solely to address arts-specific issues and concerns and are not included among civic leaders.

Artists who have provided artistic leadership in this arena have received limited public recognition for their artistic innovations and civic contributions. Increased public recognition of exemplary work may stimulate other artists, as well as cultural and civic institutions, to consider ways that artists and their work can illuminate complex civic issues and promote more vital communication about them.

What can arts leaders, scholars, public policymakers, civic dialogue organizers, and funders do now to address these challenges?

The study has identified several opportunities for targeted actions that could build on important efforts to date and exercise a timely, invigorating impact to decisively advance this valuable work.

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**What can arts leaders, scholars, public policymakers, civic dialogue organizers, and funders do now to address these challenges?**

***Exchange and knowledge-building:*** Encourage strategic opportunities and help to create the necessary mechanisms for artists, curators, and institutional leaders to convene across disciplines, and with other civic dialogue leaders, so that they may share innovations, study methodologies, and build understanding about the philosophical, aesthetic, and practical aspects of arts-based civic dialogue, including methods of evaluating its impact. Link convening efforts to established discipline-based networks and annual gatherings.

***Documentation and scholarship:*** Document and disseminate current program models and methodologies. Support scholarly research and writing from many vantage points—art, history, sociology, cultural anthropology—to enhance understanding about the historical precedents and global contexts of arts-based civic dialogue and locate it within meaningful intellectual and critical spheres.

***Institutional capacity-building:*** Commission case studies that illustrate the organizational capacities needed to implement arts-based civic dialogue. Identify and communicate best practices for strategies to realign organizational mission, policy, structure, and practice to support this work most effectively. Provide targeted support for key groups positioned to refine innovative organizational systems whose example can inform practices in the broader field.

***Innovation and collaboration:*** Develop laboratories in which the artistic initiatives of independent artists and curators—both those concerned with rethinking works from the canon as well as those creating new work—can be strengthened. Encourage key opportunities for cross-disciplinary efforts, exploration of new programming approaches, and collaborations among cultural institutions and civic dialogue organizations that demonstrate new ways to advance the aesthetic and social achievement of arts-based civic dialogue work.

***Training and professional development:*** Assist arts training programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels to experiment with enhanced curricula that will enable young artists to integrate development of civic dialogue skills with aesthetic competencies. Help establish defined opportunities—institutes, workshops, symposia—through which artists, curators, and institutional leaders may advance their skills and learn from each other.

***Communication and criticism:*** Foster cross-disciplinary efforts among field leaders to develop a vocabulary for communicating about arts-based civic dialogue work. Stimulate informed analysis, interpretation, and discussion about the work among critics and journalists, including those within the arts as well as other domains. Link this criticism to publications that address broad audiences as well as those that speak to the field of contemporary arts.



*Recognition and public awareness:* Establish national awards that would draw attention to those artists and cultural institutions that have demonstrated leadership and innovation in the emerging arts-based civic dialogue field. Promote the award program widely as a means by which to increase public understanding of the role of artists and cultural institutions in civic life.

**In sum, the current moment represents a critical juncture for the arts-based civic dialogue field: There is increasing recognition of the importance of dialogue to democracy; a lively array of artistic activity and aesthetic innovations are nourishing dialogue on a wide range of critical issues; there is growing institutional interest in this arena; and a clearer picture of the accomplishments, promise, and needs of this field and its leaders has begun to take shape. Taken together, these trends signal an important opportunity to strengthen and invigorate critical aspects of America's civic and aesthetic life. It is a timely moment to bolster the position of artists, curators, and cultural institutions whose imagination has proved a potent force in animating democracy through the arts and civic dialogue.**

DEMOCRACY



# Appendix A

## Overviews of Trends Within Specific Arts Disciplines and Abstracts of Selected Projects

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## Overview: Museums

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**M**useums encompass a wide range of public and privately supported institutions. Whereas a decade ago, few museums addressed civic issues through their cultural activities, in recent years, an increasing number have done so. This study considered primarily art, history, and ethnically specific museums; however, some children's, science, natural history, and city museums proved relevant because of their deliberate arts-based civic dialogue efforts.

A redefinition of the role of museums in society occurred, in large part, as a result of the 1992 report, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, published by the American Association of Museums. It pointed the way for museums to expand their role as educational and public service institutions, especially with regard to culturally diverse audiences. Pressure to abandon exclusively Eurocentric interpretations prompted two pivotal Smithsonian conferences: *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (1988) and *Museums and Communities* (1990). As a result, museums have been working to increase diversity and represent alternative perspectives in their exhibitions and programming. Through this field-wide shift in perspective, a new definition of museums as institutions of public service and education has evolved to include the notions of exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue.

Certain controversial exhibitions incited public debate about civic issues or raised questions about the role of the museum in engaging in these issues. The Whitney Museum's 1994–95 exhibition, *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, was one. While it never intended to address social issues head on, the exhibition nonetheless prompted substantial and passionate commentary in the media and informal discussion by museum visitors. With few formal structures for dialogue in place, the show pointed to the need for museums to anticipate and plan opportunities for constructive dialogue. Issues of contemporary cultural interpretation have highly politicized museum exhibitions such as the Smithsonian's 1995 *Enola Gay* exhibition. Rather than encourage public dialogue around this contentious historic symbol, questions of how far the museum could go in presenting multiple and conflicting viewpoints dominated and instead led to a self-censored exhibition that avoided offending anyone.

Larger, traditional art museums have been slower to develop meaningful relationships with communities than other types such as history, ethnic, and community-based museums. An important reason is that the thesis-oriented approach to curation within art museums has not allowed for an easy shift toward dialogue, which includes providing for multiple viewpoints. Curatorial training has been based in an academic tradition of scholarly analysis that presents a hypothesis and seeks to defend a particular point of view. While civic issues have been addressed in art exhibitions, it is usually with an intellectual focus on the issue and a basis in a singular point of view, rather than in the public's relationship to the issue. Still others eschew interpretive activity in general because it is believed to interfere with a direct, unmediated experience of the work.

When they do occur, arts-based civic dialogue projects within museums often represent the initiative of progressive curators or departments and may not reflect full institutional commitment. However, paradigm shifts within the museum field are creating more fertile conditions for museums to foster such exchange. Museums increasingly view their role as forum—a place for experimentation and debate—as opposed to solely a temple for the collection and preservation of objects. New programmatic approaches including interdisciplinary programming of films, performances, and public art, as well as partnerships with other institutions are employed to exercise this broader role. And innovations in museum education have resulted in new models of interpretation, shifting from didactic to more inquiry-driven models.

## A-1. *Memories of New York Chinatown* Museum of Chinese in the Americas (formerly Chinatown History Museum), New York City

**Project Description:** The Museum of Chinese in the Americas has experimented with a wide range of community engagement approaches for both research and public programming in an effort to document, reconstruct, and reclaim the history of Chinatown. Issues of cultural representation, identity, and ethnic and racial relations have been explored. In 1990, the organization’s founders began the process of planning what they call a “dialogue-driven museum.”

The 1991 *Memories of New York Chinatown* exhibition demonstrated the dialogic concept. The exhibition itself had various stations or modules in which different types of dialogues took place: Timelines that could be added to, a genealogy/biography database, and programs evoking group memories. Stations allowed visitors to discuss themes and details of the exhibition; add their memories, photographs, documents, and personal memorabilia; help CHM staff locate collections and people with whom to speak; and help staff listen to and learn from the visitors’ perspectives, interests, and needs toward more effective future engagements with audiences.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Additional public dialogue methods were used, including:

- Targeted segments of the Chinese American community collaborated with CHM in documenting the history of Chinatown and reflecting upon their memories of it. Emphasis was placed on moving beyond empirical information to deeper discussions of meaning. Methods used included:
  - *Historical reunions* cosponsored by the museum to address the need for people to reconnect with their past and find meaning in their memories. Former students of P.S. 23 in Chinatown, for example, were reunited.
  - *Family history and genealogy workshops*
  - *Films, videos, and slide shows* dealing with aspects of the exhibition themes were shown to invited constituent groups. Presentations were intended to stimulate conversation about issues of mutual concern and interest.
- Targeted segments of the non-Chinese community collaborated with CHM in documenting and reflecting upon their perceptions of and experiences with Chinatown (e.g., Italian Americans who attended P.S. 23).
- Chinese and non-Chinese interested in pursuing historical exploration (students, volunteers, contributors) were trained in museum skills to help document and interpret community history.

The museum notes that the dialogue-driven approach necessitates reshaping traditional structures and operations of museums in three ways: a) an interdepartmental approach is required with joint planning and communication among archivists, curators, and public programs; b) more time and money is required for collaboration within the museum and with the public; and c) follow-up is needed once lines of communication are opened with various segments of the public.

**Information Sources:** Kuo Wei Tchen, John. “Creating a Dialogic Museum: The Chinatown History Museum Experiment,” *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. ed. by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, Steven D. Lavine. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992, p. 285-326.

## A-2. *Crown Heights History Project*

### **Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn Children’s Museum, Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History, New York City**

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**Project Description:** *The Crown Heights History Project* (1994) combined exhibits and educational programs in an attempt to foster better relations and intercultural understanding among the African American, Caribbean American, and Lubavitch communities in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York. The project was developed in response to long-simmering interracial and inter-ethnic tensions brought to a head by a violent interracial incident in 1991. *The Crown Heights History Project* was developed to facilitate dialogue and understanding between the communities.

The project was a collaboration among three organizations. Through an exhibit of photographs, oral histories, and artifacts, The Brooklyn Historical Society traced the history of the three main groups in the community and illustrated how the media can overreact and distort the representation of a community. The Brooklyn Children’s Museum exhibit presented a positive view of the multicultural community from a child’s point of view. The Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History exhibit examined how and why people came to Crown Heights, tracing the population from the time of migration from Africa to the present.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The project’s Community Advisory Committee, comprising representatives of different groups, met with project directors every few months. Project directors identified community residents with the help of neighborhood leaders who had also provided oral histories and objects for display in the exhibitions. This process laid the groundwork for the type of communication the project aimed to encourage. Community residents were solicited for their ideas about the community’s history and invited to suggest the kinds of community structures that might be developed to bring about greater long-term harmony and stability. Panels and discussions with public audiences accompanied the exhibits.

**Information Sources:** Ford Foundation grant summary; Cassedy O’Donnell, Susannah. “Making Peace in Crown Heights,” *Museum News*, July/August 1994.

## A-3. *Hartford Grandmothers’ Project*

### **Peggy Diggs, artist; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut**

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**Project Description:** The Wadsworth Atheneum invited artist Peggy Diggs, whose work addresses issues of domestic violence, to develop a public art project in conjunction with a museum exhibition tracing the evolution of her work from studio to the public sector. Diggs’ resulting *Hartford Grandmothers’ Project* (1993-94) addressed the fear of city streets experienced by elderly women living in the city. The women’s anger was primarily directed at teenagers whom they viewed as responsible for an escalation of violence.

The public art project took the form of scratch-off lottery tickets. One side of each card included excerpts from a conversation Diggs had with an elderly woman discussing the decline of personal safety in the streets of Hartford. The other



side revealed the words of a teenager on the subject of crime and the fears of the elderly. The sheets of scratch-off cards were distributed on one day in an edition of the city's daily newspaper, *The Hartford Courant*. At first reluctant to circulate the angry comments to the community at large, the newspaper later reevaluated its role and responsibility in the representation of the city's realities for particular citizens.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Diggs spent one year interviewing elderly women in senior citizen centers, churches, parishes, and in their homes. Their personal stories were later incorporated into the "artwork." Diggs met with teenagers in housing projects with the help of the Institute for Community Research, school officials, and members of the clergy. Throughout the summer and autumn following the *Courant's* distribution of the cards, Diggs returned to coordinate meetings bringing together the elderly women and teenagers for conversation with each other.

**Information Sources:** Phillips, Patricia C. "Peggy Diggs: Private Acts and Public Art," *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995; exhibition brochure.

## A-4. *The Manhole Cover Project: A Gun Legacy* Bradley McCallum, artist; Wadsworth Atheneum

**Project Description:** *The Manhole Cover Project* (1997) was organized to provide a contemporary counterpoint to *Sam and Elizabeth: Legend and Legacy of Colt's Empire*, an exhibition of artworks collected by Hartford gun manufacturer Samuel Colt. *The Manhole Cover Project* by artist Bradley McCallum was a collaborative public art project that responded to Hartford's past and also attempted to gain perspective on the current problem of gun violence in the city. McCallum did not pretend the project offered solutions to gun violence. Rather, its goal was to engage diverse audiences in the process of translating a pressing social problem into a meaningful set of cultural metaphors. With gun violence increasingly addressed as a public health issue and not simply a criminal justice issue, the Atheneum collaborated with the Connecticut Childhood Injury Prevention Center of Connecticut Children's Medical Center to maximize the project's potential for education and prevention.

At the Wadsworth Atheneum, the project was represented by the exhibition of 228 custom-designed manhole covers weighing 32,216 pounds, the exact equivalent to the weight of the 11,194 guns confiscated by Connecticut State Police since 1992. McCallum modified the design for the city's existing manhole cover pattern in two important ways. Each cover was emblazoned with the words "MADE FROM 172 LBS OF YOUR CONFISCATED GUNS." McCallum intended the purposely vague pronoun "your" to suggest a sense of collective responsibility through the metaphor of



A manhole cover installed permanently in a Hartford city street.

collective ownership. Each cover also bears the Latin phrase *Vincit Qui Patitur*, the Colt family motto, alternately understood to mean “He Who Perseveres is Victorious” or “He Who Suffers Conquers.” McCallum was drawn to the ambiguous meaning of the motto and how these once-romanticized notions of strength and suffering have changed over time. The manhole covers were displayed in a temporary outdoor installation at the museum before they were installed in the streets of Hartford, many destined for some of the most crime-ridden neighborhoods. The museum installation also included audio testimonies, collected by five Hartford students, from individuals whose lives had been affected by gun violence.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** For four months, McCallum, under the supervision of the Connecticut Childhood Injury Prevention Center, led a team of local students identified by CCIPC in collecting oral stories from family members of victims of gun-related death; youth who had witnessed an act of gun violence or themselves had been shot; perpetrators of gun violence; and public health officials who deal with gun-related injury. Students went through intensive orientation and training with the artist and social service professionals before conducting interviews. At the end of the four months, students had spoken with more than seventy-five individuals and recorded twenty complete interviews.

**Information Sources:** Rondeau, James. *The Manhole Cover Project: A Gun Legacy*. (exhibition catalogue), Wadsworth Atheneum, 1996. Eiseman, Alberta. “Sam, Elizabeth and the Victims of Guns.” *The New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1997.

## ***A-5. J. M. W. Turner and the Romantic Vision of the Holy Land and the Bible*** **McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College**

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**Project Description:** The opening of the exhibit of Romantic artist J. M. W. Turner’s paintings and prints of the Holy Land at Boston College (1996) coincided with escalating battles in the Middle East in October 1996. Organizers of the show aimed to help “salve the wound” through the exhibition and an ambitious array of related public symposia with participants from all the faiths rooted in the Middle East. Presenters included: Anwar Sadat’s daughter, Camelia; Rabbi David Rosen, director of interfaith relations at the Anti-Defamation League in Jerusalem; and Rev. Samir Kafity, Anglican bishop of Jerusalem. Topics of the public symposia were:

- Significance of the Architectural Monuments of the Holy Land for Three Faiths
- Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the American Consciousness and American Politics
- The Role of Jerusalem and the Holy Land as the Center for Three Faiths

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Public programs created around the exhibition were led by experts from different cultures of the Middle East who made presentations in three-hour symposia held at Boston College. Symposia were extremely well attended and audiences included church and synagogue groups and the general public, as well as members of the area’s college community.

**Information Sources:** Temin, Christine. “A peaceful vision of the Middle East,” *The Boston Globe*, October 6, 1996, sec. N, p. 1.

## A-6. *Re: public/Listening to San Diego*

**Richard Bolton, artist; Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego**

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**Project Description:** This interactive installation by Richard Bolton at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego was held in the summer of 1996 at the time of the Republican National Convention hosted by the City of San Diego. The artist’s aim was to enable the community to discuss many of the same national issues that were debated on the Convention floor. The installation presented a wide range of perspectives and opinions, with the emphasis on politics as it is experienced in everyday life rather than as it is articulated in policy arguments or in the media. The artist hoped to “illuminate the potential of conversation as a bridge for public understanding.” *Re: public/Listening to San Diego* changed over the course of the summer in order to accommodate diverse viewpoints.

To represent diverse segments of the San Diego community, Bolton invited six California artists to participate in the project by creating short videos taped, edited, and produced throughout the three-month run of the exhibition. The videos varied in style, subject, and viewpoint and addressed issues related to immigration and the border, gang violence, the effects of welfare, and the gay community. The exhibition had six components including: an informal theater where videotapes being produced during the exhibition were projected; a video library where visitors could make their own selections and view videotapes; a “Question of the Day” to which visitors were invited to respond in writing and make a Polaroid photo of themselves (the growing collection of these was exhibited alongside the statements); and a work space for the participating artists to work on-site.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The installation itself had interactive components where visitors could record their responses to questions. These were compiled for other visitors to read. Public dialogue was facilitated through a variety of public events. A web site for the exhibition was created and could be accessed during the show and for months after with opportunity for interactive dialogue.

**Information Sources:** Knight, Christopher. “Consider it an Artist’s Exit Poll,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1996, Calendar, p. 59; interview, Diana Gaston, curator, Museum of Photographic Arts.

## A-7. *Mining the Museum*

**Fred Wilson, artist; Maryland Historical Society and The Contemporary, Baltimore**

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**Project Description:** *Mining the Museum* (1992-93) was a ground-breaking exhibition that urged both the public and museum professionals to investigate their perceptions of race, history, and the role of cultural institutions in shaping societal norms. It was a collaborative project between the Maryland Historical Society and The Contemporary, the city’s museum without walls. Given an open invitation to work with any institution in Baltimore, Wilson specifically chose the Historical Society because it seemed the archetypal museum that had not changed. Wilson’s goal was to enhance the institution’s and the public’s awareness that museums can validate or diminish human experience through what is on display—or what is not. He spent a year in residence getting to know the museum, the community it served, its structure, how it worked and the

people who worked there—from the maintenance staff to the executive director. “Mining” the collection was a central focus of the residency.

*Mining the Museum* occupied eight linked rooms of the Historical Society. Wilson resurrected long-hidden items and displayed them juxtaposed with other more conventional objects and art from the historical society’s collections. The result was jarring and thought provoking. In a standard exhibition case labeled “Metalwork, 1723-1880,” for example, slave shackles appeared in a case alongside an ornate silver tea service. Labeling was intentionally spare in order to encourage visitors to come to their own conclusions. Through the element of surprise, Wilson made visitors rethink their history and their attitudes as well as how the museum as an institution portrays history.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** During Wilson’s residency, educators and their students were invited to talk with the artist. When the show opened, gallery talks were held, as well as a panel on “Mainstreaming Cultures on the Margins in Museum Practices,” including the artist, museum professionals and area artists in discussion of the work.

Wilson’s residency and the dialogue within the institution, in addition to the exhibition, had a transformative effect on the Maryland Historical Society. Attendance for *Mining the Museum* set an all-time record. The historical society invited Wilson back to recreate a segment of the exhibition for permanent display. The society’s new exhibits have been more culturally inclusive than those developed in the past and exhibitions have been developed to specifically feature African American history in Maryland. The museum’s relationship to its collection and its community is fundamentally changed.

**Information Sources:** Garfield, Donald. “Making the Museum Mine: An Interview with Fred Wilson,” *Museum News*, May/June 1993, p. 47. Stein, Judith E. “Sins of Omission,” *Art in America*, October 1993, p. 110-114. Exhibition brochure and materials; interview, Michelle Carr, Maryland Historical Society.

## Overview: Public Art

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**P**ublic art typically refers to visual artworks (sculpture, murals, environmental art) purchased or created for public spaces located outside of traditional exhibition spaces. Public art may also include performance art and conceptual art events presented in settings outside the typical proscenium stage. In the last two decades, the predominant direction in public art has been toward site-specific works that are created in direct response to the unique physical, social, and/or political context of a particular place. Public artworks may be initiated by artists, publicly funded agencies, or private nonprofit organizations, or may be commissioned by corporations. Works result from the singular activity of an artist, through artist collaborations, or through collaborative interactions between the artist, community, and sponsoring agencies. Public artworks may be intended as permanent or may be installed temporarily for the public to experience.

In the 1980s, there was a proliferation of publicly funded percent-for-art programs. Local arts agencies and state arts agencies led efforts to secure municipal and state funds for the purchase or commission of art for public spaces. As they sought to gain public acceptance for artworks, artists and sponsoring organizations recognized the critical importance of a public process to guide the selection or creation of art work that was accountable to community interests. Dialogue was, and continues to be, prevalent in that process. Artists and sponsoring agencies typically involve targeted community segments in their research stage, in the creative process, and in aspects of artistic decision-making toward the goal of meaningful and lasting artworks in communities.

One result of incorporating a public process in the creation of site-specific work has been a wellspring of creative possibilities. The particulars of local issues, stories, commemorations, and physical locations provide unique variables for artists to consider in their aesthetic explorations. This often results in innovative approaches to content, use of materials, or scale and forms impossible in an artist's own studio-based work. In particular, new genre public art, an artist-driven movement in which artists seek social relevance and meaning through conceptually-based public artworks, has advanced some of the most challenging new aesthetic investigations in recent years.

Publicly funded public art programs are less disposed to address contentious civic issues. While they often explore contemporary themes (the environment, cultural histories, urban gentrification), highly contentious issues pose greater risks. Publicly funded agencies cautiously consider the political and funding ramifications of addressing difficult issues as well as the potential for the agency to be perceived as advocating a particular point of view. In contrast, individual artists and arts organizations that are not publicly funded more often initiate public art projects through which unpopular civic issues are addressed and/or artistic conventions are challenged.

The public art field has begun to codify community engagement and dialogue processes as a way to share techniques and prepare new artists and administrators to work effectively in public art. Public art professionals have developed conferences, forums, and publications that provide analysis of public art, including significant attention to community process and dialogue. Public artists Judith Baca, Amalia Mesa-Bains, and Suzanne Lacy have documented their processes and have developed a college-level curriculum to establish a core set of proficiencies necessary for effective public art.

## A-8. *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*

**Judith F. Baca, artist; Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), Los Angeles**

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**Project Description:** *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, painted over a seven-year period by a revolving cadre of community artists and inner-city youths (350 employed), combines intergroup dialogue among local residents with historical research. Artist Judith F. Baca, in conjunction with SPARC, responded to a youth gang “warfare situation” between and within various Los Angeles neighborhoods. Begun in 1976, the mural is 2,435 feet long and located in the Tujunga wash drainage canal in the San Fernando Valley. The location is a suburban area settled by white flight from expanding inner city neighborhoods and by newcomers. *The Wall* visually documents the contributions and history of indigenous people, European immigrants, and women from prehistory to the 1950s. When completed, the mural will extend over one mile. From the start, the intent was to stimulate constructive dialogue among the different, and often embattled, ethnic groups serving as a monument to interracial cooperation.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Baca is a teacher who creates pedagogical structures within her artworks, training young artists in art as a tool for social transformation. The methods used by Baca aim at civic dialogue, education, and activism through art. In the early stages of the project, Baca had to overcome ethnic prejudices and conflict among participants. To get these differences out in the open, Baca used applied-theater games and role-playing, as well as think tanks with scholars and community participants who served as oral historians. Ultimately, she tried to empower participants with a sense of their own worth as participants in the project. In the studio, Baca sought input about the different ethnic groups and relationships among them, from both social and historical points of view. Baca brought in ethnic historians to teach and guide as images were being created. One of her strategies has been to identify and emphasize “overlapping mythologies,” the similar images and traditions discovered in different communities during the process of research.

Baca has used similar processes in subsequent projects, including the *World Wall: A Vision of the Future Without Fear*, a monumental, multi-panel traveling mural project that encourages global dialogues on war, peace, cooperation, interdependence and spiritual growth; and the *Cultural Explainers* project, movable sculptures designed to encourage intercultural dialogue in Los Angeles neighborhoods.

**Information Sources:** *Public Art Dialogue + Southeast* (conference document), Durham: Durham Arts Council, 1989 (Baca presentation transcript); Lippard, Lucy. *Mixed Blessings*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990. Lacy, Suzanne. *Mapping the Terrain*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995. Interview with Judith Baca.

## A-9. *Silent Wishes, Unconscious Dreams, and Prayers ... Fulfilled*

**Carl Pope, artist; Real Art Ways, Hartford, Connecticut**

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**Project Description:** *Silent Wishes, Unconscious Dreams, and Prayers ... Fulfilled* was a public artwork created by artist Carl Pope, Jr., and dedicated in September 1996 in Hartford, Connecticut. The intent of the work was to help community people reflect upon and heal the pains caused by inner-city crime with the hope of preventing more killing. The work was located in a vacant lot in north Hartford and consisted of seventeen brownstone slabs. Engraved in the slabs were quotes

from friends and loved ones about eleven Hartford youth who died in Hartford neighborhoods as a result of domestic or gang violence, drug abuse, or AIDS. The installation remained in the vacant lot for one year and then groups of the stones were moved to other city parks and locations.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The artist researched the youth who died. He spent time walking the neighborhoods and talking with family, neighbors, friends, girlfriends about those who were victims of violence. Their quotes were incorporated into the project. While the project was being installed, neighborhood members talked with the artist and Real Art Ways representatives on an ongoing basis. Conflicting gang factions showed up to check out the project and expressed that they would protect it. After the work was installed, informal dialogue took place at the site of the artwork and was generated by neighborhood organizations, the media, and Real Art Ways. There was substantial editorial coverage in the local newspapers as a call to Hartford to “wake up.”

**Information Sources:** Interview, Aaron Wartland, visual arts curator and Will K. Wilkins, executive director, Real Art Ways; project materials.

## A-10. *Underground*

### **Suzanne Lacy, artist; Three Rivers Arts Festival, Pittsburgh**

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**Project description:** The Three Rivers Arts Festival in Pittsburgh includes a public art program in which artists develop temporary public artworks based on the historical, cultural, and environmental character and issues of the city. The festival’s 1993 “Sculpture at the Point” exhibition included an outdoor installation by Suzanne Lacy on the subject of domestic violence. Lacy’s project, *Underground*, was organized around a length of railroad tracks laid in a park setting at the center of the festival site. Along the tracks, rusted and crumpled junk cars inscribed with statistics and the tragic statements of victims symbolized the stories of domestic abuse. A poem written by the artist about a woman escaping domestic violence was inscribed into the wooden railroad ties. The final car along the route, filled with suitcases and stories of escape, offered a vision of hope. At the end of the tracks was a telephone booth with an interactive line where participants could learn where to get help, leave their own messages and meditations, and listen to the voices and messages of other women.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Before the project, Lacy collaborated with the staff and survivors of the Women’s Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh. A coalition, formed for the project, consisted of volunteers from police departments, legal and medical professionals, and survivors themselves who staffed the phone lines of a local domestic violence shelter. As many as 500,000 festival visitors saw Lacy’s public art work, and Lacy received hundreds of messages from festival goers at the phone booth.

**Information Sources:** Phillips, Patricia C. “Everybody’s Art: Long-term Supporters of Temporary Public Art.” *Public Art Review*. Forecast: St. Paul, Minnesota, spring/summer 1994. Kelly, Jeff. “The Body Politics of Suzanne Lacy.” *But Is It Art?* Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

## A-11. *Consequences of a Gesture and 100 Victories/10,000 Tears* Daniel Martinez, artist, Mary Jane Jacob, curator; a project of Culture in Action, Sculpture Chicago

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**Project Description:** Seeking to bridge art and life, eight public art projects curated by Mary Jane Jacob unfolded from 1992 to 1993 in various communities throughout the city of Chicago. Under the umbrella *Culture in Action*, artist and community partnerships were forged in order to explore pressing social and political issues. Each project addressed a separate issue.

*Consequences of a Gesture and 100 Victories/10,000 Tears* by artist Daniel Martinez was a two-part project (1993) that tracked the history of the American immigrant labor movement by identifying important events in Chicago for which no monument or marker exists. Martinez wanted his work to recognize existing cultures in neighborhoods and encourage interaction among people in geographically and culturally isolated parts of the city. The project's two parts were:

- *Consequences of a Gesture*, a parade that brought together Mexican American and African American groups who do not generally join forces.
- A public art monument called *100 Victories/10,000 Tears* evolved out of one of the parade locations, the Maxwell Street Market area. It has a rich history as a settlement for various ethnicities and racial groups but was greatly reduced in 1957 when a portion of the community was demolished to build an expressway. The area had become a hotly contested location at the time of Martinez's project because of the University of Illinois' efforts to expand its adjacent campus, thereby threatening once again to displace the poor people in the community. That issue, coupled with this community's history as the site of the 1886 Haymarket Riot, where workers came into conflict with management and changed the course of labor history worldwide, became the thrust of *100 Victories/10,000 Tears*. Martinez created a monument to labor using giant granite slabs from a building being torn down on the University of Illinois campus.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** *100 Victories/10,000 Tears* was recognized by contingents that stood at opposite ends of the debate on the future of the market and the university. Though removed mysteriously after five months, Martinez's monument became a catalyst and forum for dialogue. Martinez saw value in being an outsider, perhaps able to see another's situation more clearly than those inside.



*Consequences of a Gesture*, Daniel J. Martinez, "Culture in Action," a project of Sculpture Chicago. Photo John McWilliams.

In broad terms, *Culture in Action* was concerned with "spaces of discourse" and the "active continuum of sculptural and cultural space." Dialogue occurred through communal action on the various projects. Recognizing that there are many publics, *Culture in Action* addressed itself first and foremost to constituents for whom the social issues were of primary concern. "The objects that resulted from the interactive process of *Culture in Action* were the locus for shared sentiments and means of communication with other audiences," said Mary Jane Jacob. "Their form, even if unconventional and more tied to conceptual genre than tradition, did not pose a



barrier: Artists and audiences intersected at the point of meaning and joined in determining the form of expression their dialogues would take.”

Discussion and education were intrinsic to each artist’s project. Each project had many parts and a number of these served educational functions for different audiences. For example, the installation, *Flood*, by the artist group Haha, actively involved health volunteers in cultivating a hydroponic garden to produce vegetables and therapeutic herbs for use by HIV/AIDS service organizations. The garden served as a space for community dialogue as well as a metaphor for caregiving. The installation was toured daily by groups and discussions were held on site and were open to others who dropped in. The artists and their collaborators also held sessions among themselves with invited speakers.

(See also *Televecindario*, another Culture in Action project, in the Media Arts section.)

**Information Sources:** Jacob, Mary Jane, Michael Brenson, Eva M. Olson. *Culture in Action*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

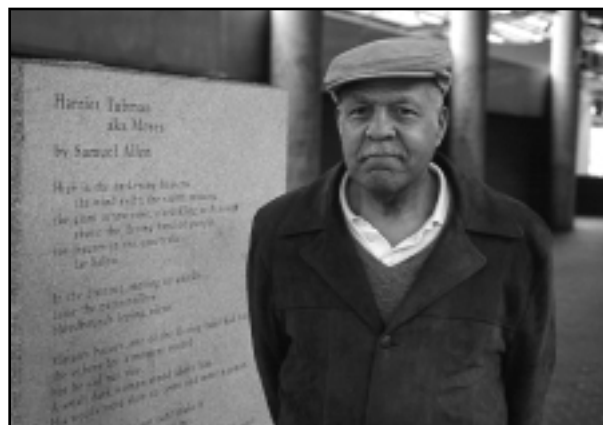
## A-12. Art in Transit/Orange Line project UrbanArts, Boston

**Project Description:** In the late 1980s, Boston relocated its elevated Orange Line into a nearby railroad corridor, transforming it into an intermodal connection. Local residents were wary of this transit relocation, fearful about gentrification the project might bring to their neighborhoods. Public art became a tool to help residents cope with the changes imminent in the Orange Line relocation. UrbanArts, a Boston-based public art organization, established a station-specific art program. Citizen-based station committees helped review artist proposals and also created opportunities for residents to document the transformation they experienced in their neighborhood through photography, oral history, and writing.

*The Artists’ Lens* invited high school students to work with professional photographers to document changes, helping residents assert an identity they felt was being erased by the massive construction project and to relieve tensions that had been building in their community.

*Boston Contemporary Writers* selected prose and poetry from a statewide competition that was then inscribed in granite and permanently installed in the new stations and adjacent parkland. An oral history project, *Sources of Strength*, offered students of Roxbury Community College and residents an opportunity to learn oral history techniques and to gather stories from community residents. The stories were developed into a theatrical performance presented in collaboration with two colleges; an exhibition of the text accompanied by photo portraits of the storytellers was also presented.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Nearly eight hundred people of all ages and backgrounds took part in the projects. A ten-member site committee of community representatives served to develop a com-



Author Samuel Allen stands before the granite page of his writing installed at the Ruggles station, a literary project of the Boston Orange Line public art initiative. Photo George Vasquez, courtesy of UrbanArts, Inc.

munity profile for each station's art program. These profiles were used by the professional art selection panels to select artists to develop proposals. The photographic and oral history projects actively stimulated residents' awareness of the changes that had been introduced historically into Southwest Corridor communities and were continuing to be introduced by economic and political forces beyond residents' control.

**Information Sources:** Margulies Breitbart, Myrna and Pamela Worden. "Creating a Sense of Purpose: Public Art and Boston's Orange Line," *Places*. Brooklyn: Design History Foundation, v. 9, no. 2, summer 1994. Wendy Feuer, *art in transit: making it happen*. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.

## A-13. *Echoes of the Heart* Olivia Gude, artist; Chicago Public Art Group

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**Project Description:** *Echoes of the Heart* sought to examine and improve neighborhood race relations in a Chicago neighborhood. The project consisted of a series of ten banners made in 1993 with a group of residents from Chicago's southwest side, an area surrounding Marquette Park, nationally infamous as the place where residents threw rocks at Martin Luther King. Adults, teens, and children worked with artist/facilitator Olivia Gude to generate the themes, images, and text that together presented a dynamic portrait of the complex social relations of the area. The project arose from the community, with the Southwest Catholic Cluster Project, an antiracism group, providing leadership.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** A multiracial discussion group agreed to come together to try to speak frankly about race and the neighborhood. Participants shared stories of anger, grief, fear, and embarrassment, and analyzed structures of language and politics, as they sought to find a practical basis for fulfilling spiritual commitments to break down barriers of racial difference. Because of its extensive community-based mural work, the

Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG) was invited to participate in a gathering on community, culture, spirituality, and race. Through networks formed at that gathering, Gude, a CPAG artist, proposed a project that would represent this kind of dialogue to others in the community. CPAG aims to help communities "represent themselves to themselves." Apparent within the dialogues was how subjectivity changes over time. People present themselves not as standard historical types, but as human beings whose thoughts and reactions shift according to accumulated experience. The Catholic Cluster provided a structure through which the banners could be shown at various community sites and thus become incorporated into an ongoing dialogue.



*Banners from the Echoes of the Heart Project created by Chicago residents with artist Olivia Gude. Photo Chicago Public Art Group.*

**Information Sources:** Gude, Olivia. "Beyond Monological Monuments." *Public Art Review*, spring/summer 1995.

## A-14. *The AIDS Memorial Quilt* The Names Project

**Project Description:** The Names Project *AIDS Memorial Quilt* is composed of over 33,000 individual three-foot by six-foot cloth panels, each created by an ordinary person to memorialize a friend or family member who has died of AIDS. In 1995, the Names Project Foundation and its 40 chapters sponsored 1,563 displays worldwide, visited by nearly 1.2 million people. Goals of the Names Project are to: Provide a creative means for remembrance and healing; illustrate the enormity of the AIDS epidemic; increase public awareness and prevention education around HIV/AIDS; and raise funds for community-based AIDS service organizations.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Quilt display programs have been developed with a focus on particular population segments and include related educational materials whose aim is to educate, increase awareness, and stimulate reflection and discussion. Two examples are:

- **High School**—The Quilt offers a way to reach youth in their teens and twenties with the message of HIV prevention. Seeing the Quilt creates a “teachable moment” when young people are receptive to information that can save their lives. More than eight out of ten students surveyed at high school displays say that seeing the Quilt makes them want to find out more about how to prevent HIV infection.
- **Interfaith**—Making AIDS an immediate, relevant issue for members of churches, temples, and mosques across the country is a principal goal of the Interfaith Quilt Program. Names Project supplies general suggestions for integrating the Quilt into faith communities. Host committees organized by the religious organizations hold panel-making workshops and integrate the Quilt and discussions of HIV/AIDS into services, inviting people living with HIV to speak. Religious groups often sponsor events such as open houses, concerts, or school field trips to share the Quilt with the larger community.

**Information Sources:** Names Project program materials; web site, [www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org).

## Overview: Media Arts

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**T**he media arts have burgeoned in the last 10 years, particularly in the public's consciousness, as a broad range of venues and products, including new interactive media, have evolved. Independent film and video are widely available, not only through the more traditional venues of film festivals and media art centers, but also through commercial movie industry releases, home video, network and cable television, and most recently, the Internet. Although they have been the subject of public funding cuts in recent years, public television and radio have been instrumental in getting work produced, broadcast, and creatively distributed to schools, libraries, and other settings.

Institutional venues, such as film festivals, media art centers, museum film departments, and public television and radio stations face the challenge of attracting broader publics. Maximizing standard post-screening discussion formats to achieve greater depth in discussion of civic issues is one approach. Public radio and television have begun to explore innovations in listener and viewer call-in formats as well as coordinated local programming and discussion forums in conjunction with broadcasts. On public television's POV series, High Impact Television campaigns feature first-rate independent film and video documentaries to catalyze local dialogue through interactive programming coordinated by local agencies and public television stations. The Independent Television Service's Station-Independent Partnership Production (SIPP) fund is another example of public interest media's efforts to contribute to civic dialogue. SIPP funds catalyze the creation of programs that highlight local issues and perspectives that also have national resonance. An explicit intent is to use the program to expand civic dialogue. Finally, many independent media arts producers have taken advantage of the technical resources of public access television to develop projects that give voice to civic issues.

Certain recent national projects have demonstrated the potential of film and video to advance public dialogue about civic issues. Documentary film, by its topical nature, as well as issue-focused dramatic films, have long stimulated informal conversation among moviegoers as well as formal postscreening discussions in a variety of educational, festival, and community-based settings. Through strategic partnerships between producers and other agencies, contemporary films have engaged broad audiences in facilitated discussions about contemporary issues. For instance, through the *Chrysler Hoop Dreams Challenge*, the PBS broadcast of *Hoop Dreams* became the catalyst for a 20-city community outreach campaign to engage children, parents, communities, and the public in discussions about issues raised by the film.

The growth of new media and interactive possibilities open up new aesthetic frontiers and dialogue opportunities. Many cultural institutions are using web sites as a means for audiences to offer reactions and engage with the institution and each other in online discussion of museum exhibitions, films, and other programming. Artists working in interactive media are intrigued by aesthetic possibilities enabled by technological advances and by the directness of communication with viewers, not only in dialogue about work, but as choice-making participants and even cocreators.

## A-15. *Tele-Vecindario*

### Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, artist; a project of Culture in Action, Sculpture Chicago

**Project Description:** *Tele-Vecindario* (1992-93) was a project commissioned as part of Sculpture Chicago’s Culture in Action public art program. The project’s organizational processes sought to bridge the social and cultural isolation of residents of West Town, a neighborhood of Chicago, and create a space for dialogue. Through the project, artist Inigo Manglano-Ovalle aimed to transform and reclaim the neighborhood street, territorialized by gangs, into a communal promenade. The project was centered in the artist’s own neighborhood of West Town, a predominantly lower-income, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central, and South American neighborhood. The usual urban problems—lack of jobs, high drop-out rate, crime, drugs, gangs, teen pregnancy, and AIDS—affect the area.

Video emerged as “the very tool of the tertulia (conversation), the means by which a dialogue between peers and with adults could be facilitated.” The project took the form of multiple video dialogues among neighbors, known cumulatively as *Tele-Vecindario*. A youth division of the project named Street-Level Video (S-LV) became a central force.

A *Street Level Video Block Party* was a major component of S-LV’s multiyear work; an event encompassing one residential street, using 75 monitors, involving four rival gangs and S-LV members, with an audience of more than a thousand people. For 12 hours, video monitors were grouped in multiple installations. The event, both a block party and video installation, also included a stage with teen performers and a peace mural whose negotiated design involved S-LV, gang representatives, some neighbors, and graffiti artists. Insiders and outsiders to the neighborhood blended as they strolled down the street for the evening’s tertulia. They conversed with each other or listened to each other on videos. As the evening progressed, the monitors lit the street and provided, albeit ephemerally, a neutral site for cultural and social exchange.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Video itself emerged as the artist’s tool for engaging the neighborhood, enlisting students, meeting other people, and learning the terrain. Manglano-Ovalle visited more than 40 social service agencies in order to refine his approach to the project. The artist knew that active involvement of area leaders was essential to integrate this project into the life of the community. He formalized the associations and alliances he had been building over a year’s time with the creation of a new coalition of youth organizations that called itself West Town Vecinos Video Channel. S-LV, now known as Street Level Youth Media, remains actively engaged in the community with a storefront location. It continues to hold an annual block party among its many programs.

**Information Sources:** Jacob, Mary Jane. *Culture in Action*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, p. 76-87. interview, Inigo Manglano-Ovalle.

## A-16. P.O.V. High Impact Television Project American Documentary, Inc.

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**Project Description:** P.O.V. is a documentary series produced by American Documentary, Inc., that is distributed through public television stations nationwide. High Impact Television™ (HITV) is a “beyond outreach” effort that forges national and local partnerships to build new audiences, educate viewers, and foster sustained public discourse and activity around the issues raised by P.O.V. programming. HITV campaigns have been implemented around select programs such as *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (1995, about Alzheimer’s disease and issues of caregiving), *Silverlake Life: A View From Here* (1993, about AIDS), *Girls Like Us* (1997, about empowering young women and intergenerational problem solving), and *If I Can’t Do It* (1998, about disability issues). Local public television stations often partner with P.O.V. by coordinating human service and other relevant local organizations in order to maximize the program’s impact on different audiences. Local activities include call-in shows, on-line support systems, sneak preview screening/discussion forums, coalition building, etc.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** HITV maximized the presentation of *Girls Like Us*, Jane C. Wagner’s and Tina DiFelicianantonio’s Emmy award-winning film about four teenage girls growing up in South Philadelphia. Using its broadcast as a centerpiece, P.O.V. partnered with Girls, Inc., a national organization dedicated to serving young women, to launch the “Listen UP! Girls Like Us” campaign. The effort inspired intergenerational dialogue, offered safe venues for potentially ongoing discussion of sensitive issues and garnered attention for the program as a tool to encourage adults to become aware of the issues affecting the young women in their lives. Events were held in cities across the country and often co-hosted by a wide range of partner organizations including Girls, Inc., the American Association of University Women, the National 4-H Clubs, the YWCA, and local public television stations. In Tennessee, Girls, Inc., and the University of Memphis held a widely promoted sneak preview screening and discussion with young women and adults from around the city. Information about available community resources was shared and viewership in the area increased by threefold for the broadcast of the program.

**Information Sources:** *High Impact Television™*, Washington D.C.: The Benton Foundation, 202-638-5770.

## A-17. Eyes on the Prize I and II Blackside, Inc.

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**Project Description:** The public television project *Eyes on the Prize I: America’s Civil Rights Years 1954-1965* and its sequel, *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965-1985*, were produced by Blackside, Inc. of Boston and first received national public television broadcast in 1987 and 1990 respectively. Both series have received numerous awards for their comprehensive and compelling portrayal of the civil rights movement and issues of race in the United States over three decades. During the first-year run alone, Blackside estimates over 20 million people watched each series.

In addition to broadcast, educational and outreach efforts have extended the impact of *Eyes on the Prize*. The series have been made available to high schools and colleges for purchase in videotape form with accompanying teaching materials, including *Viewers Guide* designed to help teachers facilitate discussions. In conjunction with *Eyes II, Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement*, and other print materials were developed as tools for community-based screenings and discussions.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** *Eyes on the Prize I*—An evaluation conducted by American Social History Productions of the impact of *Eyes on the Prize I* in high schools and colleges confirmed its power as a teaching tool. Beyond teaching materials provided by Blackside, teachers employed diverse teaching strategies with the video, attributed to the adaptability of such a high quality series. Teachers invariably used *Eyes* as an active tool to deepen students’ understanding of difficult emotional and moral issues, rather than simply as a passive supplier of information that could not be covered in lectures or textbooks. The series was able to engage the interests and concerns of students and was particularly effective in helping them confront philosophical and moral issues such as racism and equality.

*Eyes on the Prize II*—Pre-broadcast grassroots as well as national promotion generated substantial interest in *Eyes II*. Series producers and staff participated in a number of special events developed by colleges, public television stations, religious leaders, and community groups in conjunction with the broadcast to promote dialogue about civil rights and American democracy. Post-broadcast programs were developed in schools, museums, film festivals, and colleges, many of which hosted panels or facilitated discussions. Facing History and Ourselves, a national organization that engages students in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism, created a curriculum focusing on American democracy using segments from both *Eyes I* and *II*. In addition, more than 25,000 *Viewers Guides* were mailed to educational, religious, and community organizations, libraries, and public television stations.

**Information Sources:** *Final Report on Eyes on the Prize II* (report to the Ford Foundation), Blackside, Inc., 1989. Brier, Stephen and Kimberly Kinsler. *Watching Eyes: An evaluation of the educational impact of “Eyes on the Prize”* (report to the Ford Foundation), 1990.

## A-18. A Healthy Baby Girl Judith Helfand Productions

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**Project Description:** *A Health Baby Girl* is an autobiographical documentary chronicling the filmmaker’s experience with cervical cancer caused by diethylstilbestrol (DES). Shot over five years, this one-hour video-diary explores what happens when science, marketing, and corporate power intervene in the deepest family relationships. The distribution campaign (beginning in 1997) makes explicit the connections between these issues, using a national public television broadcast as a focal opportunity to advance community awareness and long-term local activism.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The producer worked with cross-class, cross-constituency coalitions of activists and educators across the country to design an effective strategy for media-based activism. The film was shown as a work-in-progress to focus groups in different regions, bringing together organizers and individuals representing different constituencies. Participants completed detailed questionnaires; responses helped to ensure that the film would be useful, accessible, and relevant to a broad audience. Focus groups also helped to determine concrete ways to build alliances between people that may not otherwise recognize their common ground—for example, a DES mother and an oil refinery worker exposed to hormone-disrupting PCBs. Using these questionnaires, the producer worked with a media educator and organizers to develop informative viewer materials. National and local partner organizations helped to identify opportunities to create links between screenings of the film and local discussion groups.

**Information Sources:** Presentation by Judith Helfand, Northampton Film Festival; project materials.

## A-19. *Hoop Dreams: Chrysler Hoop Dreams Challenge* Kartemquin Films

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**Project Description:** The purpose of the *Chrysler Hoop Dreams Challenge* (1995-96) was to use the public television premiere of *Hoop Dreams* as a catalyst for local discussions of important social issues illustrated by the film. *Hoop Dreams*, made by Steve James, Frederick Marx, and Peter Gilbert, is the story of two African American youth whose hopes for the future hinge on basketball scholarships. At once a sports documentary and a penetrating look at American class structure, the film was released theatrically and received both popular and critical acclaim. An extensive twenty-city educational outreach campaign sponsored by Chrysler used the film's subject to engage children, parents, and the public about issues of: familial conflict and support; the role of sports in inner-city communities; teen and single parenting; drugs and violence; class; and the educational system's role and responsibility in recruiting young athletes.



*William Gates and Arthur Agee in the documentary Hoop Dreams.*

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Kartemquin Films, a filmmaking and distribution company in Chicago committed to activist cinema (and coproducer of the film), coordinated the educational outreach program in conjunction with the public television broadcast of *Hoop Dreams*. Local outreach efforts were coordinated by a team in each of the twenty cities that included the public television station, college or university, and schools and local organizations. The outreach campaign included both high-profile and grassroots events and distribution of the *Hoop Dreams Student Playbook and Teachers' Guide* to facilitate discussion of the film's many themes in neighborhood and school settings. After the Chrysler initiative, Kartemquin mounted additional efforts in Chicago schools, and Northeastern University in Boston continued efforts through a program called "Hoop Dreams and More."

**Information Sources:** Interview, Francine Pope, educational outreach director, *Hoop Dreams*; project materials, Kartemquin Films, Inc.

## A-20. *A Guide to the Film Schindler's List* Facing History and Ourselves

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**Project Description:** A detailed study guide created by Facing History and Ourselves helps teachers and students connect the events described in the film *Schindler's List* to present-day events by focusing on issues of choice, group behavior, and racial and ethnic hatred. Facing History and Ourselves is a national organization that engages students in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism, and often employs the arts to stimulate discussion. The use of *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg, provides an opportunity to both preserve and judge the past through a medium that is



accessible to every high school student. The film and readings suggested by the project’s curriculum materials help teachers to stimulate students to think about the complexities of good and evil, the choices they have as individuals within a society, the consequences of those decisions, and their responsibilities to self and others.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Through seminars conducted by Facing History staff and resource speakers, teachers learn to use the tools of the humanities—inquiry, analysis, and interpretation—to help students analyze events and issues. At workshops and follow-up sessions, teachers are offered a wide range of materials to engage and challenge their students’ most advanced thinking and promote individual reflection and group discussion. Facing History is committed to producing programs and teaching materials that further democratic values and beliefs and challenge students to deepen their thinking by not accepting simple solutions to complex questions. They keep a journal that becomes a “silent conversation with themselves” and come together to share insights and perspectives as they form judgments about human behavior and events in history.

**Information Sources:** *A Guide to the Film Schindler’s List*, Facing History and Ourselves; interview, Christine Stokes, Facing History and Ourselves.

## **A-21. Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema International House of Philadelphia/Neighborhood Film/Video Project**

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**Project Description:** The Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema is a twelve-day celebration of artistic excellence and diversity in contemporary independent media arts. In 1996, the PFWC screened over 100 films from 37 countries for an audience of 22,000 people. The festival provides an environment that encourages interaction among filmmakers and audiences as one way to fulfill the International House mission of cultural exchange and understanding. The festival’s programming includes significant attention to films that address contemporary social, political, and cultural issues. Documentaries have lent themselves most readily to the various dialogue formats used by the festival and have been the most popular with audiences. The festival seeks documentaries and features that acknowledge the artist’s point of view and whose subject and storytelling capture the emotion of the issue in ways as compelling as a dramatic film.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The Festival’s *Cine Cafes* offer topical, facilitated discussions focused around a particular grouping of festival films that explore common themes. They are casual gatherings at local bookstores, cafes, and coffee shops that “are not about raising hands, experts, or right answers.” For selected films, filmmakers and/or other individuals with relevant perspective also facilitate post screening discussions. For all discussion forums, the festival seeks skilled facilitators who share the festival’s dual agenda to explore the art of filmmaking and to bring out the issues.

The festival sees certain limitations on its role in relation to public dialogue. Creating substantive opportunities for dialogue within the festival requires programmatic attention, just as the selection and screening of films does. The festival provides the forum and the space and gets the parties there, but sees follow-up as beyond its means. Appropriate community-based partners would be needed to extend the dialogue or develop action.

**Information Sources:** Program and promotional materials from the Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema; interview, Linda Blackaby, festival director

## Overview: Literature

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Literature has enjoyed a resurgence of public interest in recent years. Nonprofit literature organizations, presses, coffeehouses, bookstores, libraries, colleges, and universities, and cultural organizations have advanced the popularity of the written arts by offering increasing numbers of readings and popularized events such as poetry slams and festivals, which are attracting sizable audiences. Schools and colleges have launched public events to read particular books, followed by planned forums and discussions. In addition, commercial publishers and bookstores have sponsored events that contribute to public interest in the art form.

The potential of literature to involve a broad public through collective reading and discussion is increasing due to the emergence of a variety of informal and alternative venues that connect writers' work to the public. An opportunity exists to build on the processes and impact of writers-in-residence programs, in particular, which are offered in many of these settings. While the focus of residencies has been on the writing process and individual creative expression, the writer often has served as a catalyst to elicit discussion of the issues that participants explore in their writing or through the work presented by the resident author.

Humanities and social service organizations are forming partnerships to engage people in civic dialogue through literature and poetry. For example, over a three-year period, The *Writer's Voice* project of the Billings, Montana, YMCA will conduct a series of readings and discussions in Montana and Wyoming based on James Galvin's book, *The Meadow*. Galvin will give a reading hosted by a local organization followed by a discussion of issues related to land use and environmentalism. The Snake River Institute in Wyoming (now defunct), a nonpartisan convening organization focusing on western community issues, gave the arts and humanities a central role in stimulating dialogue about politically charged topics. Its *Atomic Ghost* program (titled after a poetry anthology), for example, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bomb. It began with readings from the anthology as well as from the works of western writer, Terry Tempest Williams, covering her family's experience with cancer resulting from A-bomb testings. In a subsequent forum on issues of atomic energy in the region, the poetry and its content became a key reference point, helping to humanize the dialogue.

## A-22. *Atomic Ghost* Snake River Institute, Wilson, Wyoming

**Project Description:** The Snake River Institute offers forums, symposia, and workshops that examine and discuss the land, the people, and the issues of the West in a neutral setting. The arts and humanities are the Institute’s central tools, providing both a point-of-entry and effective vehicle for dialogue about topics that are often politically charged and hard to solve. Literature, in particular, has been a thrust.

The *Atomic Ghost* program in 1995 (titled after a poetry anthology) marked the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bomb. A Friday night program featured the editor of *Atomic Ghost*, John Bradley, and a western writer, Terry Tempest Williams, whose work, *Refuge*, is about her family’s experience with cancer as a result of A-bomb tests. The Institute invited local people who were considered excellent readers to read selections from the anthology. Tempest Williams also read an essay she wrote particularly for the anniversary. The following day, the forum provided a pointed look at contemporary issues of atomic energy in the region by featuring a dialogue between David Love, a geologist who worked in the 1950s as a uranium specialist and a representative of an Idaho-based nuclear waste facility. According to Libby Crews Wood, Snake River director, “What was striking was that, even in this more scientific, issue-based discussion, the poetry and its content of the previous evening emerged again and again as a reference point during the discussion.” The Saturday dialogue did not succumb to a heated debate between these two people or with the audience, and Crews Wood deduced that beginning with personal stories told through literature resulted in more open and intimate dialogue.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** A 20-member advisory board helps the Institute to discuss and define Western issue priorities, identify current players, and develop a core curriculum. Advisors include artists, historians, writers, architects, activists, journalists, and folklorists; most have served as Institute faculty. Dialogue is a key facet of any forum coordinated by the Institute.

**Information Sources:** Program materials, Snake River Institute; interview, Libby Crews Wood, director. (Note: The Snake River Institute closed in 1998.)

## A-23. *The Writer’s Voice of the Billings Family YMCA* Billings, Montana

**Project Description:** Over a three-year period beginning in 1996, the Writer’s Voice of Billings Family YMCA conducted a series of readings and discussions in eastern Montana and Wyoming featuring author James Galvin. His book *The Meadow* was used as a catalyst for dialogue. The intent of this project was to address the competing demands of land use and environmentalism affecting the daily lives of people in ranching communities in the western United States through the writings of James Galvin and other related literary works. Through this project, Galvin hoped to address issues—environmental protection versus ranching, development versus wilderness—and to find common ground where it existed. Prior to the reading, sponsoring organizations were given copies of *The Meadow* to distribute freely to the public. The project was funded by the Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund.

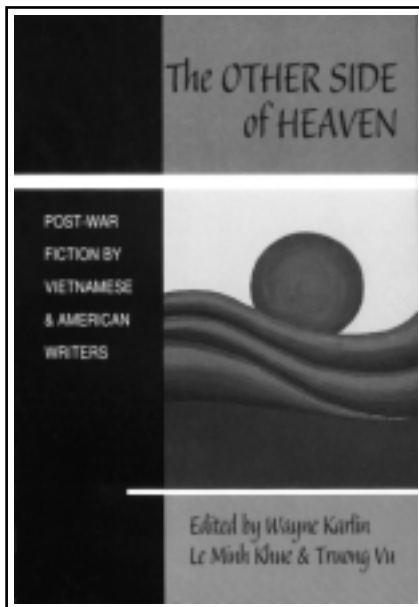
**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** In each locality, Galvin gave a reading followed by a discussion of issues related to land use and environmentalism. The intent was to open the door to further discussion among local factions and lead to understanding of common ground as well as differences. Hosting a reading and discussion was open to any interested local organization.

**Information Sources:** Interview, Jason Schindler, National Writer's Voice Project; interview, Corby Skinner, Writer's Voice at the YMCA, Billings; program materials, National Writer's Voice Project.

## A-24. *The Other Side of Heaven* anthology and national book tour Curbstone Press, Willimantic, Connecticut

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**Project Description:** *The Other Side of Heaven: Postwar Fiction by Vietnamese and American Writers* includes stories about the aftermath of the Vietnam War as told by thirty-seven American, North Vietnamese, and South Vietnamese writers. The book's editors, now all writers, stood on opposing sides during the war: A Vietnam veteran, a female soldier for the North Vietnamese, and an expatriate former South Vietnamese soldier. By giving equal voice to the Vietnamese and Americans, the anthology sought to establish the human effects of the aftermath of war for both sides and to create a reconciliation through literature. In 1995 the book and its editors and authors went on national tour to colleges and community settings in hopes of facilitating a healing discussion. The anthology was published and the tour mounted by Curbstone Press, of Willimantic, Connecticut, a nonprofit publishing house dedicated to literature that reflects a commitment to social change.



**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The month-long book tour of *The Other Side of Heaven* was hosted largely by colleges and universities and consisted of readings, signings, and discussions. Curbstone Press frequently “piggybacked” discussions at public libraries, high schools, and bookstores. Curbstone worked to gain significant attention in the media at tour locations, including print media coverage and radio call-in shows when appropriate. The tour had the effect of personalizing the Vietnam War. Le Minh Khue, the North Vietnamese writer/coeditor, found that many American veterans were deeply moved by her writing. She observed that the enemy, suddenly personified, was no longer an invisible demon but someone who experienced the same suffering they had.

**Information Sources:** Karlin, Wayne. “Travel to the Other Side of Heaven.” *The WA Veteran*, March 1996. LaSalle, Peter. “Both Sides Now: A Gathering of Fictional Perspectives on the Unforgettable War.” *The Texas Observer*, January 26, 1996. Blumenthal, Ralph. “After Vietnam War, A Literary Healing.” *The New York Times*, October 21, 1995.

## Overview: Presenting

**T**he arts presenting field encompasses organizations and institutions that present the performing arts within their own facilities or in other local settings. Colleges and universities, as well as major performing arts facilities, and smaller facilities with performance series represent the range of traditional presenters. Other types of presenters include single and multidiscipline festivals and independent presenters without permanent facilities.

Recent initiatives have sought to reexamine and redefine the role of presenters within the cultural landscape. In 1988-89, *An American Dialogue*, a study created by the National Task Force on Touring and Presenting and administered by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, set forth a new philosophical framework for the presenting field. The study recognized the potential of the presenting field to address complex issues, as well as the need for effective audience development strategies. *American Dialogue* clarified the need for artists and presenters to gain new skills to meet this potential, and it recast presenting as a series of relationships developed over time between artists, audiences, communities, and presenting institutions. Among the outcomes of *American Dialogue* was the development of the National Performance Network, which raised the standards for community engagement work by facilitating field-wide exploration of best practices, and the Arts Partners funding program of the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Fund.

New presenting models were further developed by individual organizations and consortia with an equal emphasis on artistic development and building community relationships. Two key organizations are The American Festival Project and Alternate Roots. The American Festival Project is a national coalition of performing artists working with local cosponsors in communities throughout the United States. Festivals are designed to address important local issues or concerns and are developed through a multiphase planning process around performing arts residencies that include workshops, performances, discussions, and other presentations. The aim is to foster intercultural exchange around locally defined issues. Alternate Roots, an organization based in the Southeast, supports the creation and presentation of original performing art rooted in a particular community of place, tradition, or spirit. Roots' annual convenings of artists and presenters and its touring programs that connect artists to rural, diverse, and emerging grassroots presenters throughout the south have promoted the exploration of local identity and issues through performance. Both organizations have organized discussions among practitioners and have begun to codify best practices for community-based presenting.

As a result of community-based work over the last decade, presenters have gained important experience that can guide effective arts-based civic dialogue. Performing artists and presenters agree that the presenter's role is pivotal in planning and carrying out effective community-based work. The presenter, in fact, is a critical partner to artists who wish to deepen their own performance and touring work through community-based activities. Through artist residencies and commissioning of new work, presenters have developed skills and built relationships within their local audiences that position them to carry out issue-oriented dialogue projects.

## A-25. *A Momentary Order*

### Doug Varone and Dancers; Bates College, Lewiston, Maine

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**Project Description:** In a residency in Lewiston, Maine, presented jointly by the Bates Dance Festival and LA Arts, Doug Varone and Dancers created a new work, *A Momentary Order* (premiered in 1992), that aimed to help Franco-American residents reclaim their cultural identity lost to decades of suppression and discrimination. The Varone residency also aimed to strengthen the connection between the town and Bates College, which had remained isolated from Franco Lewiston by long tradition. The Doug Varone Company's ten-month residency included workshops, discussions, community meetings and forums, lecture-demonstrations, open rehearsals, and showings of the work-in-progress. The culminating performance took place in an abandoned mill to sold-out audiences. The "story," inspired by local residents' stories, gestures, and speech patterns, includes mill worker characters—a mother and father, their son, and fellow inhabitants. One result of the project was a revival of what had once been an annual Franco-American festival. A local historian noted that it also sparked both individual and civic interest in the preservation of heritage.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Initial contact was a meeting called a "Community Gathering" attended by about one hundred people, mostly senior citizens who brought photos and other objects and mementos to share, along with their stories. The artists were later invited to the homes of local residents where they ate Franco food, saw home movies, and heard live music. The nature of these visits had a profound impact on the three collaborating organizations. Originally conceived as a work with quasi-political content, the project evolved to more directly concern the people in the community rather than the social forces that acted upon them. A Franco-Yankee Contra dance brought together enthusiasts of traditional music and dancing with the Varone Company dancers and Bates Dance Festival dance students. An excerpt from the commissioned work-in-progress was performed at the contra dance.

The artists were sensitive to their standing as outsiders in the community and were aware of the potential for charges of cultural appropriation. Their artistic approach was to transform the local culture through the filter of their own experience and aesthetics into something new, not a reproduction. They stressed this to local residents, articulating that they could not themselves produce Franco-American art. Despite this preparation, some residents who participated in the project throughout its various stages were baffled by the new work. They appreciated its professionalism but wished it had more direct connection to their French heritage. They felt their own music and dancing should have been used to tell their story.

**Information Sources:** Suzanne Carbonneau. "A Momentary Order." *Inside Arts*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Performing Arts Presenters. February/March 1995.

## A-26. *The Arts and Dialogues on Race Series* Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts

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**Project Description:** The Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center (CMAC) presented the first year of *The Arts and Dialogues on Race Series* in 1998-99. The initiative evolved out of CMAC’s long history of programs that tackle difficult issues of race and bigotry through the powerful language of the arts. CMAC recognized an unmet need within the local community for honest conversation about the cultural and ethnic differences that divide people. *The Arts and Dialogues on Race Series* responded to the need for safe, honest, public dialogue. Each of the programs in the series presents a thought-provoking topic introduced through a performance and a visual art exhibition that is then publicly discussed with a panel of scholars, artists, community leaders, and audience participants. The first programs included: “The Latina Woman Speaks,” “Reality on the Big Screen,” and “What is the Color of Beauty?”

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** In 1997, CMAC convened a series of community dialogues, facilitated by a professional mediation group to identify and discuss pertinent racial issues in the community and how best to encourage people who do not consciously address racial issues to participate in the program. Community leaders, neighborhood residents, artists, students, and scholars met monthly.

While audience participation was strong in the first year, CMAC continues to challenge itself to reach out to new and diverse community participants, in large part through partnerships with other organizations as co-presenters. CMAC leaders have observed various obstacles to participation including discomfort talking about bigotries; overexposure of the issue and a related desire not to hear more; and lack of time based on the immediate struggles and demands of every day life.

Related to the actual dialogues, CMAC also observed that participants were often frustrated at not having the opportunity to ask all their questions, voice their opinions, or explore specific areas of the conversations more deeply. To address this, CMAC planned informal meetings for audience participants to have additional opportunity for dialogue. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the series has been going beyond the easily expressed “mantras” of diversity and racial equality to an honest expression of how racism and bigotry affect individuals. Throughout, CMAC has based its programs on the premise that the arts can describe and present ideas with greater poignancy and beauty than any other means of communication.

**Information Sources:** Interviews, Jim Field, former CMAC director; Judilee Reed, CMAC development director; CMAC program materials.

## A-27. COAL

### Judith Shatin, composer; Shepherd College, Sheperdstown, West Virginia

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**Project Description:** *COAL* was a two-year project (1992-94) conceived by former faculty member Mary Kathleen Ernst that included a commissioned musical piece and residency by the composer, Judith Shatin, at West Virginia's Shepherd College. The purpose of *COAL* was to deepen the community's knowledge of and relationship to the arts and 20th century music through a project that had resonance in the region. Shatin's statewide research and interviews with citizens of West Virginia focused her residency on mining history and related contemporary issues. Each of four residency periods featured at least one composition by Shatin as well as other activities to provide a "means of access" to unfamiliar contemporary music. Related activities included a showing of the film *We Dig Coal* and a gallery show, *Images of Appalachian Coal Fields*, by photographer Builder Levy. A lunch session featured the Old-Time Appalachian musicians who were to perform the premiere of the culminating multimedia oratorio called *COAL* composed by Judith Shatin during the residency. In addition, a community chorale, which included several members with roots in coal country, performed the final piece. The final composition included twenty-six songs, written by Shatin, that told the complex history of coal mining from diverse points of view. The chorus sings "solidarity forever," but they also sing "the union went 'n sold us out." Several songs were delivered from the perspective of coal camp women. This project was funded by a grant from the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Arts Partners Program and by the West Virginia Council on the Arts and Humanities.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** An important aspect of this project was the development of partnerships between the college, the composer, and community groups (including the Woodson Historical Society, Millbrook Orchestra, and the Masterworks Chorale) to plan and produce residency events. It was the belief that broad community involvement in the project would result in greater support for the music featured. The artist traveled across the state during her research stage and talked with miners about their lives and work. A panel discussion on the topic of coal history and mine safety included Shatin, the then-president of the United Mine Workers, and the assistant secretary of the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration. According to music writer David Schulman, "the project succeeded in establishing a creative dialogue between twentieth-century art music, the United Mine Workers, computer sound engineering, old-time Appalachian music, and the people of Sheperdstown." Much of Shatin's research was documented in a film titled "COAL," produced by West Virginia Public Television.

**Information Sources:** Schulman, David. "A Rich Vein: In West Virginia Mine Country, a Composer Creates a Work That Delineates a Community's Life," *Inside Arts*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Performing Arts Presenters. February/March 1995.



## A-28. American Festival Project Appalshop, Whitesburg, Kentucky

**Project Description:** The American Festival Project (AFP) is the facilitator of creative community collaborations that aim to break down the barriers that separate people from one another and their cultures. Since 1981, the AFP has engaged performing artists and others who share a belief that cultural exchange can provide a context in which diverse peoples can begin to understand and respect one another. Exchange is fostered through locally based cultural activities designed to address locally defined themes and issues. AFP works with community-based groups and artists throughout the United States, guiding a process that empowers local people and employs the arts and culture as a vehicle for social change. The AFP is a program of Appalshop, an arts, media, and education center in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

*The Environmental Justice Project* is a recent American Festival Project. The purpose of the Environmental Justice Project was to confront environmental racism along a 90-mile stretch of the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Baton Rouge that has been dubbed “Cancer Alley.” The stretch hosts more than 130 major petrochemical plants, grain elevators, medical waste incinerators, solid waste landfills, and other industrial operations. Residents of this region—predominantly low-income African Americans—face high rates of cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, and other health problems. The multi-year project, planned by Junebug Productions (an African-American, community-based theater ensemble in New Orleans), involved partnerships between community-based theater groups and community-based organizing groups, including a Baptist church, the New Orleans Youth Action Corps, and the Gulf Coast Tenants Association, among others. The collaborations culminated in 1998 with a festival of new theater works in and around New Orleans, as well as performances, visual arts exhibits, community education projects, and a special training institute for artists, administrators, and community activists.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The Environmental Justice Project focused significantly on long-term relationship-building between the collaborating arts and non-arts organizations. Project participants worked together in planning meetings, storytelling sessions, and theater workshops, as well as organizing public cultural events. This process stimulated intensive dialogue on the issue. Local community groups provided stories and critical feedback to the theater groups, and the theater groups created and performed the new works.

The AFP works with communities to build cultural literacy and agency and to develop permanent resources within its partner communities. In general, each AFP project is conceptualized according to the needs and desires of the community in which it takes place. The initiation, planning, and implementation of an AFP happens through community process. Over the years, AFP’s approach has evolved as it has observed what most effectively achieves community goals. For example, AFP has shifted from investing project leadership in local arts-presenting organizations and universities to identifying and directing resources to community groups. This helps to ensure that the community’s agenda remains foremost in shaping the direction of the project. In addition, AFP has observed that the story circle method it often used tended to attract like-minded people to discuss community issues. AFP increasingly seeks to expand both dialogue and arts and culture formats in order to bring together people whose opinions on an issue might be at odds.

**Information Sources:** Interview, Michael Hunt, executive director, *American Festival Project*; Schwarzman, Mat. “Drawing the Line at Place: The Environmental Justice Project.” *High Performance*. Saxapahaw, N.C.: *Art in the Public Interest*, summer 1996; Cohen-Cruz, Jan. “The American Festival Project: Performing Difference, Discovering Common Ground,” *But Is It Art*, edited by Nina Felshin. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

## Overview: Dance

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**W**hile the dance field includes an extraordinary range of classical, modern, traditional, and vernacular styles, the study found that most arts-based civic dialogue activity is created by contemporary dance companies. It was observed in the work of modern companies, choreographer-led companies, and dance presenting organizations.

Less institutional infrastructure within the dance field appears to have fostered experimentation and flexibility among choreographers and dance presenters that, in turn, has led to arts-based civic dialogue work. Less standardization in the way dance works and artists are presented and direct exchange between artists and presenters are common and have enabled development of residencies and work that engages traditional audiences and other segments of the community in innovative ways.

A significant emphasis on the commissioning of new work during the past two decades has enabled choreographers to focus on different audiences, settings, and contexts. This has provided an opportunity to engage with civic issues and to explore new aesthetic directions. The dance field has benefited from initiatives and innovative approaches in the presenting field, including those advanced by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Arts Partners program, and Dancing in the Streets' regranting program, which has enabled the commissioning of site-specific work that often incorporates civic issues.

The desire to address social issues through dance appears to have had an influence on the dance form itself. Choreographers such as Bill T. Jones, Liz Lerman, and Donald Byrd have incorporated text, video, and other means to layer social meaning into their work. Kim Chan of the Washington (D.C.) Performing Arts Society observes that the civic dynamics and relevance of vernacular dance have influenced and informed the concert activity of these choreographers and others. According to Chan, "In traditional and vernacular dance forms [such as hip-hop], dance itself has been one of the means that communities use to define their own civic interests."

The study found only a few cases where civic issues are being addressed in the restaging of the classical ballet canon. Modern ballet, on the other hand, has relevant examples. Ballet Arizona in Phoenix, for instance, mounted *Day of the Dead*, a full-length story ballet about the conflict experienced by a young Mexican-American girl who struggles to retain Mexican traditions, while her parents seek to assimilate and abandon those traditions. The ballet and its partner, the University of Arizona, worked to relate the performance to community and political issues such as immigration, Chicano culture, and English-only policy debates.

## A-29. *The Beast: The Domestic Violence Project* Donald Byrd/The Group with Dance Umbrella

**Project Description:** *The Beast* was a residency and new work commissioning project by Donald Byrd/The Group, and was first conducted in Austin, Texas. Goals were to: Address the issue of domestic violence; inspire and engage members of the judicial, social service, and therapeutic communities to participate in the performance and other activities; and use discussions and nonperformance activities to educate the targeted communities about community violence, contemporary art, and theatrical techniques.

Through dramatization of a single event of violence between husband and wife, *The Beast* explores more generally the idea that much of the violence present in today's society has its roots in the family. The piece uses the techniques of black vernacular dance, classical ballet, and modern dance to explore the issue. Following its premiere in Austin, *The Beast* toured throughout the country, forming partnerships in the various communities where it was presented.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** In 1994, Byrd and company members conducted community research on domestic violence in the form of conversation and focus groups three months before the performance. The company also conducted workshops utilizing dance, theater, and writing. Various related activities were developed by the company and their presenting partners as the show toured. Campus groups at the University of Washington, for example, incorporated the dance company's performances and workshops into their "Love Shouldn't Hurt" campaign. Students handed out bookmarks and flyers describing the warning signs of domestic violence; distributed notebook inserts with phone numbers of crisis lines, support groups, and resources on date rape and sexual assault.

After performing, company members talked with audiences. *The Beast* became a vehicle to stimulate discussion about what gives rise to violence between men and women, why some batter, why others allow themselves to become victims, and what domestic violence truly costs a society. At post-performance discussions, people sometimes attacked the dance piece; some questioned whether this was art or social commentary.

Some presenters had difficulty attracting audiences to the performance given the subject matter. Adequate audience preparation also was an issue. At one performance for children in grades three through twelve, the company discovered that materials they had provided to prepare the audience had not been used. Students were upset by the experience, and Byrd vowed he would not do such work again unless there were conditions and guarantees that audiences were prepared in advance for what they would see.

**Information Sources:** Tilghman, Romalyn. "Hitting Home." *Inside Arts*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Performing Arts Presenters. September 1996; interview, Donald Byrd.

## A-30. *The Sacred Tree*

### Mozambique National Ballet Company, Mozambique

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**Project Description:** The Mozambique National Ballet created a ballet to tell the story of the importance of forests and their resources to the life of rural communities, and the need for local people to manage and protect them, including protection from destruction by mostly foreign logging interests. The piece is called *The Sacred Tree* in recognition of the cultural as well as economic importance of forests in rural Africa. Funded in part by the Ford Foundation, the company worked in concert with other grantees of the Foundation's Mozambique Resource Management Initiative. A goal was to advance policy reform to sustainable community-based management systems in partnership with a more responsible private sector. The project was implemented from 1995 to 1997.

The Mozambique National Ballet drew on its distinguished tradition of combining folk and contemporary dance in powerful performances that capture the national imagination and drive public debate. It has been particularly concerned with giving voice to rural people. Ballet director David Abilio argues that dance serves as a powerful tool of communication because it uses a vocabulary that is participatory and rooted in African cultures. In a country with 80 percent illiteracy and little communications infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, other means for the flow of ideas are limited and not always effective.

*The Sacred Tree* was performed across rural communities in several provinces in central and southern Mozambique, as well as in urban communities and internationally. One of the spin-offs of the work in Manica Province was building the capacity of local dance-theater groups. One of these, the Cultural Activists Program, is now involved on an on-going basis in extension programs in the forests and mountains of Chimanimani in central Mozambique.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Field work by company members included learning from local people about the role of dance within its society and about the various dances used. The company incorporated and developed this material with special attention to dances linked to forest and other natural resources. The company also sought to understand the nature of the issues surrounding forest management in an area in order to better target the message of the ballet. The company linked up with local informal dance groups to share skills and vision, so that these groups could continue to deploy dance in this manner in the future.

**Information Sources:** Ford Foundation project summary.

## A-31. *Still/Here*

### Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company

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**Project Description:** *Still/Here* explores and contemplates survival, life, and art through dance and music. *Still/Here* is a two-act, evening-length dance-theater piece (premiered 1994) with a visual score made from edited interviews with people who were or are facing life-threatening illnesses. These people participated in "survival workshops" that Bill T. Jones ran in different cities across the country. In the dance-theater genre, the drama weaves spoken word, movement, music, and special effects into a mixed-media spectacle without the continuous narrative or specific time frame of traditional

theater. In the first half, the choreography features recitations and movement vignettes created by survival workshop participants. The tone of the piece evokes a positive and poignant faith that supportive friends and self-awareness can help even those imperiled by life-threatening illnesses (AIDS, cancer, and depression) to survive. A video environment created by media artist Gretchen Bender included medical photography, footage from the survival workshops, and computer imagery.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** *Still/Here* grew from dance-oriented “survival workshops” that Jones conducted in 1993 in 10 American cities. Those who took part, aged 11 to 75, all faced or had previously faced a life-threatening illness. With Gretchen Bender, Jones videotaped workshop participants as they talked about and mimed their interior experiences.

A controversial and now notorious critique of *Still/Here* by dance critic Arlene Croce appeared in *The New Yorker* (1994). In her review she called the work “victim art,” and unworthy of serious artistic critique. The review unleashed months of debate and discussions in conversations, classrooms, and the media about the responsibility of the critic. *The New Yorker* printed four pages of responses. Other publications jumped in. At the end of the national tour of *Still/Here* in Pittsburgh, the Dance Critics Association annual conference devoted several sessions to the controversy, including a Town Hall speak-out and a keynote by Jones.

**Information Sources:** Siegel, Marcia, B. “Virtual Criticism and the Dance of Death.” *The Drama Review*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Summer 1996. Yablonsky, Linda. “Two post modern choreographers, Bill T. Jones and Pina Bausch, recently mounted elaborate dance-theater productions at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.” *Art in America*. New York: Brant Art Publications, Inc., March 1995.

## A-32. *The Shipyard Project*

### Liz Lerman Dance Exchange; The Music Hall of Portsmouth

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**Project Description:** The purpose of the *Shipyard Project* (1994-96) was to explore memories and issues, historic and contemporary, of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and their significance to the lives of people in Portsmouth. The project involved the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and was sponsored by The Music Hall of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a performing arts presenter. The project was conceived by the Music Hall as a way to address the high community anxiety around recent downsizing and two efforts to close the naval shipyard. An initial goal was to focus a Dance Exchange residency on the implications of closing the yard and to galvanize support. However, through the dance company’s community dialogue process, other issues emerged. The project culminated in a three-week event that featured an opening ceremony, performances by Lerman’s company involving middle school students and community performers, seacoast songs and stories composed and performed by musicians and songwriters from Portsmouth, a shipyard fashion show “annotated” with stories collected for the project, and a finale dance on boats and bridges featuring the Liz Lerman dancers and community members.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** An advisory committee was formed to help clarify and maintain the project’s vision. Throughout the three-year project, Lerman and her dancers, shipyard workers, civilian and military personnel, youth, and retired shipyard professionals told their stories to one another. These stories were both the civic dialogue and became the raw material from which the Dance Exchange developed dance pieces that interpreted local people’s experience of the shipyard. Various issues came forward in the storytelling phase: Fear of the base closing; the shipyard’s nuclear waste

storage and fears of contamination; racism and sexism in the military; the challenges and fears faced by military wives; and recollections of historic events such as the 1960s submarine launch that sank and killed a full crew on board. During the culminating events, story circles extended topic discussions initiated at the advisory meetings to a wider group of participants. There were informal community discussions at public lunches with Liz Lerman as well as rehearsals that actively facilitated a dialogue on project themes among community participants.

As a result of the project, participants explored value systems and beliefs different from their own and discovered unexpected connections between people. The nature of the issues that came forth, combined with the experiences of those who participated in the project, inspired several advisory committee members to continue meeting for months, and even years, after the project's culminating events in 1996. The project also had transformative powers for the artists as well. Despite the enthusiasm of the shipyard project director and Music Hall board president, and what was viewed by the artists and community members as a successful project for the community, the Music Hall leadership did not support future projects of a similar community-based nature. A changeover in both board leadership and executive director, and their combined fears of the labor intensiveness and high costs of such a project prevented full support for this new programming direction.

**Information Sources:** Program and promotional materials, *Shipyards Project*; promotional materials, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange; interview, Jane Hirshberg, project director.

## **A-33. *Day of the Dead*** **Ballet Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona**

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**Project Description:** In 1997 Ballet Arizona in Phoenix mounted *Day of the Dead*, an original full-length story ballet about the conflict between a young Mexican-American girl who struggles to retain Mexican traditions in her family while her parents seek to assimilate and abandon those traditions. Artistic director Michael Uthoff was quick to maintain that the ballet was not written as a cultural study or political statement, but rather to create a new ballet that would attract families and bring together dance, music, and theater on the scale of the family favorite, *The Nutcracker*.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The Ballet and its partner, the University of Arizona, worked to relate the performance to community and political issues such as immigration, Chicano culture, and English-only policy debates. An extensive community involvement program was developed, including bilingual lecture/demonstrations and seminars at the University and in community settings.

**Information Sources:** Program and publicity materials, Ballet Arizona.

## Overview: Music

**T**he realm of music is vast, encompassing classical, contemporary, jazz, traditional, folk, and ethnic music. The study found arts-based dialogue activity most prevalent in relation to the commissioning of new musical works and in programming models developed by symphony orchestras and opera companies.

In the last two decades, a rethinking of the role of the composer in relation to community has fostered opportunity for the creation of innovative new musical works that connect new music to local interests. Organizations such as Meet the Composer, Opera America, Chamber Music America, and the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Arts Partners program have encouraged and/or administered funding for the commissioning of musical works that enable composers to compose within various local settings. Meet the Composers' New Residencies program was designed in response to small and mid-sized orchestras and performing organizations that were interested in reconnecting to their communities through partnerships with composers and civic organizations. The program, for example, has enabled folk composers to work in an economically depressed area of the New York state's Catskill Mountains to address conservation and development issues, and it has allowed a film and theater composer to create new works of cross-cultural interdisciplinary music-theater in San Diego to express and respond to heritage and immigration issues.

Within classical music presenting, a trend in theme-based programming goes beyond the tradition of showcasing works as singular masterpieces and seeks to provide a framework for exploring historic and contemporary issues that have shaped the music or are illuminated by the music's unique characteristics. For instance, the American Symphony Orchestra's Concerts with a Concept program presents lesser known works that are thematically grouped, and are sometimes developed and promoted in conjunction with related offerings of museums and other cultural institutions. They involve lively audience conversations facilitated by conductor Leon Botstein and accompanied by extensive published program notes.

In presenting the classical canon, many symphonies and music institutions are providing audiences with a greater degree of contextual information through extensive program notes and pre- and post-performance discussions. By examining the social and political, as well as the musicological context within which the music was composed, parallels to contemporary issues or social/political conditions are drawn. There is, however, resistance to interpreting the work. The goal instead, is to provide information and facilitate discussion that allows people to come to their own interpretation of the music.

Opera companies and composers have begun to create a contemporary canon. The creation of topical work, sometimes based on contemporary issues, has been one approach to renew opera aesthetically and to make it more relevant to contemporary audiences. Commissioning of contemporary operas has offered the opportunity to explore a wider range of stories emanating from histories not typically told or from contemporary conditions of peoples not previously portrayed. Through its *Opera for a New World* series, the Houston Grand Opera has presented new works that draw from the diverse cultures represented in Houston and that hold appeal for groups who may have felt culturally, socially, or economically removed from the traditional American opera audience. The Houston Grand Opera has taken up many contemporary concerns, including race relations and women's rights in *The Outcast*, and race and gender issues in *The Mother of Three Sons*, a dance opera featuring choreography by Bill T. Jones.

## A-34. *The Hating Pot*

**Liz Swados, artist; Brooklyn Academy of Music**

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**Project Description:** *The Hating Pot* is a musical theater work on the subject of prejudice and bigotry using a multicultural cast of teen and adult performers. The piece was performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music to youth audiences from public and private schools and was also presented on tour. Artist Liz Swados incorporates folk music from different cultures, blending the musical styles of Yiddish song, African and Spanish rhythms, and incorporating a variety of dance genres. The performers tell stories about their own attitudes toward people who are different. Its goal is to open up a dialogue with young people through music and movement to understand what underlies these issues.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** *The Hating Pot* was developed through workshops with hundreds of junior high and high school youth from New York public schools. Through music making and improvisation, Swados looked for the vocabulary of bigotry and its opposite, compassion and hope. She hired more than 20 young people and ten adults to make the show with her. Swados believed it was important “to develop artistically as an ensemble.” The production incorporated material from talks and improvisations and guest presentations about the history of hate. A curriculum guide was developed for teachers to support classroom preparation and post-performance discussion with students.

**Information Sources:** “The Hating Pot: Student and Teacher Study Guides.” Performing Arts Program for Young People/Brooklyn Academy of Music, Simon & Schuster (no longer available).

## A-35. *Harvey Milk*

**Stewart Wallace, composer; Michael Korie, librettist; The Houston Grand Opera**

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**Project Description:** The opera, *Harvey Milk*, was commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera as part of HGO’s *Opera New World* series. It was inspired by the life and assassination of San Francisco’s first openly gay elected public official. Through the portrayal of Milk’s personal struggle with and resolution of his own gayness, as well as his political activism on behalf of gays and other marginalized groups, the opera asks “Whose America is this?” and explores the ideals of freedom and the dignity of the individual at the heart of American democracy. The opera’s world premiere took place in Houston in 1995.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The Houston Grand Opera coordinated a series of events that took place before the opera opened as a way to refamiliarize people with Harvey Milk and his place in the history of gay and human rights and in San Francisco politics. These included:

- a screening of the film *The Times of Harvey Milk*, followed by a discussion;
- a panel and audience discussion, “Who Was Harvey Milk?” for which the Opera brought from San Francisco individuals who were active in Milk’s campaign and who were also portrayed as characters in the opera;
- a guest speaker and panel discussion, “Is Houston Ready for Harvey Milk?” featuring local people active in the gay rights movement.

At each event, there was a question and answer session.



From education director Gary Gibbs' observation, the opera as art provided a comfortable setting to discuss issues of gay and human rights. Concerning issues of artistic quality he said, "there is a danger of being too preachy in the case of the libretto or too shocking in your production. If the art is not quality, then the [social] issues will be missed." *Harvey Milk* provided its general audience with exposure to historic and contemporary gay rights issues they may not have otherwise sought out. HGO also saw new audiences for the opera, particularly from the gay and lesbian community, and has tried to maintain relationships with gay and lesbian organizations.



Robert Orth (*Harvey Milk*) on Castro Street. Photo Jim Caldwell.

**Information Sources:** Program materials, Houston Grand Opera; interview, Gary Gibbs, education director.

## A-36. *The Moses Project*

**Walter Robinson, composer; Boston Symphony Orchestra, Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center, Somerville Community Corporation, Jewish Community Relations Council, Facing History and Ourselves**

**Project Description:** Black-Jewish relations are at the heart of *The Moses Project*, a multisite Massachusetts-based residency in which gospel composer Walter Robinson is writing a gospel opera about the life of Moses. The goal of the three-year residency (begun in 1995) is to use Robinson's musical theater piece, *Moses*, and other music composed by him, to educate and sensitize African American and Jewish communities to their common links and to encourage dialogue. Such exchanges aim to help confront racism and religious intolerance by creating an example of the universal dialogue of human rights. The opera work is being developed in relation to workshops with African American gospel choirs and Jewish community groups. The emerging work will be presented in special programs.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Robinson's role is described as "ambassador to the news media, corporate, religious, political, and artistic circles," as well as composer. The residency includes symposia focusing on various aspects of Jewish and black culture. Discussions focus on mending relations and looking for common experience. Robinson's presentations in schools bring together disadvantaged and affluent students to experience music's power to bridge cultural differences. The school program is facilitated by the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based organization Facing History and Ourselves. A monthly newsletter was initiated in the second year of the project as a way to announce upcoming events in the residency and developments in the project.

**Information Sources:** Noble, Clifton J., Jr., "Creating Hope Through Music." *The Springfield Republican*, June 2, 1996. Watson, Bruce. "His opera speaks to Blacks, Jews." *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, June 4, 1996. Program materials, Springfield Symphony Orchestra and Meet the Composer; interview, Melinda Thomas, Springfield Symphony Orchestra.

## A-37. War, Reconciliation, and Peace/St. John Passion Oregon Bach Festival, Eugene

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**Project Description:** In 1995 the Oregon Bach Festival theme, War, Reconciliation, and Peace, marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II and simultaneously addressed existing local religious-based prejudices and anti-Semitism. The *St. John Passion* was selected to open the 1995 season. Many members of the community, particularly within the Jewish faith, felt that the selection of this work seemed counter to the theme of reconciliation because its narrative had been used for hundreds of years as a justification for the denigration and persecution of Jews. After much discussion among the members of a festival community steering committee and the festival staff, it was decided that this piece should remain on the program. The festival recognized the potential for the music to create opportunities for dialogue and greater understanding within the community. It sought to bring diverse communities together by acknowledging the importance of inclusion and recognition of diverse opinions, perspectives, and voices.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** A steering committee representing pluralistic perspectives within the community created a process for community engagement between the festival, its audience, and the greater community. Building partnerships with specific communities allowed the festival to sensitively and appropriately explore potentially explosive issues.

*Creative Journeys* is an audience development approach that the festival has developed to provide a context for the audience's experience of music presented at the festival. Creative Journeys activities and forums created to encourage public dialogue included the following:

- A series of public "Gatherings" was organized and convened in different sites around the community. Participants came together to listen to music from the festival, share ideas about what they experienced, listen, and respond to others.
- An interfaith service of reconciliation preceded the opening concert. In addition, sermons related to the festival theme were delivered in many churches.
- *The Creative Journeys* journal compiled thoughts, perspectives, and ideas on this theme from people who lived in the community. It included personal stories and essays from local scholars and was widely distributed.
- The four major choral-orchestral works of the Festival were broadcast on the radio with on-air discussion with special guests.
- A series of five films exploring aspects of the theme was shown 11 times at a local movie theater. Each showing included a preview talk.
- Four lectures were presented to explore experiences, ideas, and reflections on the theme from a diversity of perspectives.
- Community members wrote letters to the editors of local newspapers, distributed protest leaflets at the opening performance, and gave comments in the program book.

**Information Sources:** Brown, Valerie. "Second Century Text Creates Modern Cultural Dilemma." *Eugene Weekly*, June 15, 1995. Kammerer, Karen. "St. John Passion sends clear message." *The Register-Guard*, June 25, 1995; *Creative Journeys* journal and program materials, 1995; interview, Neill Archer Roan, director, Oregon Bach Festival.

## Overview: Theater

The theater discipline comprises different segments reflecting varied philosophical, aesthetic, and audience orientations and emphases. Regional institutional and college/university theater remains the locus of production for the theatrical canon and contemporary work. Community-based theater has been a growing movement motivated by artistic leaders and bolstered by a longstanding tradition of resilience and innovation. Culturally specific theater companies, increased in numbers in recent decades, provide more opportunity for dialogue within communities where previously it may not have existed. Alternative companies and spaces, as well as individual playwrights, performance artists, and directors, support new work and continue to challenge traditional definitions of what theater can be.

Theater, by its very nature, involves articulation of social issues, values, and beliefs. This fact, combined with a history within the discipline of artistic and scholarly interest in the role of the audience in the theatrical event, provides a foundation for contemporary theater efforts in arts-based civic dialogue. Many believe that, among all the arts, theater is best positioned to stimulate and engage people in civic dialogue by virtue of its emphasis on the spoken word, a longstanding use of post-performance discussions, and its critical relation to audience and to community. Historically, the seminal work of such key figures as Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht encouraged the viewer to think and act, as well as to empathize. While their work, and the socially engaged activity of subsequent generations of artists offers an instructive and inspiring legacy, the potential of constructive dialogue as a conscious element of the theatrical event remains relatively untapped.

Contemporary theater activities in arts-based civic dialogue have drawn also from the approaches of community-based theater movements and traditions. Drawing on the Free Southern Theater and Augusto Boal's theater of the oppressed, some contemporary theater companies view the process of making theater as a forum for dialogue about issues. *Swamp Gravy*, a series of plays begun in 1992 and developed over several years in rural Colquitt, Georgia, involved hundreds of local citizens of different races and economic classes as participants in theater-making around issues of race relations and intercultural understanding. Through the project, a rich ongoing dialogue has been sustained by local people addressing previously unspoken feelings and views.

In contrast to community-based theaters, regional institutional and college/university theaters have been challenged to apply the unique qualities of theater to civic dialogue. Regional theaters have given relatively less attention to stimulating broader civic dialogue beyond conventional post-performance discussions. Like all large-scale cultural institutions, regional theaters are typically limited in their ability to experiment with formats conducive to civic dialogue goals by their need to sustain a facility, subscription base, and large infrastructure. Similarly, college and university theater programs across the country also sustain an extensive infrastructure but have given some attention to the civic dimensions of their mission.

## A-38. *Swamp Gravy*

**Richard Owen Geer, director; Colquitt-Miller Arts Council, Georgia**

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**Project Description:** *Swamp Gravy* is the name of an ongoing project and a series of community plays that come from it. The project began in 1992 and the *Swamp Gravy* production was performed in its final form in 1994. The *Swamp Gravy* project was conceived as a tool for cultural and economic revitalization. However, as director Richard Owen Geer came to know the community, the project became more about restoring a degraded local cultural identity and a process of dialogue and art-making that sought commonalities among people who had internalized historical conflicts and separations. The project has involved hundreds of local citizens of different races and from all economic classes as actors and other participants in theater-making. The company continues, performing two seasons a year and touring.



*Swamp Gravy performance at Cotton Hall*

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Humanities scholars, including theater director Geer, trained citizens in techniques of oral history interviewing and transcribing. Stories of local residents were integrated into the final play. These elements reflect the play's authority and express its local knowledge. At times, Geer's outsider aesthetics clashed with the community's. He found he had to set aside his individual artistic preferences and become more sensitive to the signals of the actors. The intimate process of community members who do not usually interact with each other rehearsing and performing together in the safe environment created by the arts council contributed to dialogue in this small town. As a cumulative effect, Miller County's pride has deepened.

The project has now been replicated in other communities with projects presently underway in five states.

**Information Sources:** Richard Owen Geer. "Out of Control in Colquitt: Swamp Gravy Makes Stone Soup" *TDR* (The Drama Review), Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press for Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, Summer 1996. Pearce, Michele. "Dining Out on Swamp Gravy," *American Theatre*. New York: Theater Communications Group, November 1995.

## A-39. *upRooted/reRooted* Ukiah Players Theatre, Ukiah, California

**Project Description:** The purpose of *upRooted/reRooted*, two versions of a play produced in 1991 about deforestation in northern California, was to seek environmentally and economically valid solutions to deforestation, particularly selective cutting with quick reforestation. The Ukiah Players theater company's expressed goals were to promote full communication, consensus-building, and healing. The play begins with a scene of the conflicting perspectives of a logger, an environmentalist, and a timber company executive. The first version of the play *upRooted* introduces the story of a nineteenth century timber company's ad-gimmick invention of Paul Bunyan and traces the subsequent history of logging, with Paul looking on or taking part, alongside his mythical companion, Babe, who, in an interesting twist on legend, is presented as a pre-environmental woman. The final contemporary scene is a sharply drawn confrontation between opposing sides. *upRooted* and its second incarnation, *reRooted*, were part of a larger community storytelling project, "A People's History of Mendocino County."

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The play was developed from extensive interviews and improvisational workshops with community members and organizations representing all sides of the debate, including the extremes of timber industry owners, unemployed loggers, and Earth First protesters. Community discussions were held during a work-in-progress run of *upRooted*. They were heated and the play provoked many long letters to the editor of the *Ukiah Daily Journal*—some defending the work and others accusing it of "corporate and timber bashing." As a result, there were more community meetings between the playwright, loggers, timber owners, and environmentalists. The play underwent a massive rewrite that gave more credence to the industry and its impact on the local economy, with less caricature and more interview-based characters and personal statements in the form of a montage. This second version, *reRooted*, was given a staged reading at Ukiah Playhouse. Because of their community base, both versions of this play, even though broadly drawn and strong in their stance against clear-cutting, did not shy away from contradictions.

**Information Sources:** Interview, Kate Magruder, project director/playwright, Ukiah Players Theatre; Cless, Downing. "Eco-Theatre, USA: The Grassroots is Greener." *The Drama Review*, Cambridge: New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Summer 1996.

## A-40. *The Survivor Project* 7 Stages, Atlanta, Georgia

**Project Description:** *The Survivor Project* is a multiyear international exchange program developed by 7 Stages Theatre in Atlanta, in conjunction with the Arts Festival of Atlanta. The project aimed to initiate a substantive dialogue around the issues of survival. In 1994, anticipating the upcoming 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, 7 Stages recognized that the city of Sarajevo had hosted one of the most warmly remembered Olympics in recent history. In the 1990s, Sarajevo was engrossed by war. Experienced at presenting companies from Central Europe, 7 Stages saw the *Survivor Project* as a way to focus, through theater, on this part of the world where survival is so difficult and as a way for Atlantans to relate to survival issues in this country. Starting in July 1996 and through the year 2000, artists and companies from the Balkan states will be invited to Atlanta for a series of performances, dialogues, and interaction with other artists.

During the Olympics, *The Survivor Project* called its sessions “The Free Zone,” symbolizing a location where artists from war zone countries, as well as artists struggling for survival in the safer West, could talk openly and calmly. These conversations led to many ideas and insights. The 45 year-old Arts Festival of Atlanta closed in 1998, but the need to continue dialogue and discourse about the Balkans remains. 7 Stages continues the projects and will work with other organizations as appropriate.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Informal “circle meetings” modeled after those used by Alternate Roots, a regional organization dedicated to community-based art, were begun in March of 1996 to begin to give audiences context for the two theater productions that would be presented during the 1996 summer Olympics. The circles began with friends and colleagues to share what 7 Stages had learned on multiple trips to Central Europe and to get feedback on project design. Future circles invited other artists, peace activists, educators, and representatives of refugee organizations, and others with special interest. Word of mouth increasingly broadened the base of those who participated to include refugees of war, community people, and 7 Stages audience members, with some circles reaching about thirty-five people.

Circle meeting discussions were facilitated by someone with direct experience in the Balkan states (refugees, humanitarians who had worked there, or 7 Stages staff who had spent considerable time there). Only close to the time of the Olympics were theater company members from Europe present to participate in circle meetings. Participants were guided to talk about personal reactions and responses to the crises in Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and Herzegovina, as well as to consider personal and social survival issues here in the United States. A key question reiterated by participants in circle meetings was “In an ever-violent world, what is the response and responsibility of artists?” This question continued to be turned back to the community as the project evolved.

Talk-backs after performances were held following two of the three companies’ performances. Discussions, some facilitated by an organizer of the Belgrade Theater Festival, involved 20 to 45 people and often went on for more than two hours.

**Information Sources:** Interview, Lisa James, *Survivor Project* coordinator, 7 Stages.

## A-41. *Outreach Residency Project* City Theatre, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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**Project Description:** City Theatre’s mission is to provide an artistic home for the development and production of contemporary plays of substance and ideas that engage and challenge diverse audiences. For each play produced (five per season), City Theatre identifies an organization or agency whose constituents can benefit from creatively expressing their concerns. These community people relate their work to City Theatre’s by paralleling the themes and ideas in the City Theatre mainstage production with the issues they face. Dialogue about contemporary issues takes place in the process of creating the work and in post-performance talk-backs both on City Theatre’s mainstage and in the community where the residency took place.

For example, City Theatre staged an arrangement of Woody Guthrie’s songs and poetry called *Woody Guthrie’s American Song*. Guthrie’s compassionate understanding of the American consciousness provided the backdrop for an Outreach project with Just Harvest, an agency of the Hunger Project. Women residents of Pittsburgh housing projects who use Welfare

Services were given voice to tell their own stories through the residency project and created a play about welfare reform. The play has been performed at City Theatre, in the community, and before the state legislature to educate about these women’s perspectives regarding welfare reform.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** In the residency project, a professional playwright worked with community-based participants to first improvise and then rehearse their own plays. The richest exchange about issues occurred in the process of creating the play. City Theatre also regularly holds talk-backs after mainstage plays that lend themselves to discussion about issues and/or artistic matters. After City Theatre’s staging of *Fires in the Mirror*, a Black-Jewish organization took on discussions stimulated by the play. After David Mamet’s play *Oleanna*, a panel, including representatives of women’s and men’s groups, and humanities scholars discussed issues of sexual harassment. This particular panel taught City Theatre organizers that discussions do not necessarily have to involve the artists, particularly if the discussion intends to focus more on issues as opposed to artistry. Post-performance discussions were often led by City Theatre’s artistic director for outreach.

**Information Sources:** Program materials, City Theatre; interview, Marc Masterson, producing director, City Theatre.

## A-42. *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*

**Anna Deavere Smith, theater artist; Intiman Theatre, Seattle**

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**Project Description:** The purpose of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* was to create a dialogue and to use the ambiance and techniques of theater to inspire discussion about the civil disturbances that took place in Los Angeles in April 1992 following the Rodney King verdict. *Twilight* evolved from interviews the artist conducted with individuals directly or indirectly involved in the Los Angeles disturbances. The work was created and is performed by Deavere Smith as a one-woman show in which she plays all the characters using verbatim excerpts from their interviews. She also intends for other companies to perform the piece, potentially using casts of various sizes. According to Deavere Smith, “The theater is by nature the art form which creates action through dialogue . . . If the theater chooses to, it can, from time to time, use its ability to entertain and create spectacle to participate in civic discourse.”

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The Intiman Theatre in Seattle presented *Twilight* in 1996. The theatre designed a daylong program that brought together youth and adults for discussion of critical issues. The theater first assembled a steering committee composed of youth and adults from the school district, as well as members of the police department and business community. The steering committee helped to identify and invite participants for the daylong program that would culminate with a performance of *Twilight* by Anna Deavere Smith. Youth were invited from local high schools and the Seattle Center Peace Academy, which trains high school kids to be facilitators of conflict resolution in the schools. Adult participants were invited through the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and the Boeing Corporation.

In the morning, students and adults participated side-by-side in workshops based on Intiman’s *Living History* program. Actors staged a scene of a shooting, and participants were asked to interpret what they saw. Discussion facilitated by the artists led to the realization that there can be many different stories depending on the observer’s or the character’s point of view. The workshop pointed out how race and class influence perspective of current events. During a lunch break, adults and youth were assigned seating together to “force” people out of their normal conversation groups. Participants then saw the performance of *Twilight*. An opportunity for discussion followed with Deavere Smith, the superintendent of schools, mayor, and chief of police.

## A-43. *Fires in the Mirror*

**Anna Deavere Smith, theater artist**

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**Project Description:** *Fires in the Mirror* is a play created and performed by Anna Deavere Smith based on the outbreak of racial violence in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York in 1991. A seven-year-old African American child was killed by a car in the entourage of the local Hasidic religious leader and, in apparent retribution, a young rabbinical scholar was stabbed to death while surrounded by a group of black men. In an interwoven series of brief monologues, Ms. Smith presents 29 characters based on verbatim excerpts from interviews conducted with her subjects. The play seeks to facilitate intercultural exchange and public discussion about sexual and racial politics, ethnic identity, and multiculturalism. The piece premiered at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in New York City and was later adapted for film by American Playhouse for public television and in order to meet international demand for the piece.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Crown Heights community members were interviewed extensively and their stories incorporated into the final piece. WGBH public television developed an educational outreach program for the film adaptation including: an informational poster designed to assist teachers, students, and community leaders to use the film as a tool for classroom and public discussion. An advisory committee including experts in race relations, anti-Semitism, and conflict resolution, community leaders, and teachers guided development of the poster. A study guide for colleges and universities also was developed.

**Information Sources:** Ford Foundation summary; artist statement, playbill, *Twilight*, Colonial Theater, Boston; interview, Laura Penn, managing producer, Intiman Theatre.



## Civic Dialogue Abstracts

(For Overview, see Chapter 2, Animating Democracy)

### **A-44. Lima, Ohio, Study Circles on race relations and violence** **City of Lima, Ohio; Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, Connecticut**

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**Project Description:** Lima, a mid-sized city in western Ohio, was the first community to organize community-wide study circles. Lima's study circle efforts began in 1992, prompted by racial tension in the wake of racial unrest in Los Angeles. At that time, Mayor David Berger helped to form an interracial Clergy Task Force and challenged the clergy of the city to reach out into the community. The task force worked with the Mayor's office and Ohio State University at Lima to organize a first round of study circles, using Study Circles Resource Center's newly developed study circle guide on racism and race relations.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The Study Circles Resource Center was established in 1989 to promote the use of study circles on critical social and political issues. Study circles provide an effective process for participants to talk about and work on important public issues with people from different racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic and ideological backgrounds. Participants meet in small groups to talk about a public problem, led by trained peer facilitators and following a framework laid out in a discussion guide. Reading materials present a variety of viewpoints on an issue and the facilitator encourages expression of personal views and experiences. Through this process, participants are able to build mutual trust and respect, allowing participants to speak openly about public issues, consider larger questions surrounding these issues, and discuss new collaborative approaches to meeting challenges in their communities. Study circles have their greatest impact when organizations across a community work together to create large-scale programs where many citizens work together.

Mayor Berger formed the Clergy Task Force of prominent ministers, recognizing the potential for the ministers and their congregations to be a resource in bringing about racial harmony. The task force developed a strong consensus on the need for dialogue. A pilot phase provided training to the task force and eight lay people, four African American and four whites. These people then paired up to lead pilot study circles in which seventy-two people participated. The pilot was videotaped for later training use. In April 1993, nearly two-hundred lay leaders attended facilitator training sessions. The ministers worked in pairs to recruit participants and organize study circles joining black and white congregations. Over the next year, over 1,200 Lima citizens participated in study circles on race relations. In May 1994 a second round began and successive new rounds of race relations study circles continued in 1996.

Since 1993, more than 3,000 people have been involved in study circles. Each year, Lima citizens have focused on a new issue, including crime and violence, youth issues, neighborhood issues, and community policing. Lima's study circles have been wellsprings of grassroots action. Two ongoing groups, "From Discussion to Action" and "Growing Peace in Lima," formed as a result of the study circles and have achieved 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Community diversity celebrations have been held each year for the past four years. A mediation center is now up-and-running. "Our Daily Bread II" was

created to serve as a soup kitchen and a center for tutoring and recreation. The Lima Violence Prevention Center has been established.

**Information Sources:** McCoy, Martha, Phyllis Emigh, Matt Leighninger, Molly Barrett. *Planning Community-wide Study Circle Programs: A Step-by Step Guide*. Pomfret, Connecticut: Topsfield Foundation, 1996; program and publicity materials, Study Circles Resource Center.

## A-45. National Issues Forums

### Public Agenda in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation

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**Description:** National Issues Forums provide opportunities for citizens around the nation to deliberate and make choices about the most challenging social and political issues of the day. The goal of a National Issues Forum is to move toward making a choice on a public policy issue. Forums have focused on such issues as the economy, education, healthcare, and crime. The National Issues Forums takes its theme from Thomas Jefferson's notion that citizens' discretion and vote in a democracy should be informed by education.

Thousands of civic and educational organizations, colleges and universities, libraries, service clubs, and membership groups hold forums each year. Although each community group is locally financed and controlled, all are part of a national network of individuals and organizations committed to deliberation and public dialogue. Each year the local forum convenors select issues of national and local importance. Background issue books and related materials on each topic present the information on issues in the form of action choices. National Issues Forums receives support from the Kettering Foundation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that has provided books, materials, and workshops for the NIF since it was founded in 1982.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Forums vary in size from small study circles to large gatherings in the tradition of town meetings. Forums present an issue in a neutral, nonpartisan way that encourages people to take a fresh look at the topic and at their own convictions. Convenors distribute issue books that provide a nonpartisan overview of each topic and several alternative choices or courses of action that address the issue. With the help of moderators and the framework for discussion presented in the issue books, participants analyze choices and their rationales, and discuss other implications. Deliberative dialogue as defined by NIF includes: Understanding the benefits and consequences of every option, its costs and trade-offs; knowing the strategic facts and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option; getting beyond people's initial positions to their deeper motivations; weighing carefully the views of others and appreciating the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable; and working through the conflicting emotions that arise.

**Information Sources:** Program materials, National Issues Forums; Briand, Michael K. *Building Deliberative Communities*. Charlottesville, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 1995.

## A-46. Pew Center for Civic Journalism Washington, D.C.

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**Project Description:** The Pew Center for Civic Journalism helps print and electronic newsrooms to create and refine new ways of reporting issues that can help people re-engage in civic life. The Center shares successful ideas with journalists through national workshops and training material. The Center’s work responds to the concern that news reports may contribute to people’s sense of alienation and hopelessness. Civic journalism initiatives vary widely. A common denominator involves journalists actively seeking to engage readers and viewers in the reporting process. The use of polls, focus groups, “pizza parties,” action teams, study circles, mock juries, on-line chat rooms, and civic mapping have helped bring citizen voices into news reports. To date, the Center has launched more than 77 projects, involving 148 news organizations.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Methods to engage citizens in dialogue and the reporting process have included:

- **Study circles:** Portland, Maine has been the site of several civic journalism projects. The *Portland Press Herald*, in its eight-part series *The Deadliest Drug: Maine’s Addiction to Alcohol*, (1997-98), delivered such startling statistics and personal stories that it prompted a year-long grassroots effort that mobilized nearly 2,000 people in more than 70 communities to participate in study circles on the impact of alcohol abuse. Their community action plans were compiled in a book as well as followed up in the newspaper.
- **Book clubs:** In *Poverty Among Us* (1998), the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* chronicled, once a month for seven months, what it was like to be poor in Minnesota at a time when the official welfare safety net was replaced by welfare-to-work programs. The paper told the story through the eyes of school children, the working poor, immigrants, and others. But the paper did not stop there. It tried to pull readers into a conversation about poverty by forming book clubs on the literature of poverty with the St. Paul Public Libraries, by publishing interviews with the poor on its web site, and by providing discussion guides and tool kits for those wanting to organize discussion groups. More than 2,500 people participated.
- **On-line:** More than 20,000 New Hampshire residents, about 2.5 percent of the state’s registered voters, used their computers in the spring of 1999 to access New Hampshire Public Radio’s On-Line Tax Calculator to see how tax reform proposals would affect them. After a new tax measure was passed, 3,000 citizens a week visited the site for several weeks to compare their old tax bill with the new one they would be getting.

**Information sources:** Schaffer, Jan, editor and Pat Ford, writer. *Don’t Stop There! Five Adventures in Civic Journalism*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 1998. *Civic Catalyst*, newsletter, *Ibid*.

## A-47. *National Conversations on Pluralism and Identity* National Endowment for the Humanities

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**Project Description:** The intent of *National Conversations on American Pluralism and Identity* (1993-1996) was to increase the participation of Americans in the humanities by engaging in a dialogue around the issue of American pluralism. The overarching question of the project was, “What does it mean to be an American?” NEH awarded grants to state humanities councils, colleges and universities, the American Bar Association, the National Council on Aging, museums, arts organizations, and other organizations to design specific approaches to dialogue around this question. An example of one project was *Theater and Literature as Explorations into Plurality and Common Ground*, presented by the Western Humanities Concern, Salt Lake City, Utah. It comprised nine conversations among diverse audiences using short theatrical presentations and readings, and identified community issues as conversation starters.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Methods of dialogue depended on the focus of the conversation. Conversation how-to kits were created and distributed by NEH to provide guidance for structuring a conversation that had no predetermined outcome, was democratic, and inclusive. A film was aired on public television on the unfolding of democracy in America. A shorter version was created for use by schools, libraries, and community organizations as a springboard for conversation on American pluralism and identity.

**Information Sources:** *Conversation Resource Kit: A National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity*. National Endowment for the Humanities, 1994.

## A-49. *Civic Library Forums* Libraries for the Future, New York City

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**Project Description:** The Civic Library Forums is a national project begun in 1996 consisting of forums cosponsored with local libraries in four cities—San Francisco, Newark, New Jersey, Hartford, Connecticut, and St. Paul, Minnesota. Through panel presentations, public discussions, and live demonstrations, the Forums examine urban issues and consider ways to strengthen local institutions and projects that promote a more just and equitable society. A goal is to foster cross-sector, cross-community cooperation to address local conflicts. The forum in Hartford, for example, dealt with racial antagonism between the African American and Puerto Rican communities. The Forums and their planning processes are designed to foster new partnerships and coalitions to address local concerns, and to build a stronger identity for the public library as a convener and neutral ground for public debate on civic and cultural issues. Libraries for the Future is a national nonprofit organization. Its goals are: To build and assist community support for public libraries nationwide; to communicate and demonstrate the value of public libraries as centers for literacy, community development, cultural vitality, and democratic participation; and to promote information and technology policy in the public interest.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** In each community, a planning committee representing a variety of community-based organizations selects the organizations and individuals that will shape the theme of the forum and take part in the program. Dialogue occurs through panel presentations, public discussions, and live demonstrations.

**Information Sources:** *Community Connections: Libraries in Civic Partnerships*. New York: Libraries for the Future, August, 1996 (pre-publication version); program materials, Libraries for the Future; interview, Diantha Schull.

## A-49. Larimer County Exchange Project

### Sharon Carlisle, visual artist

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**Project Description:** The goal of the Larimer County Exchange Project was to spark a different way of addressing local issues by using the arts and one-on-one dialogue. Larimer County, Colorado, is faced with issues related to growth and development. Prime agricultural land is fast being converted into subdivisions and many residents have found it difficult to address the fundamental issues facing them. Contrary sides to the issue are often reduced to extremes. In addition, “solutions” are often imported or so watered-down as to be ineffective.

In this project conceived and coordinated by artist Sharon Carlisle, 25 artists were paired randomly with local residents to create a work of art that addressed growth and development issues of major concern in Larimer County. Hair stylist and visual artist, baker and writer, for example, were asked to find common ground on the issue and then create a work of art. If common ground could not be found, then the duo was asked to create a work that reflected their differences, but the project continually encouraged an exploration of the complexities of the issue, to move beyond simple pro and con sentiments. Among the pairs, many experienced deeper understanding of the issue as they were able to connect a real person to a position. In one project, a farmer, Jim Geist, was paired with dancer, choreographer, and educator, Jane Slusarski-Harris. When they discussed the tenuous grasp farmers like Geist have on their leased land, Slusarski-Harris began to understand how immediate the situation is for farmers—that their land could be sold off to developers. The two created an interpretive dance to reflect the threat to food-producing land and the farming lifestyle by the relentless advance of home sites and pavement.

The project was partially funded by a one-time Arts in the Community Initiative of the Colorado Council on the Arts and received other forms of support from the Loveland Museum/Gallery, the Colorado Growers Association, and the Larimer County Commissioners.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** The pairs were required to meet at least three times on the project, but beyond that were left to their own process. The various creations made by artist/citizen pairs in the Larimer Project were presented to large crowds at the County Fairgrounds. Carlisle observed that the one-on-one work of the duos had the most significant impact in terms of enhanced understanding of the issue and a broadening of perspective beyond self-interest. Broader public dialogues were not planned as part of the project.

**Information Sources:** Interview, Sharon Carlisle; Mahoney, Michelle. “Getting to Know You: Collaboration crux of 50 arts projects.” *The Denver Post*, September 7, 1996.

## **A-50. Community Convention** **Community Self-Leadership Project, Colorado Community College** **and Occupational Educational System, Colorado**

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**Project Description:** The Community Convention is a contemporary version of the New England town meeting. The model, promoted by Michael Briand, director of the Community Self-leadership Project, is inspired by the ideas of the National Issues Convention and James Fishkin’s “deliberative opinion poll.” The convention is designed to afford a community the opportunity to deliberate, while ensuring that participants are as representative as possible of the community as a whole. In short, it adapts the inclusiveness and face-to-face quality of the original town meeting to the much larger communities of today.

The Trinidad-Las Animas Community Convention, for example, addressed questions of growth and development in Las Animas County, Colorado, an economically depressed and rurally isolated county in the southeastern part of the state. Each open forum asked, “How fast? How much? Which direction?” The forums culminated with the Convention proper; a day and a half intensive deliberation. Sponsored by the local junior college, the Convention concluded its work with a published report to citizens and an invitation to join a county-wide citizens’ organization to serve as a vehicle for taking action and creating opportunities for public deliberation.

**Civic Engagement/Dialogue:** Multiple rounds of small forums open to anyone are held over the course of several weeks in various locations in a community. Open forums maximize the opportunities for active citizen participation and ensure ordinary people’s concerns, needs, and aspirations will be transmitted to the Convention proper. Locations are selected to draw people who typically steer clear of public affairs. After each forum, participants select a representative for succeeding rounds of the community-wide discussion. Final-round delegates are joined by an additional 40 to 50 persons selected randomly to capture the community’s diverse makeup to participate in the Convention proper. Once the Convention has concluded, the group reports the results of their deliberations to the larger community either through video or audio programming.

**Information Sources:** Briand, Michael K. *Building Deliberative Communities*. Charlottesville, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 1995.

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## INTERNET

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Alliance of Artists' Communities ([www.artistcommunities.org/~aac](http://www.artistcommunities.org/~aac))

Americans for the Arts ([www.artsusa.org](http://www.artsusa.org))

Art in the Public Interest ([www.artswire.org/highperf/APIhome.html](http://www.artswire.org/highperf/APIhome.html))

ArtsWire ([www.artswire.org](http://www.artswire.org))

Association for Independent Video and Filmmakers ([www.aivf.org](http://www.aivf.org))

Civicus/World Alliance for Citizen Participation ([www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org))

Corporation for Public Broadcasting ([www.cpb.org](http://www.cpb.org))

Institute of Cultural Affairs ([www.ica-usa.org](http://www.ica-usa.org))

Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue ([www.arts-civic.org](http://www.arts-civic.org))

Kettering Foundation ([www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org))

National Civic League, Alliance for National Renewal ([www.ncl.org/anr](http://www.ncl.org/anr))

National Endowment for the Arts ([www.arts.endow.gov](http://www.arts.endow.gov))

National Endowment for the Humanities ([www.neh.fed.us](http://www.neh.fed.us))

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POV, American Documentary ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

Webster's World of Cultural Democracy ([www.wgcd.org/](http://www.wgcd.org/))

DEMOCRACY

# Appendix C

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# The Animating Democracy Initiative

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The Animating Democracy Initiative (ADI) is a four-year programmatic initiative of Americans for the Arts and its Institute for Community Development and the Arts made possible with support from The Ford Foundation. The purpose of the Initiative is to foster artistic activity that encourages civic dialogue on important contemporary issues. The Initiative seeks to accomplish this through an integrated set of programs that support new learning and deepen field knowledge about this work. These programs include:

**The Lab** which aims to identify and select exemplary arts-based civic dialogue projects and strengthen them through financial support and connections to other resources. The Lab encourages experimentation and a testing of ideas and approaches to arts-based civic dialogue.

**Publications** that document and disseminate current program models and methodologies and scholarly research and writing, providing contextual understanding that can advance the field, including this study *Animating Democracy: The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue*.

**An interactive web site and searchable database** that centralizes information for arts and civic dialogue leaders, reports on ADI activities, and links to other sites, providing a dynamic vehicle for communication and exchange; and

**National convenings** that disseminate knowledge growing out of the Animating Democracy Initiative and bring together practitioners, scholars, civic leaders, critics, and the media to inform each other of innovations, compare differing perspectives, discuss best practices, or explore opportunities for advancing recognition of the work.

## About Americans for the Arts

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Americans for the Arts is the national organization for groups and individuals dedicated to advancing the arts and culture in communities across the country. Toward this end, Americans for the Arts works with cultural organizations; arts, business, and cultural leaders; and patrons to provide leadership, research, visibility, professional development, and advocacy to advance support for the arts and culture in America.

Americans for the Arts' Institute for Community Development and the Arts promotes public and private funding for the arts. This is accomplished by educating local arts agencies, elected and appointed municipal officials, and arts funders about the important role of the arts as community change agents for economic, social, and educational problems. The Institute also identifies innovative community arts programs and nontraditional funding sources to enable local arts agencies, arts organizations, and local civic officials to adapt these programs in their communities. The Institute: examines innovative arts programs and nontraditional funding sources that address community development issues; strengthens the leadership roles of local arts agencies; builds partnerships with local government leaders; and stabilizes and promotes local public and private funding for artists and arts organizations.

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