

LA Commons Community Arts Program Overview

LA Commons Mission/Purpose

Art + Stories + Community Building

LA Commons engages communities in the creation of art for public spaces that tells their unique stories and serves as the basis for dialogue, interaction, and a better understanding of Los Angeles.

Compendium of LA Commons Community Arts Projects

2003 Taking Flight: Migration Dreams

Three part installation: Dreams of Home, Home of Dreams and Spirits Rising, Rooting

I. Wooden houses in trees painted with images of home

II. Wood cut-outs suspended in trees with images of childrens' vision for the future

III. Giant Papier Mache Masks in trees with images of neighbors who had immigrated to the community and made contributions to the life of the community
Location: Trees along West 7th Street and at the corner of West 7th and Alvarado in MacArthur Park.

Artists: Rafael Escamilla, Andy Ledesma, John Mack, Julia Munoz, Beth Peterson, Jorge Portillo, Oscar Santos and Weston Teruya

2003 Taking Flight: Migration Dreams

The Past, Present and Future of Immigration in Koreatown

36" by 24" Mixed Media Korean Kites that celebrate the 100 years of Korean Immigration to Los Angeles. (8'by12' final printed banners)

Location: Koreatown Galleria at corner of Olympic and Western

Lead Artists: Hyunsook Cho, Yanira Cartagena, Silvia Simmons

Youth Artists: LA High School

2004 Fragmentos Del Futuro – MacArthur Park

Art Tile Tamale Cart and photograph/poetry postcards

Artists: Jose Ramirez and Rossana Perez

Youth Artists: CARECEN

2004 “Children of Heaven”, “Bridging the Present” and “East West Trading Post”

Chinatown

Hand Painted Silk Lanterns, Chinatown Map and Digest, and Cross country Mobile Souvenir Station

Artists: Cindy Suriyani, Shan Chao, and Annie Shaw

Youth Artists: Chinatown Service Center

2004 What's Playing at the Del Mar?

Mid-City

Local Stories in Words and Pictures Celebrating the Heart of Los Angeles

Artist: Mike Blockstein

2005 Intersections

Sylmar

Metal medallions for street light poles that mark the places where people of Sylmar intersect

Artists: Ambrose Meyer, Juan Pueblo

Youth Artists: Tia Chuchas, Sylmar HS, Mission College

2006 Expressions of Our Reality

MacArthur Park

Wood Cut-outs painted and suspended between trees sharing stories of how Youth in Homies Unidos Gang Intervention/Prevention programs have had their lives affected by violence.

Artist: Spartecaus Cacao

Youth Artists: Junior and Senior High Leadership HS Youth in Homies Unidos gang intervention/prevention programs

2006 Migration Stories

CARECEN (Hoover and West 7th Street), MacArthur Park

5' by 5' Six edged kites painted on canvass and attached to wood frames

Artist: Rocio Veliz

Youth Artists: CARECEN Youth, Belmont HS, Santa Monica Community College

2007 Bangladeshi Dreams

Koreatown between Vermont and Western on 3rd Street

Street light pole banners sharing the history, struggles and vital presense of the Bangladeshi community in Koreatown.

Artist: Andaleeb Firdosy

Youth Artists: South Asian Network Bangladeshi Youth Group

2007 Highland Park Stories

Avenue 50 Studio in Highland Park

16 two foot by two foot birch panels carved and attached to wall as installation sharing stories of people and trees of Highland Park

Artist: Poli Marichal

Youth Artists: Franklin HS, LACC

2007 Sankofa Film and Video Project

Leimert Park

KAOS Network and World Stage Jazz Festival

Video digest of Leimert Park through the eyes of Leimert Park teens.

Artist: Ben Caldwell and KAOS Network

Youth Artists: Crenshaw HS, Dorsey HS, Manual Arts HS and Home School

2007 Dancing Angels: A Celebration of Thai Town
Thai Town, East Hollywood
Thailand Plaza

Artists created paintings exploring Thai immigrant experience that were installed on post as a sculpture in front of Thaitown Plaza.

Artist: Vibul Wonprasat

Youth Artists: Wat Thai Temple of Los Angeles

2007 Opening Eyes: Little Armenia Public Art Project
Little Armenia, East Hollywood
Wall of Panos Pastry

Seven by seven foot mixed media piece on wood with resin coating. Celebrates Armenian culture and calls for the Opening Eyes to celebrate the rich diversity of East Hollywood.

Artist: Gregory Beylerian

Youth Artists: Rose and Alex Pilobos School

2008/2009 Leimert Park Light Pole Banner Project
Leimert Park – displayed on Crenshaw and Degnan Light Poles

The three designs celebrate the history and culture Degnan, Leimert Boulevard and Crenshaw in the heart of Leimert Park Village. Thirty 3 foot by 7 foot banners on light poles.

Artists: Jabari Hall Smith and Keisa Davis

Youth Artists: Community Build Youth Program, Crenshaw HS, Santa Monica Community College, Home School

2008/9 Highland Park Journeys
Highland Park at sites along Figueroa and York

Team created a series of five puzzle piece mural maps that share history and landmarks of Highland Park

Artist: Ulises Diaz

Youth Artists: Franklin HS

2008/9 East Hollywood Utility Box Art Project
East Hollywood, along Hollywood Boulevard between Vermont and Western

Team collected stories celebrating the diversity of East Hollywood and painted murals on 24 surfaces of six utility boxes along Hollywood Boulevard.

Artists: Patchara Wonprasat and Arpine Shakhbandarian

Youth Artists: Helen Bernstein HS, John Marshall HS, Rose and Alex Pilobos School, Wat Thai of Los Angeles, and Aztecs Rising Youth Program

The Making of an LA Commons Community Art Project

An effective project will feature these elements

- **Sharing Stories**

A sound strategy for collecting stories and images from the community and for sharing these stories through the art

- **Visual Impact**

The art makes good use of the space, furthers community beautification goals and shares stories. This is the core design role of the Lead Artist.

- **Youth Leadership Development**

Youth play an integral role in the story gathering, design and creating of the project and in sharing the artwork with the public.

- **Community Building and Local support**

A diverse team of businesses, schools, nonprofits, youth serving agencies and local cultural organizations are involved in the planning, ongoing support and celebration of the work

- **Celebration**

The art opening and Youth Artist Recognition ties in with a local celebration that is featured in the Trekking LA Tours. Ideally the celebration features food, music, dance, and the sharing of cultures and stories.

- **Documentation/ Evaluation**

The team works to document the project at each step through photography, video, spoken and written artist statements. LA Commons conducts an evaluation of the project.

The Process of Developing and Creating the Art Work

I. Gathering the stories

Gathering neighborhood stories is at the heart of the LA Commons public art project. In Addition to providing core content for the art work, if well utilized the story gathering can foster communication among neighbors, provide an opportunity for youth to gain a deeper understanding of their own community, and build awareness in the community about the art project.

Generally the process is that:

- Youth Artists share stories of their own personal experiences in relation to the topic and draw iconic images to symbolize these stories
- Youth Artists interview fellow youth arts Participants and create images to share this information
- Youth Artists work in teams to interview community members, host story circles or host story gathering workshops in which participants exchange stories and create their own visual images
- Generally this stage also involves youth in Mapping the neighborhood

II. Skills Building and Design

The Lead Artist develops a series of skills development workshops in image making using the tools of the art form. Youth practice transforming stories into visual images utilizing the principals of the art form featured in the project. Next each youth chooses an image to develop into the artwork for his or her component of the project.

III. *Develop and Revise Designs and Create the Art*

Youth and Artist work to further develop and deepen design work within the art form. Youth artist receive feedback from the Lead Artist and Youth Mentors. At times this work also needs approval from an outside entity such as the Park Department, Council Office or business owner- which may mean revising the work based on the feedback. At last the final art work can be completed. Each Youth and Artist writes an artistic statement about the meaning of his/her component of the project.

IV. *Installation/ Evaluation*

Once the art is completed and the site permission is obtained, the Lead Artist works with LA Commons staff to navigate the details of the installation of the work. Youth Artists, Lead Artists and Community Partners complete evaluation of the projects.

V. *Celebration/Recognition for the Public Art Project*

The opening Youth Recognition event is time to coincide with a neighborhood special event or festival. This brings a broader audience to the work and provides the youth a forum in which they can share the story process and the purpose of the Art.

Key Participants in a successful LA Commons Community Art Project

Role of Community Project Partners

Each neighborhood has its own set of unique project partners. Generally partners consist of:

- **Youth serving agencies** offer space for workshop sessions and for the making of the art
- **Local businesses** provide resources or locations for the public art
- **Local High School, Community Colleges, Cultural Centers and Youth Serving Agencies** recommend youth artists
- **Business Improvement Organizations and local Neighborhood Councils** sponsor projects
- **Ethnic and Cultural Arts Organizations** recommend lead artists and youth and host neighborhood celebrations
- **City Council Offices** provide assistance with site permission, funding possibilities and Certificates of Appreciation
- **Parks and Libraries** offer locations for story gathering workshops and sometimes art installation sites.

In addition to the specific individual roles, the partners as a group often recommend sites for the artwork, possible themes for the work, and suggestions for local events to highlight for the project's final celebrations.

Role of the Lead Artist

The Lead Artist is critical to the successful outcomes of the project. The qualifications for lead artists include: accomplishment within chosen art form, understanding of and experience with mentoring youth artists, familiarity with the community, and ability to envision interesting and engaging use of the site to convey neighborhood stories through the art. LA Commons intends to provide greater visibility to the artist and to provide a venue in which local artists can engage in creating public art with the community.

The work of the Lead Artist includes:

- Envision the “Big Picture” of the work for the site of the public art installation
- Provide a designed framework of forms for the project that has its own unique character and can also be open enough to encompass youth art work as a meaningful and visible component of the work
- Prepare and conduct Youth Arts Team workshops
- Participate in Story gathering process
- Submit project plans and drawings or digital composites that can be used for site permissions.
- Compile list of art materials needed for design, art making and installation in a timely manner and within project budget
- Finalize the design
- Work with community input to refine the work
- Participate in and lead the Art Making
- Plan and attend the installation
- Make a copy of documentation of the project for LA Commons use in promoting the project and for the archives
- Attend the final celebration of the work

Role of the Youth Artist

The Core Youth Artists are Key Project Partners. They bring a wealth of experiences within the community and the openness to investigate and learn more and to share their talents with the community. Ideally the projects give youth the opportunity to stretch and grow as artists, and to develop leadership skills as they interview community members, make personal design decisions, develop their work and write and speak publicly about the process and meaning of their work. Youth Artists leave the project with a \$200 stipend, a certificate of appreciation, a letter verifying community service hours, and documentation of their work as well as the experience of collaborating to accomplish a large community project.

The work of the Youth Arts Team:

- Attend all workshops
- Participate in 1-3 story gathering sessions outside of the workshop
- Participate in story gathering training: Share a story, Interview a fellow youth artist, and

Join the team to collect stories in the community

- Design an image that shares one of the stories
- Refine the image with input from lead artist
- Make a practice painting or model of your idea within the art form
- Participate in the art making and complete work on your design
- Write about your component of the art work and what it means to you
- Work with the team to complete the project
- Attend the Art Opening Event

Role of Youth Mentor/Project Organizing Assistant

The roles of the Youth Mentor and Project Organizing Assistant can be filled by one or more individuals in a project. The primary purpose of the position is to support the youth to be successful in reaching his/her project goals. Often time this role is filled by a former Youth Arts Team member who has exhibited great leadership skills; by Artist/Youth Worker from partner organizations; or by emerging artists in order to gain more experience working with youth or in community arts projects.

The work of the Youth Mentor/Project Organizing Assistant.

- Make weekly reminder calls to youth about workshops and story gathering sessions.
- Track youth attendance, and completion of evaluations and artist statements
- Coordinate documentation of the project and the archiving of the digital images
- Check in with youth weekly in the workshops and facilitate meaningful engagement in the project by the youth.
- Attend all story gathering sessions
- Work with LA Commons staff to coordinate the project

Role of LA Commons Staff

LA Commons Staff work to set the groundwork for an effective project to support the meaningful engagement of all team members. The staff brings experience in Arts, Arts Education, Community Organizing, cultural tourism and project development. All of these skills are drawn on to support the project.

The work of the LA Commons Staff

- Raise funds for the project
- Assemble the community partners
 - Initialize project plans
- Hire artists and youth mentors
- Recruit the youth
- Obtain project supplies and site permissions
- Manage the project on a day to day basis with an eye to youth empowerment, community involvement, documentation and visual impact of the work

- Coordinate plans for the installation of the art and documentation
- Organize participation in the final celebration.
- LA Commons also works to coordinate the Trekking LA Tours with the openings of the art projects.

Project Funders

A broad range of individuals, local businesses and organizations, local, state and national agencies and private foundations have offer the financial support that fund the projects. Over the last six years funding has come from: individuals, local businesses, local partner organizations, LA Department of Cultural Affairs, NEA, California Community Foundation, Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation, Civic Arts Fund, Washington Mutual, Citigroup, AT&T, Neighborhood Councils, 1% for the Arts in new building and construction sites, LA Department of Public Works, and more.

Essential Questions for Lead Artists/ Youth Mentors

Youth Leadership Development

- How do the art activities that I plan engage the youth of different skill and experience levels?
- How can I facilitate a workshop atmosphere that is safe, demanding and productive for youth artists?
- What warm up activities can I develop or utilize in my art form that give youth more experience using stories as inspiration for making visual images?
- What opportunities do Youth Arts team members have in the workshop for sharing their ideas and speaking in front of the group?

Tips from the Workshop

- *Youth rise to high expectations*
- *Identify youth that are prepared for greater responsibilities within the project*
- *Constructive criticism framed in positive, affirming language, goes a lot further than outright criticism.*

Story Gathering

- Who is it important to include in the story gathering strategy for my project?
- What information do we need to inform the project?
- Where should we collect stories and information to inform the project?
- What are strategies to maximize community awareness of the public art project through the story gathering process?
- Are stories reflected in the designs?

Community Involvement

- If the actual art is created on installation site, how can I work with team members to share the stories/ increase awareness of the project by passers by the site?

- Are there any small additional projects that local elementary students can make to accompany the project?
- Who should be included in the planning and/or attending at the final celebration to raise awareness about the project?

Visual Impact : Designing Temporary Art for Public Spaces

- Who is the primary audience in the location? Autos and buses? Pedestrians? A combination? How does the visual design read from far away? Is it clear?
- Is the scale of the project large enough or clear enough to register from a distance?
- Does the design make effective use of the space?
- Is the installation hardy enough to safely survive 3-6 month installation? How is the piece effected by sun? wind? rain? Is the piece well enough secured in terms of height or attachment to a surface?
- Are the stories being shared that investigate the theme of the project?
- How does the art speak to the theme? What is its meaning and how is this reflected in the design?

Designing with the Youth Art

- How does the overall design of the installation frame and highlight aspects of the youth art? How does the unique artistry of the lead artist come through the piece? How is the art elucidating/exploring the theme of the project?
- Each youth is responsible for creating a design, revising the concept and participating in the art making. The work of the Lead Artist is to keep in mind the Big Picture of the entire installation and design the most visibly effective means to incorporate the art.

Documentation

- What are the key points in the project to document?
- Which should be documented through photo? Video? Written word? Audio tape?
- Who will document the key points of the project?

Designing the Scope of the project within the time/resource frame

How can I plan the project to accomplish the goal in the amount of time that we have?

Should we plan extra sessions during the artmaking phase?

What materials do we need both in the design and artmaking?

How will the piece be attached or installed?

What are the benchmarks for what steps we need to accomplish by what time to complete the project?