

Santa Cruz City Arts

Public Art Program Review

Submitted by Todd W. Bressi

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Introduction

The City of Santa Cruz Arts Commission has guided arts and culture policies and programs in the City since 1977. Since 2000 City Arts has put significant focus on public art program and project management while continuing to act in an advisory capacity on cultural policy issues. Although City Arts is a small civic art program relative to others throughout the nation, it has had solid success in stimulating creative energy and community engagement on a shoestring budget, and in bringing recognition to the arts as a crucial component of the City's identity, economic development strategy and urban design goals.

Today, City Arts is at a crossroads:

- Funding is in question: in a time of government retrenchment, city agencies are being asked to operate as smartly and effectively as possible, and there are few capital projects (a traditional source of City Arts funds) on the horizon.
- City Arts' host department, Economic Development and Redevelopment, is facing an uncertain future given the state challenge to redevelopment agencies throughout California.
- The strengthening of downtown and emergence of cultural partners such as the Tannery Arts Center, the Museum of Art and History, First Friday, the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County and the new dean of the University of California Santa Cruz Arts Division creates an exciting context for public art initiatives.
- A number of items in the public art collection are in need of regular maintenance and some need repair. Sufficient funding and strategies to address these maintenance needs have not been identified. In addition, a fresh approach to public art gifts and expected lifespan of items in the public art inventory is needed, particularly given the program's continued growth and the number of gifts to the City adopted into the public art collection more than a decade ago.

This brief program review reports on the challenges and opportunities on the horizon for the public art program, points out strategic decisions that should be made to ensure that City Arts remains vital, and suggests how City Arts' resources can be focused most effectively.

Methodology and Outreach

The methodology for this program review included several steps:

- A three-day site visit to Santa Cruz, including tour of the collection, interviews¹ and one roundtable discussion
- Review of past program review and ordinance review memos
- Review of City Arts planning documents, general planning documents and budgets
- Research on relevant projects in peer cities / peer programs
- Telephone interviews

City Arts' Value in Economic and Community Development

Several of City Arts' initiatives are regarded as having a positive impact on Santa Cruz's economic climate. The SculptTOUR project on Pacific Avenue has presented well-loved artworks – destinations and anchor points – that help draw people downtown and encourage them to circulate and linger. The murals program has had a similar impact downtown and in other

commercial districts, creating iconic artworks that speak with the City's creative voice and address graffiti problems.

City Arts has also been successful on the community front. The program has built strong constituencies and good public relations for its work through public engagement. Projects have effectively tapped into groups like schoolchildren and skateboarders to present work that reflects the community fabric, and to which people have a living attachment.

In addition, City Arts has been successful at including public art recommendations in the City's land-use plans. This will bear fruit in the coming years, as there has not been much private development since these plans were completed. City Arts has also embedded art recommendations in its wayfinding program, now underway, which could lead to significant artistic gateway projects in coming years.

Goals for City Arts

City Arts has made steady progress on goals that were established in the public art program review our firm conducted three years ago. Since then, City Arts has strengthened relationships with City departments that manage capital projects and built strong linkages between city planning (general plan, area plans, urban design, and wayfinding) and public art. All of its activities have been completed within a context of sustained budgetary duress, with foreseeable income streams under threat of litigation or elimination.²

In the coming years it will be important for City Arts to ensure its resources are focused on activities that have the strongest prospect of achieving creative excellence, supporting Santa Cruz's arts and culture community, and strengthening the City's economic and community life. More specifically, City Arts' goals over the coming years could be categorized into three major areas:

Funding and Administration

- Establish a secure operational funding base for staff.
- Establish a secure source of project funding, potentially by revisiting recommendations for revising the city's percent for art ordinance.
- Establish a feasible maintenance and repair plan, and revise the gifts policy to ensure all public art on view is well-maintained.

Creative

- Capture the diverse sources of creative energy of Santa Cruz and its participatory culture.
- Catalyze public art initiatives through collaborations with cultural organizations, other non-profits, schools and local businesses.
- Maintain a high standard of curatorial and artistic excellence.

Collaborations

- Develop standard design and management tools for including art in upcoming streetscape projects.
- Continue traditional public art commissions for the most important opportunities.
- In collaboration with other City departments, cultural organizations, non-profits, businesses and others, identify specific roles that City Arts can play (permitting, brokering arrangements, catalytic funding, and promotion) and focus resources there.

Priorities for City Arts

City Arts does not have the resources to move, vigorously, in all of the programmatic directions or to support all of the projects that are open to it. Therefore, City Arts should give the highest priority to initiatives that meet the following criteria:

- The project can contribute to the distinctive look and feel of Santa Cruz by embracing its unique creative culture – which includes traditional artists as well as the skate/surf scene, the “DIY” design culture, and the interactive design culture.
- The project can be impactful because of its scale, visibility and location.
- The project can be impactful because it is part of something larger – because it connects to, strengthens or catalyzes other cultural or economic development initiatives.
- The project allows City Arts to play a catalytic role in an initiative that will largely be managed and funded by communities, cultural organizations or the private sector.

City Arts Impact on Urban Design and Infrastructure

One of the traditional functions of City Arts is to manage public artworks that are commissioned in conjunction with City infrastructure projects, in support of the City’s “percent for art” ordinance. Over the next few years, the City will focus on public and private investment on major corridors, especially those that connect downtown to the beaches; on implementing the wayfinding plan; and on improving its water supply capacity, potentially through a desalination plant. The recommended approach for City Arts is:

- Continue commissions related to major city projects / infrastructure projects. However, City Arts should be very selective about the projects it takes on, and evolve beyond working primarily as a traditional percent-for-art program whose focus is on commissioning art in conjunction with City capital projects.
- Develop, in collaboration with Public Works, standardized design approaches/templates for incorporating art in upcoming streetscape projects, particularly connections between downtown and the beach. This should allow for streamlined project management and make projects more accessible to local artists. The (Seattle) *SDOT Art Plan*³ is a model of how to do this, though on a larger scale. *Plants and Animals of the San Lorenzo River Watershed*, on the Water Street Bridge, is another example. As there is no funding for the capital work, this is an appropriate time to develop these strategies.
- Develop policies and procedures for involving art in upcoming private development, with a focus on Ocean Street, and the Riverfront / Lower Pacific connections to the beach.
- Pursue opportunities for integrated art / gateway opportunities related to the wayfinding plan (Riverside Avenue, Ocean and Mission Streets).

All of these recommendations are sizable challenges that involve considerable planning and coordination and require sufficient funding for staffing. There will also be a need for flexible resources to support preliminary planning for projects. Given limited staff capacity, City Arts should consider allocating funding from public art project budgets for retaining consulting project managers to manage new and sizeable art commissions.

City Arts Impact Downtown

Downtown has been a focus of Santa Cruz’s development efforts ever since the Loma Prieta earthquake, and has also been a key focus of City Arts. With the emergence of strong cultural partners downtown City Arts’ role should continue shifting to one of collaborator and facilitator.

- Consider how City Arts can catalyze “art zones” through various approaches: Walls / Murals, Urban Spaces / Abbott Square, SculpTOUR and Storefront Galleries. An “art zone” is a place where City Arts facilitates creative activity by addressing issues with codes and permits, and stimulates partnerships that support curatorial planning, funding and marketing. Abbott Square, SculpTOUR and murals are the nearest term priorities.
- Within the concept of “art zones,” consider developing changing art strategies – with a mix of slow-spaces (murals) and fast spaces (event-based art) to in-between (seasonal, annual exhibitions, or long-term loans such as SculpTOUR). For example, test projects of different duration at Abbott Square to see how audiences react, what the technical issues are, and what the impact of a long-term project would be.
- Look long-term towards a collaborative creative model and a dispersed funding model, working with the Museum, UCSC, Sunrise Rotary and the Downtown Association to facilitate a range of art experiences in many media.

Ensuring the Strongest Artistic Quality and a Local Voice

Creatively, City Arts should strive for strong artistic quality, and for cultivating Santa Cruz’s distinct local voice. The power of this approach has become evident through some of the most recent mural projects⁴. Areas to focus on in the coming years:

- Improve the quality of outcomes in the utility box program. Perhaps commission each year’s grouping from one artist, who develops a series within a neighborhood or defined geographic area, creating a greater sense of consistency. Consider vinyl or other applications, rather than paint, and limit painted text (artist websites, etc.) to improve artist flexibility and project consistency.
- Continue to create tools for engaging more local arts energy and arts institutions.
 - Consider Tacoma’s “Public Art in Development” as a tool for helping artists and others adapt their work to the public realm.
 - Consider Tacoma “Spaceworks”⁵ as a model for placing artwork in vacant storefronts.
 - Look at models for short-term corridor installations: Who’s on First? (SJ), San Fernando (SJ)⁶, Temporal Terminus (Tacoma)⁷
 - Abbott Square: Consider a Santa Cruz-centric challenge that results in a cycle of installations for local artists. For example, the PS1 Young Architects series⁸ or the Walker Open Field series⁹?

SculpTOUR

SculpTOUR is a popular and successful exhibition on Pacific Avenue, but in need of transition as the loan term of the first round of installations is coming to an end. In addition, there is a goal of expanding SculpTOUR south toward the Beach Area, but that has been difficult to realize.

The key focus for SculpTOUR should be ensuring the exhibitions are always strong, rather than expanding. The first challenge is curatorial – determining which of the current sculptures should be sought for longer-term loan, and developing a stream of strong artworks that can cycle through SculpTOUR sites in the future. While the exhibit currently has a skilled volunteer curator sourced from within the Arts Commission, in the long run in order to maintain quality and ensure consistency of effort there should be a designated curator who is paid an honorarium. It might take a few years to change out the first cycle, and it may be more practical curatorially to have artworks switched in and out on an incremental basis.

The second challenge is determining the right scale for the exhibition. For now, the emphasis should be on the current sites along Pacific Avenue north of Cathcart Street. Placing art south of Cathcart is difficult now because of the nature of the built context; there are not appropriate sites for sculpture exhibitions. Though there had been hope that artworks could draw pedestrians southward, that is not usually the case absent some other factor that would encourage people to walk. In the long run art should be encouraged and can successfully support pedestrian activity between Downtown and the Beach Area as key properties are developed and as streetscape improvements are made through public and private investment.

City Arts role should be limited to managing site planning, license/ loan agreements and assisting with the development of a budget that would allow the program to be sustainable. The curator should be funded either through City Arts or a private entity. Sunrise Rotary is a key partner because of its capacity to assist with deinstallation and installation.

Murals

The mural program has been successful at highlighting local artists and creating a distinct look and feel for public art in Santa Cruz. The program is also directly linked to the Redevelopment Agency's mission and goals, by helping in graffiti abatement and by giving each of Santa Cruz's commercial districts a distinct identity. These projects have also resulted in some of the most interesting documentation on the City Arts web site.

Future mural funds should be used to commission additional murals as opportunities for partnerships arise throughout downtown, and in the Soquel Avenue and other commercial districts. City Arts should follow a curatorial approach that lets local emerging artists develop projects, to continue bringing that creative voice to public attention.

Funding for City Arts

Budgets for civic art in the City of Santa Cruz are lean. In FY12 San Francisco budgeted \$16 per capita for its civic art program whereas Santa Cruz budgeted \$0.66 per capita. Additionally, Santa Cruz taxes many of the institutions¹⁰ that are funded in San Francisco. As of FY13 there will not be sufficient administrative funding available in the two percent fund balance to support the City Arts program.

Capital Funding

Much of the project funding for City Arts comes from the capital improvement (CIP) budget, which has shrunken dramatically as a result of the economic climate. Before that, there were structural challenges with CIP funding: the allocations to the public art program from the City's two percent CIP requirement vary widely from year to year, making long-term project planning difficult; calculating eligibility of projects for the two percent requirements takes a significant amount of staff time, and most CIP funding streams and/or projects are not deemed eligible. In addition, major capital projects sometimes are advanced in mid-year, outside of the annual CIP budgeting process, and public art staff are not always aware of them or the funding they will generate. City Arts should explore establishing a baseline annual funding amount for public art projects, perhaps as an annual line-item in the capital budget. The baseline might be calculated as an average of the public art allocations from past years; if required by ordinance, this baseline might be established according to city department or fund. The baseline might be supplemented by 2% set-asides from major capital projects whose budget is above a threshold amount, such as \$5 million. This practice is similar to how some small- and medium-sized public art programs are funded.¹¹

Operating Funding

The City Arts program has been funded primarily through the 2% public art fund, which currently funds Arts Commission staffing and public art program administration. Funds are not available from that source beyond the current fiscal year. A portion of City Arts operating support has also come from the Redevelopment Agency, in particular through its murals program and administrative support provided to the program. Continued redevelopment funding is in question because of state policy changes regarding redevelopment agencies. A potential source of operating funds is the city's hotel tax, a funding mechanism utilized by a number of other cities for civic art programs, following the rationale that the city's cultural sector and arts identity serve as a core asset of the tourism and hospitality industry.

Budget for Ongoing Projects

Following are project budget estimates to fund City Arts initiatives:

- SculpTOUR, three year rotation of five to ten sculptures, \$45,000 (includes artist and curator honoraria, marketing costs and an average of one hour per week of staff time).¹²
- Graphic traffic boxes, one series of ten boxes, \$15,000 (includes project costs and 100 hours of staff time).
- Murals, up to \$12,000 per mural (includes Redevelopment Agency portion of project costs and 70 hours of staff time).¹³
- Percent for art project management varies widely depending on the nature and scale of a project. Smaller projects will range from \$3,000 to \$10,000 in staff time, while larger projects might run to five percent of project budget.
- Developing design approaches and model for program for including art in streetscape \$30K.

The above estimates are based on current budget figures unless otherwise indicated. In addition to the project costs above, an annual operating budget of about \$40,000 per year¹⁴ is needed to fund basic program administration and Arts Commission staffing (15 hours per week), cultural policy initiatives and ongoing collection management.

Conclusion

Despite tightening financial oversight, streamlining administration and spearheading a number of innovative projects, the City Arts public art program is at a crossroads. California continues to balance its state budget on the back of municipalities and counties and there is no operational funding identified for City Arts beyond the current fiscal year.

Over the course of the past three years, under the auspices of the Economic Development and Redevelopment Department, City Arts has pivoted from a traditional public art program focused primarily on the acquisition and installation of large artworks to one that primarily leverages relationships in order to bring art projects that dovetail with City goals into the public sphere, acting as collaborator, facilitator, catalyst, broker and curator as well as traditional project manager. This shift reflects the values and identity of Santa Cruz and underscores broader governmental trends. Projects such as public art trainings, SculpTOUR, and collaborations with local schools show the potential of this strategy, sustained success will require an ongoing commitment to curatorial quality and creative excellence as well as base funding for staffing and collection maintenance in order to manage the program.

In order to survive, City Arts needs a stable funding mechanism that provides enough steady operational and project support to allow City Arts to maintain the existing collection and continue to leverage community support to catalyze and facilitate dynamic and successful art projects that make the unique creative persona of Santa Cruz visible in its public spaces.

1 Program Review stakeholder participants:

Mary Arman, Public Works staff

Hilary Bryant, City Councilmember

Chip, Executive Director (Downtown Association)

Kathy Dewild, Recreation Director and Arts Commission staff (Santa Cruz County Parks)

Mauro Garcia, Parks and Recreation staff

Timerie Gordon, Industrial Designer (Nielsen Architects and Design Studio)

Shelby Graham, Gallery Director (Sesnon Gallery)

Gabriel Harrison, Exhibitions Director (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts)

Patrick Haywood, Arts Commissioner, Digital Curator (UCSC, Plantronics)

Keith Henderson, SculptTOUR volunteer (Sunrise Rotary) and Project Manager (Barry Swenson Builder)

Ted Holladay (Studio Holladay)

Michelle King, Planning staff

Peter Koht, Economic Development staff

Lance Linares, Executive Director (Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County)

Bonnie Lipscomb, Executive Director (Economic Development and Redevelopment)

Marvin Plummer (self-employed artist)

Trink Praxel, Arts Commissioner

Meta Rhodeos, Parks and Recreation staff

Lynn Robinson, City Councilmember

Chris Schneiter, Public Works staff

Dannettee Shoemaker, Parks and Recreation staff

Tina Shull, Assistant City Manager

Nina Simon, Arts Commissioner and Executive Director (Museum of Art & History)

David Terrazas, City Councilmember

Michelle Williams, Executive Director (Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County)

David Yager, Dean (UCSC Arts Division)

2 City Arts did not make progress on one goal, which was to clarify and update the city's public art ordinance. While steps have been taken to improve the public art administrative procedure, the public art ordinance itself continues to be problematic, and is followed citywide to varying degrees, an item of increasing concern to staff in the host agency.

3 From 2002-2005, Daniel Mihalyo was the artist-in-residence at the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). Mihalyo spent an initial period learning about the department, its plans and its projects, and developed an arts plan identifying opportunities for artists to enhance the department's work by integrating art and the work of artists into the routine work of the department and by adding value to infrastructure projects through the use of 1% for Art funds. seattle.gov/arts/publicart/art_plans.asp.

4 Note this is not a suggestion to limit selection processes to local artists, but rather a suggestion to curate commissions toward capturing the unique creative voice of Santa Cruz, thereby creating a distinct look and feel for public art in Santa Cruz.

5 *Spaceworks* is a joint initiative of the City of Tacoma and Shunpike designed to activate empty storefronts. The initiative makes no- and low-cost temporary space available to artists, fledgling creative entrepreneurs, organizations, and community groups by placing them in unused commercial properties. spaceworkstacoma.wordpress.com/

6 San Jose Public Art, in partnership with the San Jose Redevelopment Agency, the City's Department of Transportation, ZER01: the Art and Technology Network, and the San Jose Museum of Art identified six artists to install artworks that address themes of environmental and community engagement for *Art on San Fernando: Re-visioning the Corridor*. On exhibit for three months in 2010 the installations coincided with the 01SJ Biennial. sanjoseculture.org/?pid=99224

7 A partnership between the Tacoma Arts Commission and the University of Washington-Tacoma, *Temporal Terminus: Marking the Line* is an exhibition of eight temporary public artworks highlighting the Historic Prairie Line Trail which traverses downtown from South 25th Street to the waterfront, on view for three weeks in November 2011. cityoftacoma.org/Page.aspx?hid=17528

8 The Museum of Modern Art and MoMA PS1 jointly present the *MoMA PS1 Young Architects Program (YAP)*, an annual series of competitions that gives emerging architects the opportunity to build projects conceived for MoMA PS1's facility in Long Island City, Queens. momaps1.org/yap/

9 *Open Field* was a summer-long experiment in creating a cultural commons with artists, community and institution acting as shared content creators and place makers. Taking shape in a large and largely empty green space adjacent to the Walker Art Center, the field was a platform for creative, social and intellectual exchange, home to over 130 unmediated public activities many of which bore little resemblance to formal museum going—yoga, human chess, brass bands and flash-camera tag. blogs.walkerart.org/openfield2011/

10 The City of Santa Cruz admission tax is an anomaly; we know of no other city that taxes arts institutions and does not reinvest a significant portion of that collected revenue back into arts support. From the Santa Cruz Arts Master Plan, "The City admission tax (which requires organizations to pay 5% of their gross tickets sales to the City) reduces the primary earned revenue base for small non-profit arts organizations and takes an ongoing toll on the arts sector without providing any reciprocal support. If even a small percent of this tax were reinvested into the arts community it would have a significant impact (5% reinvestment of the admissions tax would create \$100,000 annual budget for the arts).

11 These recommendations were outlined in a 2009 memo, *Findings on Public Art Capital Funding for Santa Cruz* that our firm completed for City Arts.

12 These estimates assume SculptTOUR changes recommended in this report, including paid curator and less staff time.

13 The current mural program artist budgets are significantly lower than other successful mural programs around the country. For example, in Philadelphia mural project budgets average \$25,000 to \$30,000. In order to maintain a high level of quality, I suggest a base \$10,000 - \$15,000 artist budget, scaled based on square footage. However, the Mural Program is a Redevelopment Agency Program and as such is managed separately from City Arts.

14 This reflects current staffing levels, which in FY12 were funded in part by the two percent public art funds and in part by the Redevelopment Agency.