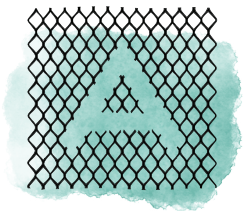
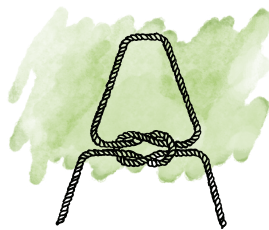


# AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES

*Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change*



**disruption**



**commitment**



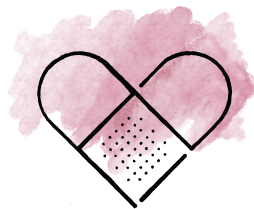
**communal meaning**



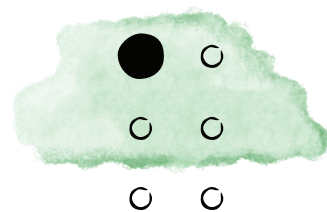
**cultural integrity**



**risk-taking**



**emotional experience**



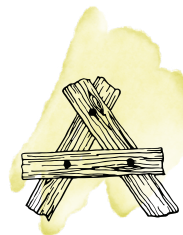
**sensory experience**



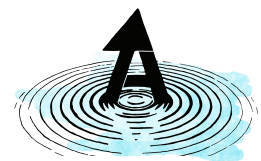
**openness**



**coherence**



**resourcefulness**



**stickiness**

## Written by John Borstel and Pam Korza

with Andrea Assaf, Chris Dwyer,

Mark Valdez, and Denise Brown

Edited by Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon



**Aesthetic Perspectives:  
Attributes of Excellence in  
Arts for Change Work** aims  
to enhance understanding and  
evaluation of Arts for Change.

In 2014, Animating Democracy launched the Evaluation Learning Lab (ELL) in collaboration with the [Art x Culture x Social Justice Network](#) and the [Nathan Cummings Foundation](#) with a goal to promote evaluation that embodies values and practices congruent with arts and social justice work—equity, inclusion, understanding context, and the role of arts and culture. The Lab engaged arts practitioners, evaluators, and funders to build practical knowledge and resources for measuring social impact, evaluating aesthetic dimensions, and equalizing power in evaluation. The Aesthetic Perspectives framework grew out of the Lab.

**Evaluation Learning Lab participants:** Kiley Arroyo, Cultural Strategies Council and Slover Linett Audience Research; **Andrea Assaf**, artist, Art2Action; **John Borstel**, artist; **Denise Brown**, Leeway Foundation; **Chris Dwyer**, RMC Research; **Rahwa Ghirmatzion**, PUSH Buffalo; **James Kass**, YouthSpeaks; **Maurine Knighton**, The Nathan Cummings Foundation now with Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; **Lisa Yun Lee**, University of Chicago and Imagining America; **Jose Serrano McClain**, Queens Museum; **Stephanie McKee**, Junebug Productions; **Wendy Morris**, Intermedia Arts; **Judy Nemzoff**, San Francisco Arts Commission; **Lisa Marie Pickens**, evaluation consultant; **Erin Potts**, RPM; **Nick Slie**, Mondo Bizarro; **Jessica Solomon**, Art in Praxis; **Carlton Turner** and **Keryl McCord**, Alternate ROOTS; **Mark Valdez**, theater artist; **Risë Wilson**, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation; **Pam Korza** and **Barbara Schaffer Bacon**, Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts

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# Table of Contents

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reclaiming “Aesthetics”	5
Defining the Attributes	9
Concluding Thoughts	11

## 2. ATTRIBUTES FRAMEWORK

Commitment	15
Communal Meaning	17
Disruption	19
Cultural Integrity	21
Emotional Experience	23
Sensory Experience	25
Risk-taking	27
Openness	29
Resourcefulness	31
Coherence	33
Stickiness	35

## 3. EXAMPLES

Commitment	
Medea Project, Rhodessa Jones	37
Reclamation Project, Xavier Cortada	37
New River Valley Planning District Commission	38
Communal Meaning	
Higher Ground, Southeast KY Community and Technical College	39
Disruption	
The Grill Project, Design Studio for Social Intervention	40
Gasland, Josh Fox	41
Cultural Integrity	
Mississippi River Water Walk, Sharon Day (Ojibwe)	42
King Kamehameha I Statue Restoration, Glen Wharton and Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education	43
Little Black Shh, Oskar Ly	44
Emotional Experience	
One Million Bones, Naomi Natale	45
Sensory Experience	
Beware of the Dandelions, Complex Movements	46
La Ruta, Working Theater	47
Risk-taking	
Speed Killed My Cousin, Carpetbag Theatre	48
The Most Dangerous Tattoo, Paul Flores	49
Mirroring Evil, The Jewish Museum, New York	49
Openness	
Reflections of Healing, Brett Cook	50
Moby Dick, Perseverance Theatre	51
Dance Exchange	51
Resourcefulness	
Pop-up Resource Village, Deanna VanBuren	52
Coherence	
Rewind, Paul Rucker	53
The State Hospital: In Memoriam, Anna Schuleit	54
Stickiness	
The Laramie Project, Tectonic Theater Project	55
Without Sanctuary, Andy Warhol Museum	55

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Find a **Short Take** of the Aesthetic Perspectives framework.

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**For more on the social impacts** of Arts for Change, see Animating Democracy's [Continuum of IMPACT](#) and other resources on its [IMPACT web site](#).

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**COMPANION Guides** elaborate on possible applications of the attributes for artists, funders, evaluators, educators, and curators.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Building an equitable society is a creative act.** It channels core human capacities for creation, including vision, imagination, strategy, ingenuity, collaboration, and perseverance. When these creative dimensions are expressed in artwork that intersects with positive social change, the process of creation can be just as valuable as the finished “product.” At this intersection, one finds cultural processes and outcomes that foster social justice, civic engagement, and community development.

Arts for Change can:

- raise awareness
- challenge current circumstances
- empower individuals
- reinforce individual and/or group identity
- inspire people to action
- build communal strength and capacity for action
- critique dominant social and historical narratives
- enable people to hear and understand different perspectives
- propose new possibilities
- create a focus and/or process for the exchange of ideas and perspectives

Arts for Change is often assessed on whether it has helped to move forward the intended community, social, or civic change. However, we can also ask:

**What attributes make Arts for Change work excellent?**

**What aspects of art contribute to the overall effectiveness of such work?**



**Arts for Change—projects at the intersection of artistic creation and civic engagement, community development, and justice—often challenge the conventional terms by which the arts are described and assessed.** Common evaluative language often inadequately considers the unique qualities that make for strong Arts for Change projects. Establishing a common language around how art contributes to positive social change can foster more illuminating communication about outcomes, fuller comprehension by critics and funders, and broader appreciation of the rigor required for such work.

**To address this need, the [Evaluation Learning Lab](#)** led by Animating Democracy at Americans for the Arts, a gathering of artists and their allies, has developed a framework of aesthetic attributes, designed to enhance understanding and evaluation of Arts for Change. Driven by the conviction that artists can and should play a role in shaping the criteria by which their work is evaluated, the flexible framework has a variety of applications by artists, funding organizations, evaluators, students, educators, critics, presenters, programmers, curators, and audiences. Articulating these attributes is intended to inspire reflection, dialogue, and rich description, rather than to limit or codify standards in justice or art.

## Reclaiming "Aesthetics"

**This framework embraces and reclaims the word *aesthetics* as an essential dimension of Arts for Change work.** Aesthetics is about how creative expression stimulates our senses, moves us, and makes meaning in the world.

**All art-makers and cultural traditions engage aesthetic considerations and values, whether explicitly or implicitly.** (See sidebar, *How Art-makers and Cultural Traditions Engage Aesthetic Considerations and Values*, [PG. 8](#)) Audiences, witnesses, and participants also bring aesthetic values to their experience of artistic work.

**That said, the use of the word “aesthetics” has often been problematic.** It commonly refers to human sensory experience and the perception of what is considered beautiful or meaningful. Elements considered for their aesthetic value include color, shape, line, texture, tone, pitch, rhythm, and resonance. While such elements are generally relevant to an understanding of a diverse spectrum of artistic and cultural expressions, the systems for valuing and interpreting them may carry a history of hierarchy, ethnocentrism, and colonial dominance. In the U.S., evaluative practices—from academia to professional art criticism, to funding panels—have historically been dominated by Euro-American values, and the terms “aesthetics” and “aesthetic excellence” are often used to privilege white Eurocentric standards of beauty, while dismissing or ignoring standards relevant to different artistic and cultural practices. (See how these standards are contested in the sidebar, [PG. 7](#) )

**Moreover, an understanding of Arts for Change sometimes suffers from the assumption that artistic quality is compromised by social intent.** There is a tendency to view the “art” as incidental rather than integral to a project’s intent, leading evaluators to assume that the artistic quality may not meet rigorous standards.

These shortcomings may result in vague articulations of what it means for a work to be “creative,” “artistically significant,” or to have “high artistic merit.” Artistic quality matters, even as diverse perspectives make the assessment of excellence more challenging.

**In considering Arts for Change work, we embrace multiple attributes that expand the common view of aesthetics.** In doing so, we hope to achieve two complementary aims:

1. To emphasize the integral role of the aesthetic in civically and socially engaged art; and
2. To offer a set of criteria that supports a full understanding of Arts for Change work as art.

## Relevance in Aesthetic Values and Standards

### Mr. Moneybags

To better uphold the value of community participation that underpins much Arts for Change, it is imperative to expand ways of looking at aesthetic excellence in grassroots creative expression by nonprofessional artists. Artist and cultural organizer Alison De LaCruz reflects on the artistic quality of the play *Mr. Moneybags* presented by two New Orleans day laborer groups—one African-American and the other Latino. The groups came together with the help of local artists to improve conditions and policies for laborers working to restore New Orleans after Katrina. “Their work...epitomized the principles of ensemble theater making that I value: respect, inclusion, and a clear ensemble built over time with a set of practices and a distinct body of work.... [as well as] use of humor as a bridge to build common understanding.” Theater director Gerard Stropnicki expands upon *Mr. Moneybags* and the core values of ensemble work by proposing five others—agency, authenticity, artistry, audacity, and accuracy—that underpin transformative creative work.



#### LEARN MORE

[“Three Lenses on MicroFest: USA,” by Gerard Stropnicki, 2013.](#)

### Yaruk and Karuk Ceremonies

“Because there is a strong bias towards art-making as ‘new work’, sometimes [funding] guidelines prohibit support of strong [traditional] artistic practices, which are at the nexus of social change and art-making,” comments Lily Kharrazi, Alliance of California Traditional Arts. Speaking about the creation of regalia for a coming-of-age ceremony for young Yurok and Karuk (Native CA) girls, a creative practice that was revived after a 200-year hiatus, Ms. Kharrazi noted, “The careful use of bark cloth, handmade baskets worn as hats, shell jewelry, and other natural materials was both historic and beautifully rendered. This was a political act; a strong statement of disruption and cultural continuity...If we continue to call only for new work without seeing how expressions emanating within communities have relevance and can respond to contemporary life, I am afraid that we may be missing something very important.”



#### LEARN MORE

[The Ihuk Ceremony and Maple Bark Skirts](#)



## How Art-Makers and Cultural Traditions Engage Aesthetic Considerations and Values

by Andrea Assaf

Whether artists are working in Ballet or Tango, Butoh or Bharatanatyam, they consider aesthetic choices such as line, shape, or rhythm; however, each form or tradition might apply a different set of values to those choices. Painters, sculptors, basket weavers, and quilt makers alike consider color, texture and light; musicians and vocalists—whether performing canto jondo, opera, or jazz— might hold different values related to tone, pitch, key, resonance, or dissonance. As theatre artist and scholar Bob Leonard points out, how the elements of composition, form, etc. are put together contains value judgements. For example, some dance forms are highly choreographed or codified, while others are essentially improvisational, and within this range, there may be different relationships to terms such as “composition.” Theatre traditions of diverse cultures or performance genres might value narrative very differently, or approach storytelling with vastly different relationships to time. Some artists value realism while others value abstraction; in a social justice context, some may value literalism while others may value metaphor, some may value taking a strong point of view while others value the juxtaposition of multiple voices. **Equitable evaluation requires an understanding of projects, artists, creative practices, or cultural traditions within the framework of their own aesthetic value systems – rather than imposing a singular, predetermined, or ethnocentric value system.** To flip the script, if we judged the best ballet dancer in the world by the standards of Butoh, we might say “wow, that’s really horrible Butoh.”



"Buto - Gyohei Zaitzu - 13" by pixiduc used under CC BY / Cropped from original

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*“If we judged the best ballet dancer in the world by the standards of Butoh, we might say “wow, that’s really horrible Butoh.”*

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**Among artists and organizers focused on Arts for Change, the dialogue about aesthetics has been enduring and deep.** For instance, as part of its mission to address inequity through artistic practice, Alternate ROOTS has conducted a sustained inquiry into the concept of aesthetics. While some participants have acknowledged the oppressive use of the term, most have advocated reclaiming the concept of aesthetics to take control of conversations that have historically excluded minority and other oppressed cultures. In redefining the terms, Alternate ROOTS has proposed the following language written by Bob Leonard, which offers one useful example of a working definition:

*Aesthetics is an inquiry into how artists, in their products and processes, utilize sensory and emotional stimulation and experience to find and express meaning and orientation in the world and to deepen relationships amongst artists and their partners across differences.*

## Defining the Attributes

**The artists, evaluators, and allied funders participating in the Evaluation Learning Lab defined a set of 11 aesthetic attributes**, encompassing both qualities and values, which enrich the conception, discussion, and assessment of all types of Arts for Change. They will no doubt evolve with the benefit of field discussion and application! Some points about them:

- Identification of these attributes is not meant to imply that Arts for Change requires an entirely distinct set of criteria, nor that conventional aesthetic attributes are irrelevant to an understanding of such work. Rather, augmenting the standard vocabulary of aesthetics with attributes of relevance to social change will afford deeper understanding and more equitable assessment of such work.
- Some of these attributes are particular to Arts for Change, while others apply more generally to all kinds of creative work, but take on a unique emphasis when applied to art in social and justice contexts.
- In combination with ethical or practice-based values of accountability, confidentiality, equity, trust, and respect, the attributes offer a rich set of criteria for what constitutes rigor in the distinctive practices of Arts for Change.

# The Aesthetic Attributes



**Commitment** - Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.



**Risk-taking** - The creative work assumes risk by subverting dominant norms, values, narratives, standards, or aesthetics.



**Communal Meaning** - The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.



**Openness** - The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.



**Disruption** - Art challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action.



**Resourcefulness** - Imaginative use of available resources drives artistic innovation and demonstrates responsible social and environmental practice.



**Cultural Integrity** - The creative work demonstrates integrity and ethical use of material with specific cultural origins and context.



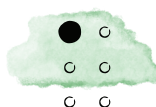
**Coherence** - Strong ideas expressed with clarity advance both artistic and social purposes.



**Emotional Experience** - Arts for Change facilitates a productive movement between “heart space”—the emotional experience that art evokes—and the “head space” of civic or social issues.



**Stickiness** - The creative work achieves sustained resonance, impact, or value.



**Sensory Experience** - Vivid sensations deepen the experience of the creative work and heighten the power of its messages and the potential for change.



These aesthetic attributes are described in detail in the section, Aesthetic Attributes Framework.

**The attributes are not meant to codify or to limit.** At the same time, we acknowledge the paradox: the very act of articulating and disseminating this framework may recreate the existing problem of defining standards in a new way. Rather than being considered as a set of criteria to be strictly followed or terms to adopt as the new buzzwords, we encourage their use as a guide for individuals and institutions in setting their own terms.

## Concluding Thoughts

Important considerations to keep in mind when drawing upon the attributes in this framework:

**The aesthetics of social justice artwork can be understood as plural and diverse.** No single aesthetic is appropriate to such work. In a diverse society, multiple aesthetics co-exist and ideally function in cultural dialogue.

**Aesthetic considerations are relevant across the process/product continuum.** Artists with community-engaged practices often defy the conventional distinction between process and product, sometimes by opening up their practices to participation, collaboration, and dialogue in ways that can constitute meaningful outcomes on their own.


**Art allows for ambiguity, contradiction, and the coexistence of opposites. The same applies to aesthetic considerations.** Ambiguity, contradiction, and co-existence are essentials for a tolerant democratic society. Art can help us live with the ambiguities and contradictions of our world; it can show us how each thing contains its opposite. For this reason, none of these attributes should be understood as negating a contrasting value.

# 2. AESTHETIC ATTRIBUTES FRAMEWORK

This section describes 11 attributes that can be observed in socially engaged work in all artistic disciplines. Equally relevant to artistic processes and outcomes, the attributes encompass both the external qualities and underlying values of such work. They address the potency of creative expression to embody and motivate change. They are designed to inspire reflection, dialogue, and rich description through a variety of applications by artists, funding organizations, evaluators, students, educators, critics, presenters, programmers, curators, and audiences.

Each of these aesthetic attributes is presented with a pointed description and reflective questions designed to help users apply the concept to specific work and contexts. Questions may guide certain stages of work or related activities, e.g. project or program planning, assessing proposed or completed work, critical or reflective writing, creating interpretive material, etc.

## Quick links to Attributes:

-  [Commitment](#)
-  [Risk-taking](#)
-  [Communal Meaning](#)
-  [Openness](#)
-  [Disruption](#)
-  [Resourcefulness](#)
-  [Cultural Integrity](#)
-  [Coherence](#)
-  [Emotional Experience](#)
-  [Stickiness](#)
-  [Sensory Experience](#)

## The Aesthetic Perspectives framework is best thought of as...

A pallet of possibilities	rather than	a checklist of requirements
A guide for description	rather than	a scorecard
Inspiration for shaping programs, projects and guidelines	rather than	a prescription of required elements
A tool to guide inquiry	rather than	a definer of success or failure
A spectrum or continuum	rather than	a hierarchical ranking system



# Uses for This Framework

We encourage consideration of these aesthetic attributes to guide planning, reflection, and assessment of artistic work with social justice intentions. We hope that different practitioners can draw upon and adapt aspects of the framework in varied ways:

## Artists

To spark creative ideas, set priorities in planning, frame artistic intent, describe work, aid self-assessment, and enhance dialogue with communities, partners, and supporters.

**Written by Mark Valdez**

[ARTISTS COMPANION >>](#)

## Evaluators

To provide a set of questions that help define program purposes and guide assessment of aesthetics in arts and social justice work.

**Written by Susannah Laramée Kidd**

[EVALUATORS COMPANION >>](#)

## Funders

To frame program mission, design application materials, guide processes for proposal review including panelist guidelines, and evaluate grantee outcomes.

**Written by M. Christine Dwyer**

[FUNDERS COMPANION >>](#)

## Educators

To guide written analysis, shape curriculums, focus areas of study, and expand how students think about art early in their careers. **Written by Bob Leonard**

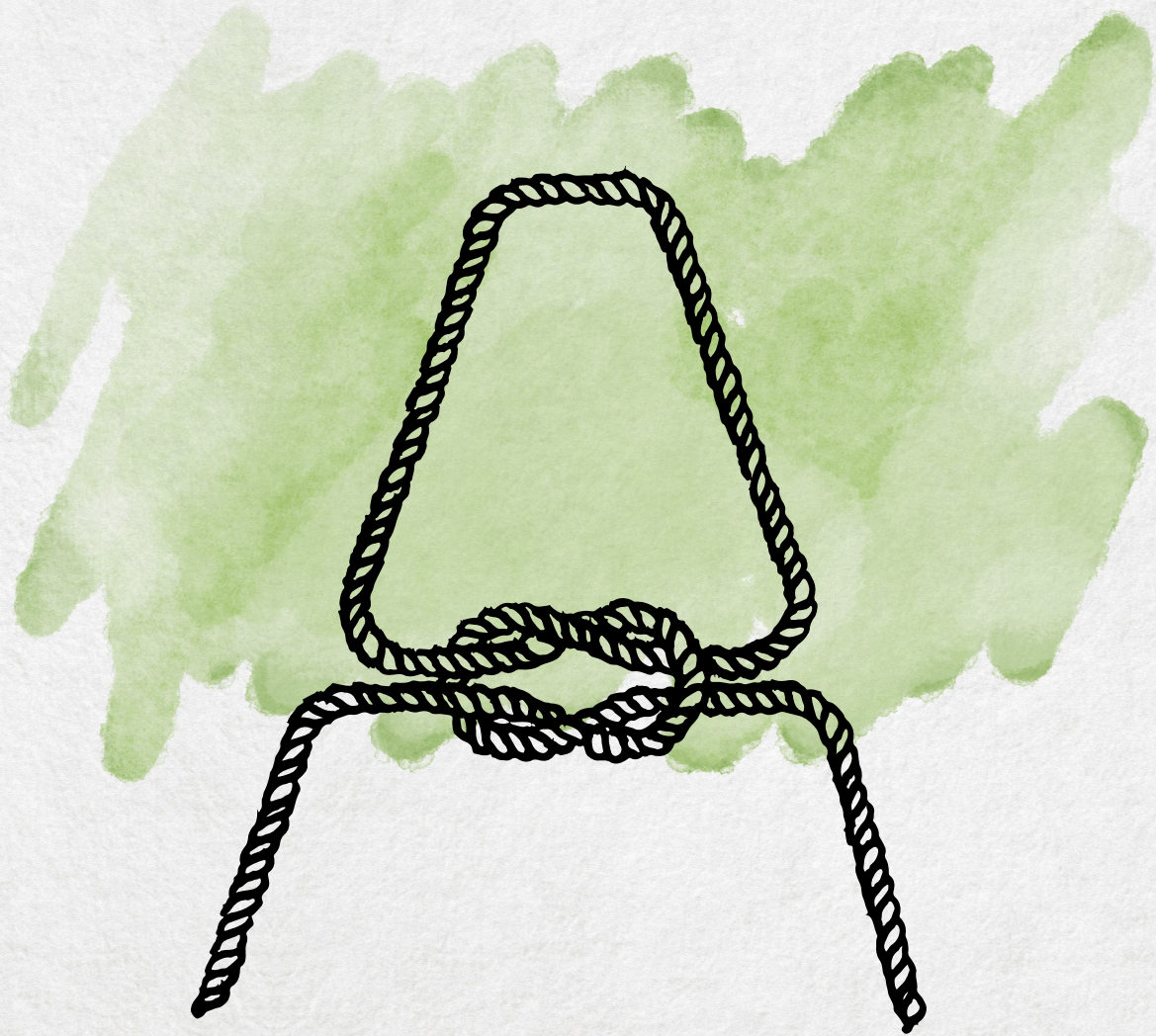
[EDUCATORS COMPANION >>](#)

## Curators

To evaluate the aesthetics of an exhibition or project, inform the development of interpretive materials and dialogue activities, and communicate the aesthetic dimensions in Arts for Change work.

**Written by Sara Reisman**

[CURATORS COMPANION >>](#)

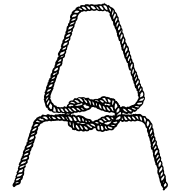


COMMITMENT

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# COMMITMENT



*Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.*

IN ARTS FOR CHANGE the commitment to civic or social change is paramount and is supported by knowledge and intention. An artistic project can demonstrate commitment in many ways through the making of the work, its content, and its presentation. Creative practices demonstrate commitment by valuing community, engaging in a long-term process, and showing accountability for how the creative work contributes to change. Artists demonstrate commitment by considering who helps to make aesthetic choices and how and whether their work supports community participants' aesthetics, their own aesthetics, or both. Commitment reflects rigor, consistency, and sustained dedication that reaches beyond the qualities of passion and aspiration. [MEDEA PROJECT | RECLAMATION PROJECT PG. 37](#)

## Consider:

- **What is evidence** of the commitment to civic engagement, community change, or justice? To what extent is that commitment a clear underpinning of the creative work?
- **How strong** is the commitment to engaging the artistic or expressive interests of community partners and intended participants?
- **In what ways** does the artist demonstrate commitment to stakeholder input in defining the purpose of creative work as well as social outcomes?
- **To what extent** does the work draw on the core strengths of artists, partners, and participants?
- **How committed** are partners to engaging artists at an early stage, to allow for maximum value?
- **How have** the artists and community partners enacted a plan for sustained commitment or depth of impact? [NEW RIVER VALLEY PG. 38](#)

## Related to commitment in the artist's work:

- **How does** the work reveal a connection to the artist's earlier work, or represent an intentional departure from what the artist has done in the past?
- **How does** the work reveal its connection to artistic movements or traditions and draw meaning or impact from that connection?
- **Does the work** take the artist to a new place in his/her development? If so, how does the artist describe the relationship of the new work to past work?



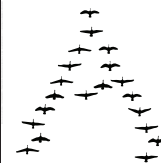


COMMUNAL MEANING

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# COMMUNAL MEANING

*The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.*

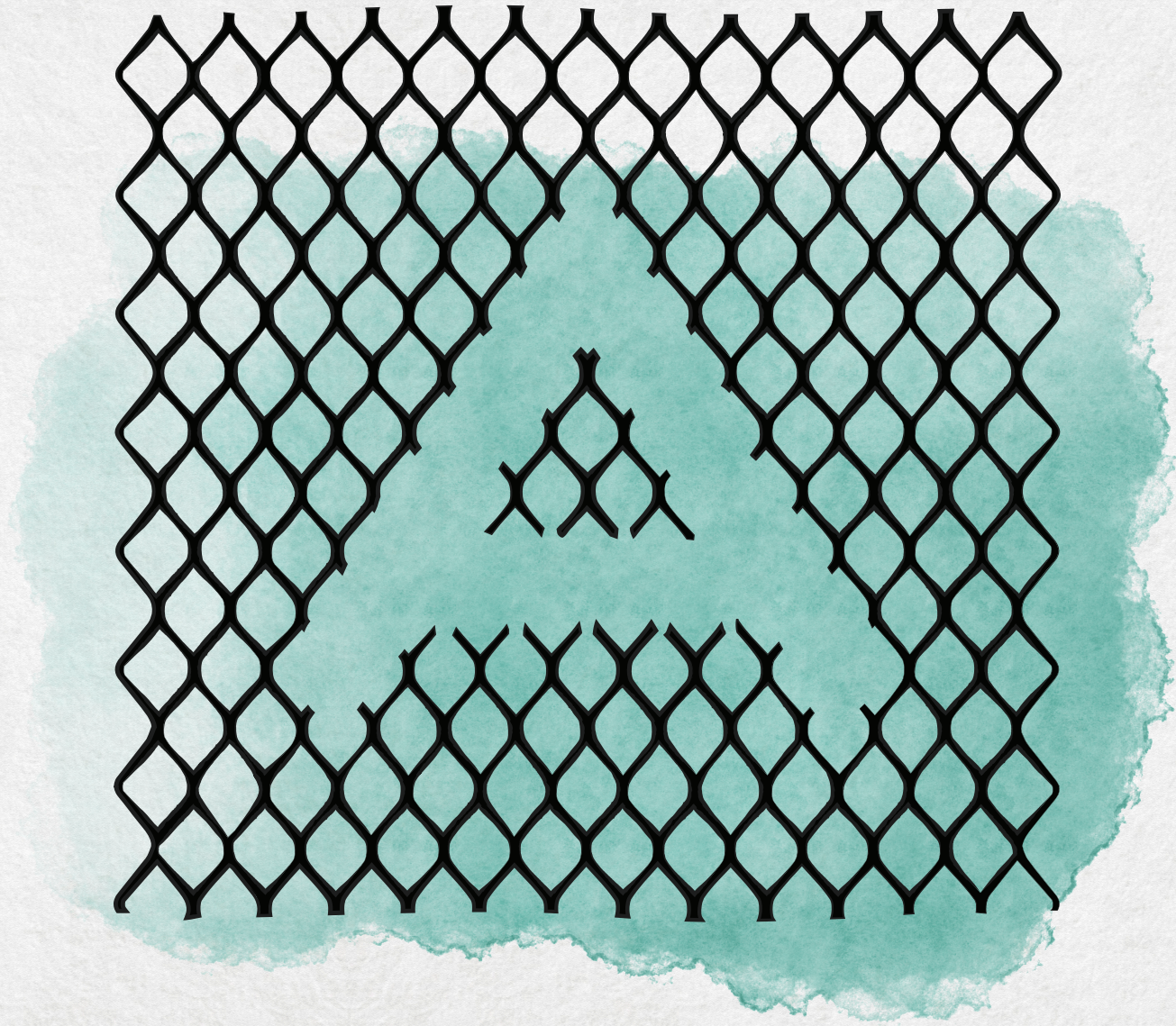


ARTS FOR CHANGE values individual experience but delivers an experience of shared significance. Communal meaning may be derived from reinterpretation of a well-known, even canonical work, or from collaboration between artist and community members, or through engagement around an individual artist's own creative work. Creative choices such as the use of story or abstraction can open space for differing interpretations, and even disagreement, as well as finding common ground. By affording participants an active voice in defining the work's social or civic purpose, making aesthetic choices, its interpretation, and in assessing its artistic and social impact, artists can help achieve communal meaning. [HIGHER GROUND | PG. 39](#)

## Consider:

- **In what ways** does the work reflect purposeful relationship among stakeholders and participants?
- **How does** the creative work or process afford participants access to collective expression, engagement, and/or reflection?
- **Does the work** elicit the stories, images, and perspectives of multiple individuals or stakeholders and provide them with opportunities to discuss and make sense of them collectively?
- **How is** the work relevant to the community, location, or context?
- **How does** the work enhance people's ability to see intersections and make connections? (e.g. through dialogue, interaction, or interpretive information)
- **How might** aesthetic choices support or inadvertently undermine engagement or dialogue?
- **How has** complexity been embraced?



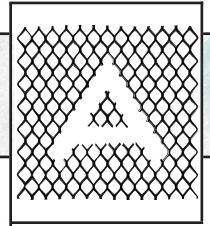


DISRUPTION

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# DISRUPTION



*Art challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action.*

DISRUPTION RELATES to both form and content. In terms of content, creative work can disrupt norms of who gets to tell the story or who has access to self-expression; status quo positions of law, policy, or social interaction; dominant stories; and power structures. In terms of form and delivery, a work can disrupt artistic conventions of its genre, standards of what is considered beautiful or pleasing, or the ways that the art encounters its audience. Effective disruption is mindful and intentional. It can propose positive alternatives to dysfunctional conditions and coexist in a meaningful way with constructive stability and continuity.

## Consider:

- **What is the point** of the creative disruption? In disrupting, does the work offer alternatives to current conditions?
- **How does** the work reveal stories or images previously untold or unseen in a way that can shift public/audience perception?
- **Does the work** or creative process offer a shift in power dynamics?
- **In what ways** does the work break away from established practices, either social or artistic? Or does it disrupt dominant systems by supporting traditional expressions that are important for particular stakeholders and that typically are not supported?
- **How does the creative work** cause people to question or consider their own beliefs, assumptions, or values? [THE GRILL PROJECT PG. 40](#)
- **How does** the work afford artists or participants new forms of expression? In what ways does it offer new ways of thinking about form or medium, particularly in relationship to the content? [GASLAND PG. 41](#)
- **How could** the work influence new directions for artistic practice or social action?



CULTURAL INTEGRITY

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# CULTURAL INTEGRITY



*The creative work demonstrates integrity and ethical use of material with specific cultural origins and context.*

IF THE GOAL IS JUSTICE, then truth, authenticity, and integrity are inherently important in the creative work. Meaningful aesthetic choices in Arts for Change respond to lived, historic, and cultural realities. Integrity as an aesthetic characteristic can be observed in: 1) the background and connections of artists and partners to the cultural context, issue/topic, traditions, community, population, and/or place that is the focus of the work; 2) the way a work of art is conceived and developed; 3) awareness and understanding of cultural values and forms (cultural competence); and 4) in the way the work involves and is experienced by stakeholders.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER WALK PG. 42

## Consider:

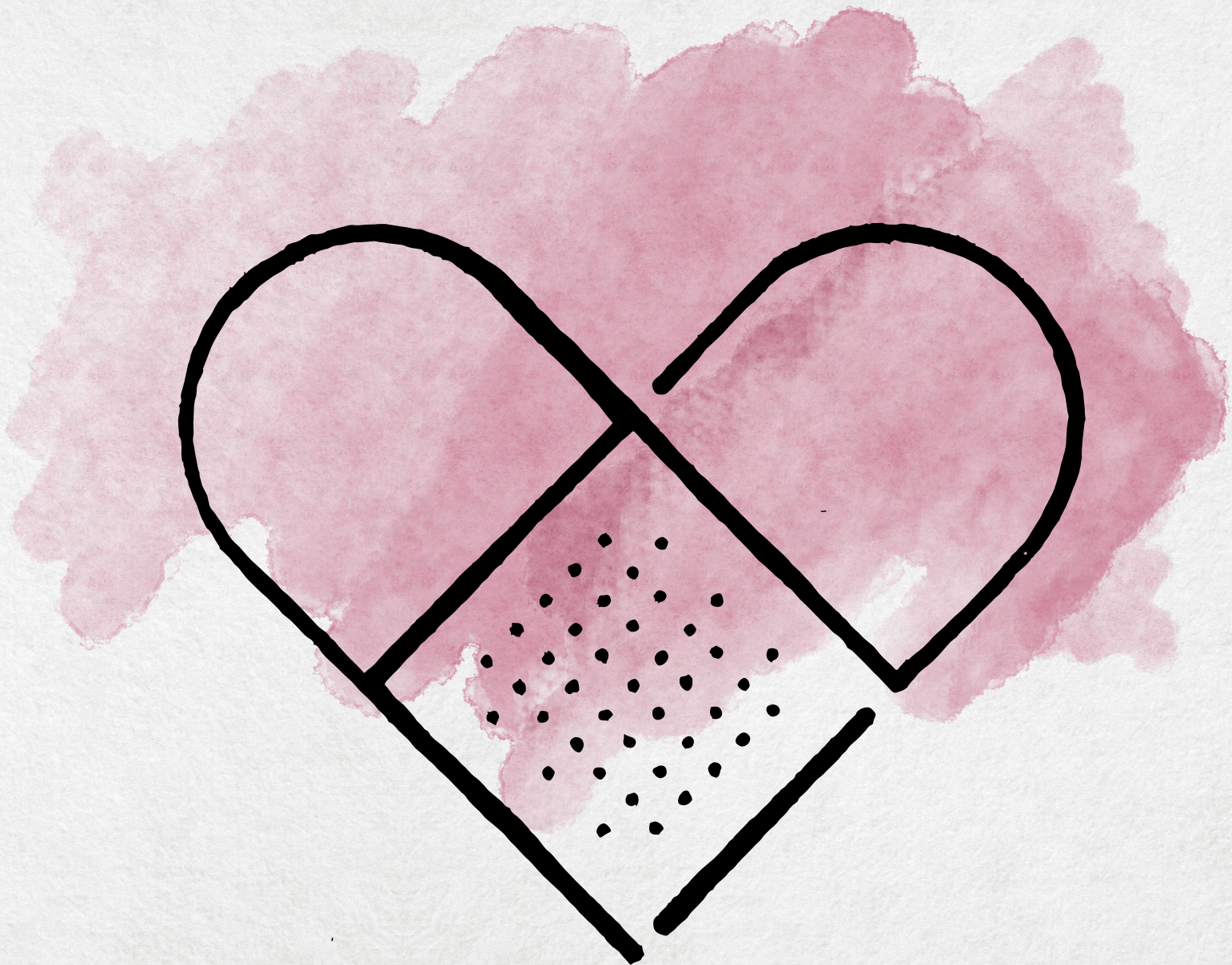
- **How have the artists** and stakeholders explored the relationships of power, privilege, and cultural context within the process of making the work?
- **How have the artists** and stakeholders explored questions of credibility, authenticity, and integrity? How does the work reflect enduring commitment to the community, practice, situation, locale, or issue/topic? KING KAMEHAMEHA PG. 43
- **How do the** people affected by the work have agency to act on their own behalf?
- **Is the work** factually accurate where such accuracy is called for?
- **Have the artists** and stakeholders considered what they may be taking away and what they can leave behind that is meaningful in a cultural context?

RELATED TO CULTURAL INTEGRITY is the serious issue of cultural appropriation, or the use of cultural forms, content, processes, and stylistic elements by person(s) from outside the cultural contexts in which they originate. In egregious instances, artists and promoters with access to privilege have profited from the use of appropriations while those at the source of the material continued to struggle in obscurity, with lineage and ownership of cultural property left uncredited and uncompensated. Ethical practice is governed by an awareness of historical and contemporary inequities and practices of respect, remuneration, and reciprocity.

## Consider:

- **How are** the artist(s) connected to the community that is the focus of the work? What history and relationship does the artist have with the knowledge, traditions, and practices they are engaging in? What is the artist's cultural relationship to the aesthetics and techniques of the project? OSKAR LY PG. 44
- **If the artist(s)** are not of the community or culture in which the work is rooted, how are they dealing with questions of privilege or potential for appropriation?
- **How have** members of the community/ population/locality been engaged in meaningful ways in the development and/or presentation of work? How has that engagement been expressed?



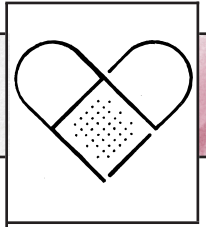


EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

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# EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

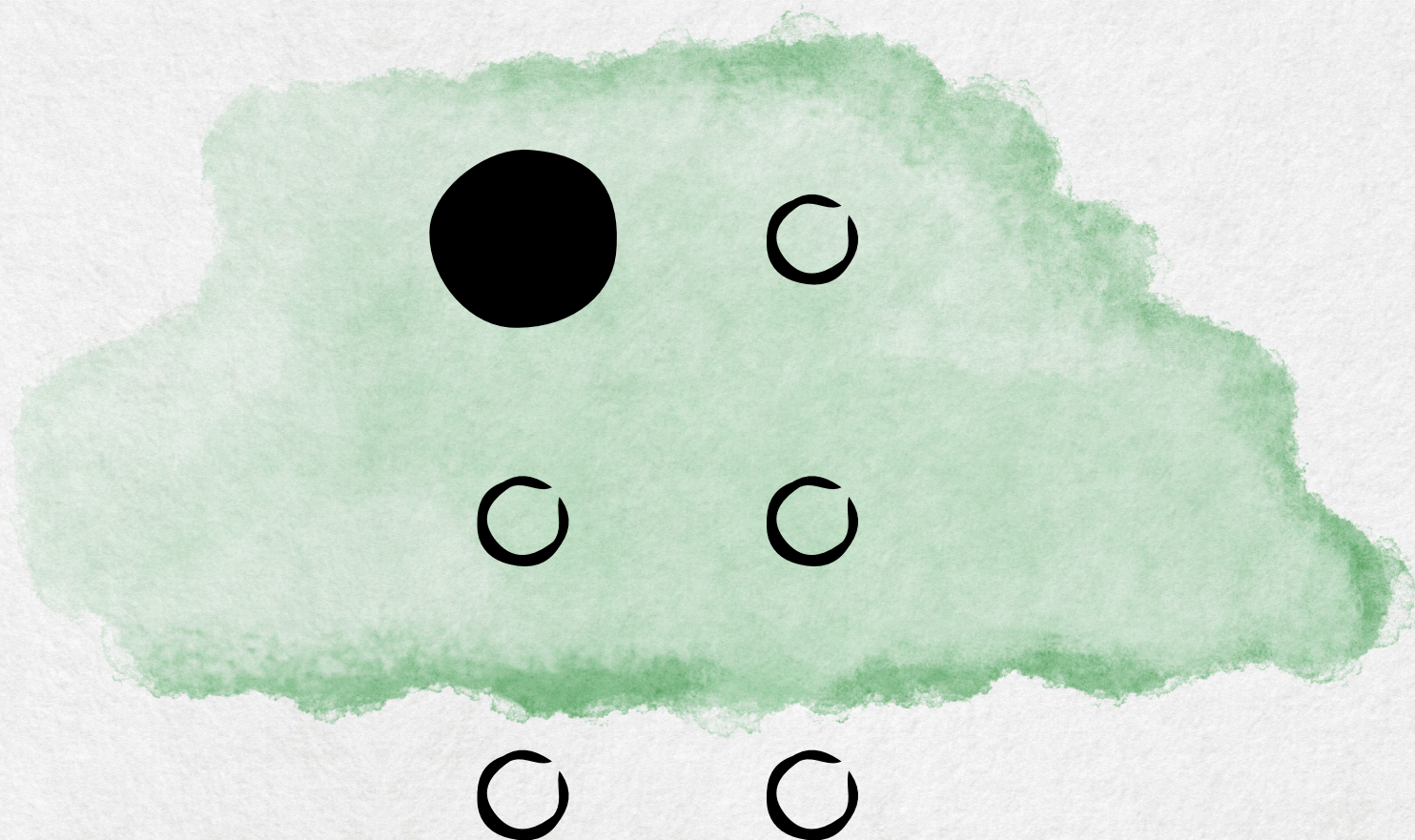


*Arts for Change facilitates a productive movement between "heart space"—the emotional experience that art evokes—and the "head space" of civic or social issues.*

A UNIQUE CAPACITY of art is to evoke strong emotions that range from joy and wonder to ambivalence and alienation. Art and culture may evoke diverse emotions or spiritual nourishment from participants depending on context and the perspectives they bring to it. It may surface deep-seated emotions based on experience, memory, or unresolved conflict. Where stakes are high, art may validate feelings of anger, sadness, or fear and allow emotion to exist in public space. The consequences of arousing emotion may be positive, such as increased empathy, a deeper understanding of the toll certain issues take on people, and building bonds that encourage dialogue and healing; or they may reinforce negative attitudes or dominant power structures. Responsible Arts for Change may prompt strong emotions, but also helps people channel such emotions into healing or action. [ONE MILLION BONES PG. 45](#)

## Consider:

- **In what ways** does the work elicit emotional responses?
- **How does** the emotional response function in relation to the social justice or change-making focus of the work? What are the roles of such responses as empathy, feeling of belonging, anger, indignation, or sorrow to the overall intent of the work?
- **Is a responsible approach** taken to help people process or cope with the potential emotional responses that the creative work make evoke? Are partnerships in place that can support emotional response or actions during the development and/or after the work is experienced?
- **How varied or similar** are the emotional responses among audiences and participants, including those with different characteristics and experiences?
- **Did participants'** emotional response to the work move them to heightened awareness or to engage in dialogue or action? Or did the work provoke emotional responses that are in opposition to the intended change (e.g., alienation or resistance)?



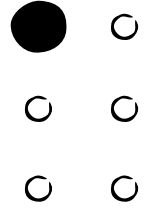
SENSORY EXPERIENCE

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# SENSORY EXPERIENCE

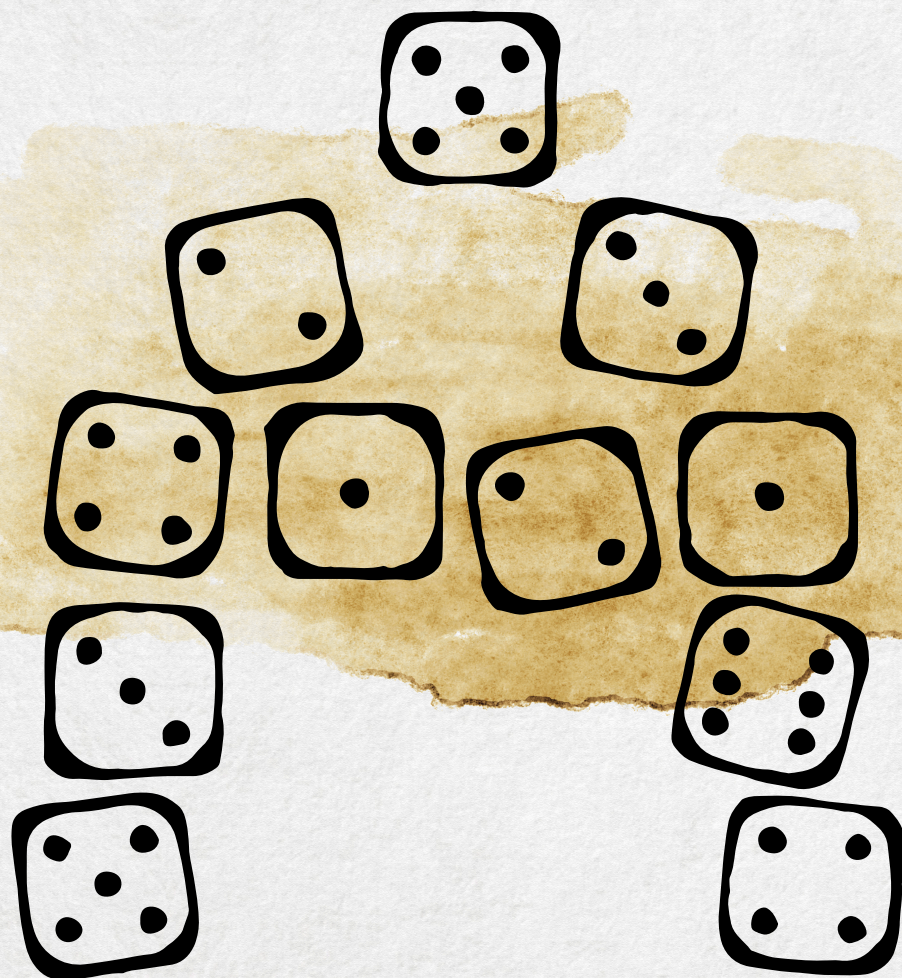
*Vivid sensations deepen the experience of the creative work and heighten the power of its messages and the potential for change.*



ARTISTS may take deliberate advantage of the senses to strengthen participant/audience experience and amplify meaning. Images, sounds, smells, and other sensory devices can act as strong triggers for memories, emotion, and notions of beauty. These can generate meaningful collective experience, but may also serve as negative triggers in certain participants or audience members, which is something for which artists may want to prepare. [BEWARE OF THE DANDELIONS PG. 46](#)

## Consider:

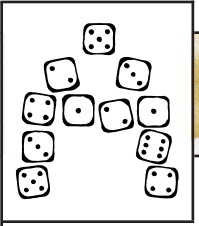
- **How does the work** highlight or challenge sensory expectations?
- **How do the sensory** responses relate to the social, civic, or justice intentions of the work?
- **How do sensory elements** affect people's experience of the creative work? Does the work elicit purposeful discomfort, the impulse to tell a story, or physical responses (movement, vocal, facial expressions, etc.)? [LA RUTA PG. 47](#)
- **How do sensory choices** engage the imaginations of audience members?
- **In what ways** are sensory experiences combined and integrated and how are they connected to the intended emotional or action-oriented responses?
- **How does** the structure or presentation of the work (such as placement of the audience relative to performers) enhance sensory experiences?



RISK-TAKING



# RISK-TAKING

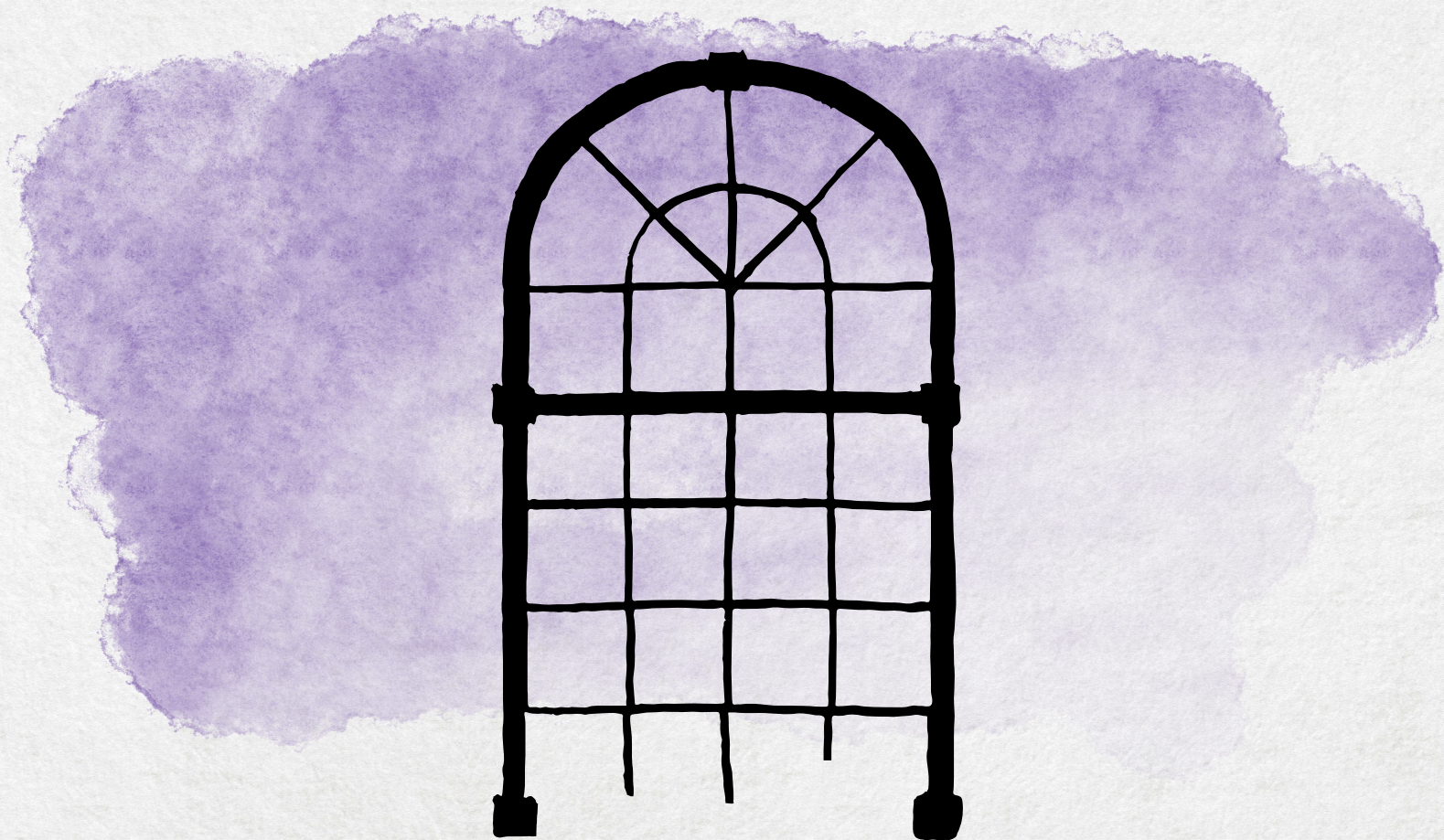


*Creative work assumes risk by subverting dominant norms, values, narratives, standards, or aesthetics.*

THE HIGH STAKES OF CHANGE and justice call for attention to risk in artmaking. Risk-taking in creation, programming, and/or connecting art with audiences may allow new possibilities to develop and often requires investment from audiences and participants. Different people involved in the same project might define risk differently or have varying levels of privilege in relation to risk. By discussing risk at the outset, artists, partners, and stakeholders can develop an understanding together of what responsible or irresponsible creative risk might look like. [WHAT'S RISKY? WHOSE RISK? PG. 48-49](#)

## Consider:

- **How does the work** take risks of form, content, medium, or the relationship among these elements?
- **In what ways** does the work experiment with new means of expression or processes for engagement?
- **What is the point** of risk-taking? In what ways does it advance a meaningful purpose or idea?
- **How and with what intent** are audience members or participants engaged in meaningful risks? Do participants/ audience have agency in decisions that might put them at risk? Does consciousness of risk inform the nature of the audience's experience?
- **To what extent** are artists and stakeholders conscious of and responsible about the creative risks of the project's process and products? Are emotional, privacy, bodily, legal risks of the work responsibly considered?
- **If the work** has risked and "failed" (by some measure) has something been gained nonetheless?

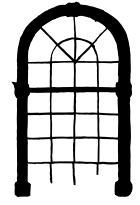


OPENNESS

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# OPENNESS

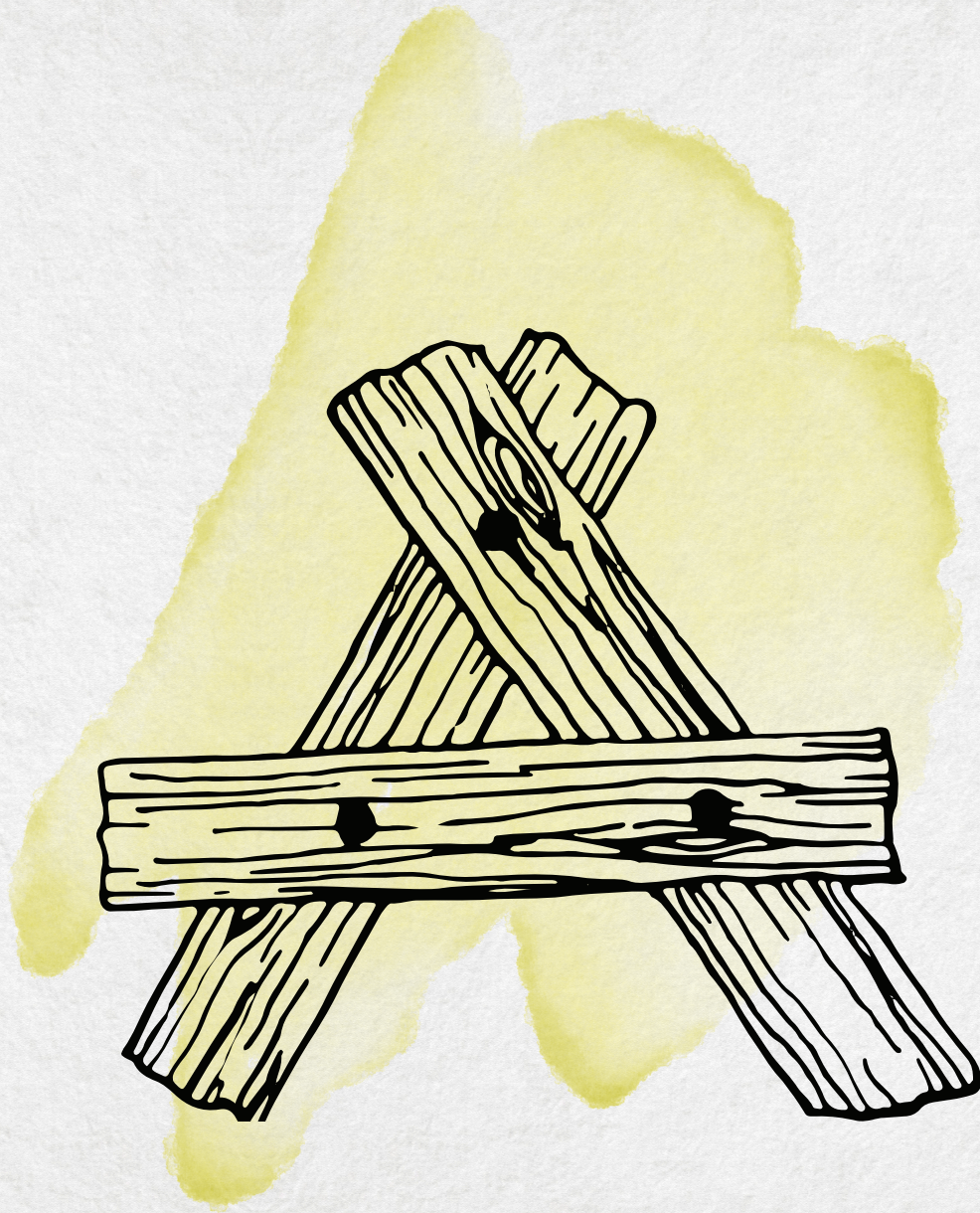


*The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.*

THE CREATIVE WORK is accessible and offers multiple entry points for people to engage in the research and development stages, artmaking, and presentation and engagement around products. There is transparency around artistic choices and ethical use of community stories or other material to help level power and build trust. Artists invite fluidity in and between process and product, allowing the creative work to change based on stakeholder exchange and input. The creative work embodies the nuances of issues, traversing between the extreme poles to allow exploration of complexity and ambiguity within opinions and attitudes.

## Consider:

- **How does the art** and its process offer multiple points of entry and/or forms of participation for people with varied expectations and aesthetic preferences?  
REFLECTIONS OF HEALING PG. 50
- **How do the artists** open their process to multiple viewpoints and show their willingness for the work to evolve based on what is learned?
- **Does the work** allow for multiple perspectives or conflicting truths, even within shared goals?
- **If the work** is designed to be adaptable to varied situations, how does it change in form or meaning with new contexts, participants, or input?
- **How does flexibility** align with the social justice intentions of the project or partners?
- **Is the development** and creative process of the work transparent to stakeholders and participants?  
MOBY DICK / DANCE EXCHANGE PG. 51
- **Is the artistic team** committed to analyzing, and possibly changing, creative choices in relation to context?

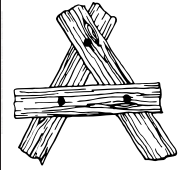


RESOURCEFULNESS

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# RESOURCEFULNESS



*Imaginative use of available resources drives artistic innovation and demonstrates responsible social and environmental practice.*

BY NATURE, social change undertakings usually make mindful use of resources; aesthetic endeavors can reflect a parallel commitment. Artists may embrace the principles of reduce/reuse/recycle, or employ materials, money, and energy in ways that maximize their possibilities. Site-specific work draws upon physical, social, and historical context to gain relevance and meaning. Resourcefulness may stem from practical considerations, but aesthetically, it can stimulate the imagination, as well as elicit a sense of pleasure or meaning through the ingenuous use of resources. [POP-UP RESOURCE VILLAGE](#) [PG. 52](#)

## Consider:

- **How does** the use of resources engage the audience's imagination and enhance their participation?
- **To what extent** is the use of resources aligned with the artists' commitment to social justice and change?
- **How does** the work demonstrate creativity in maximizing the possibilities of the human, social, financial, and physical resources available?



**Equitable distribution of resources is a justice issue in itself.** Artists and cultural organizations who have had limited access to funding resources may be scored down due to work samples that can't compare to other artists and organizations with greater access to funding resources. Likewise, limited access to resources may prohibit artists from fully realizing aesthetic visions. While resourcefulness can be a value integral to the work, it is important not to perpetuate the practice of under-resourcing artists whose work deserves equitable funding.

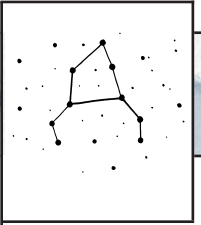




COHERENCE

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# COHERENCE



***Strong ideas expressed with clarity advance both artistic and social purposes.***

A COHERENT WORK demonstrates unity of form and purpose and shows clear relationships among its subject, values, form, and expression. Coherence may be evident in how parts of the creative work relate to the whole of the work or project, or in a powerful overall impression that the work makes. Artists may choose to work against the expectation of coherence or the supposed coherence of a dominant point of view; these too are valid choices when the work communicates effectively in relation to Arts for Change purpose and meaning.

## Consider:

- **Are artistic choices** connected to (or informed by) an overarching intent? In what ways?
- **Is there a meaningful** connection between medium and message?
- **To what extent** is there a clear artistic point of view or a clear relationship among multiple artistic perspectives?
- **Does the work** advocate a particular point of view? Or allow for multiple viewpoints in relation to its community, social, or civic intent? What are the implications? [REWIND PG. 53](#)
- **In what ways** can audiences/participants find meaning in both the parts and the whole of the work or project? [THE STATE HOSPITAL: IN MEMORIAM PG. 54](#)





STICKINESS



# STICKINESS



*The creative work achieves sustained resonance, impact, or value.*

THE CONCEPT OF STICKINESS was popularized by Malcolm Gladwell in *The Tipping Point*. He described stickiness as the qualities of a message that make it memorable. Memorable aesthetic features—a phrase, a powerful visual image, a musical hook—can become representative of larger and more complex concepts. For a long-term project or ongoing body of work, stickiness may also come from the meaning that is drawn from the overall or cumulative experience. Stickiness may raise the participants' or audience's consciousness or shift their attitudes but not necessarily motivate action.

## Consider:

- **What are** the literal or figurative marks of the work that are compelling, resonant, or striking?
- **What are** participants' takeaways from the experience and how do they connect to the social aims of the work?
- **Has the work** created word-of-mouth or buzz for its aesthetics, process choices, or social justice aims?
- **Is the creative work** part of an overall strategy addressing civic or social change that supports continued engagement on the issue?
- **How have participants** or stakeholders taken action, or stayed engaged with, the issues or justice aims of the work?

[WITHOUT SANCTUARY PG. 55](#)

[THE LARAMIE PROJECT PG. 55](#)



## **3. EXAMPLES**

PROJECTS THAT EXEMPLIFY  
ATTRIBUTES

Here are two artists whose creative work exemplifies sustained commitment to a population, issue, or place. They employ distinctive aesthetics that support their social, civic, and environmental intentions.

**Commitment to population:** Since 1989, Rhodessa Jones' theater-based Medea Project has been devoted to healing and empowering incarcerated and formerly incarcerated, as well as HIV-positive, women. Jones has worked with more than 300 women, helping many of them make a return to society. Catherine Cole describes Medea Project performances by these women as "riveting, multi-sensory experiences giving palpable evidence of the vitality of Jones's work and its deep resonance with the women who perform in it." Jones is committed to rigorous rehearsal including techniques such as rants, the "kicking dance," hand dancing, and naming of first memories that draw out the women's best performances and in a style reflecting the project's healing and empowerment goals. Cole writes, "Created in prison and presented to the public, performances use narrative, dance, and myth in a freewheeling structure orchestrated by Jones herself, who sits, even during performances at a table downstage, facing the actors, encouraging them, and talking back. She yells, 'Speak out!' or 'Move it!,' while snapping her fingers."

## LEARN MORE

[Catherine M. Cole's review of Rena Fraden's book, \*Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women\*](#)



David Wilson

**Commitment to issue:** Miami artist Xavier Cortada's local and global public art projects are committed to building awareness about environmental issues and to actual environmental problem solving. In the inaugural year of Reclamation Project, a participatory eco-art project launched on Earth Day 2006, 2,500 red mangrove seedlings were adopted by retail businesses across South Beach. Hundreds of propagules are exhibited in clear, water-filled cups where they are nurtured into seedlings and eventually planted along coastal areas. Volunteers annually collect seedlings from various Miami-Dade County locations where they would otherwise have perished and distribute them to businesses, schools, and the science museum. The sheer numbers of propagules in individual locations and collectively across the South Beach area make an aesthetic impression and are a regular reminder of the beauty and function of mangroves and the fragility of the coastline.



Xavier Cortada

## LEARN MORE

[Reclamation Project](#)

[Video: Reclamation Project](#)



In Southwest, VA, the New River Valley Planning District Commission (NRVPDC) has shown commitment to working with artists and integrating creative strategies across several regional planning efforts, based in the belief that the arts attract and sustain community participation by enhancing and deepening public planning processes. *HealthyNRV* was a collaboration involving [NRVPDC](#), [Virginia Tech's Institute for Policy & Governance](#), and [Thenmozhi Soundararajan](#), a singer, filmmaker, and grassroots media organizer. In the project, Soundararajan trained high school students to create short films to illustrate community health issues that were important to them and suggest how those challenges might be addressed in the region's future.

Among other efforts, the NRVPDC connected with Sojourn Theatre, which works at the intersection of art and civic concerns, to adapt [Sojourn's board game, BUILT](#), for a rural setting in order to stoke community conversation and collect qualitative data around citizens' planning priorities in Southwest Virginia.



In Harlan County, KY, for more than a dozen years, a community arts initiative called Higher Ground has used story gathering and theater to create open forums for residents to make sense of important issues facing the county. During the run of the first Higher Ground play, participant Theresa Osborne related the story of how suppressed conversations about prescription drug abuse opened up and gained new meaning in just one theater session.

“On the first day of rehearsals, Jerry Stropnick, the director, asked those whose immediate family had been affected to gather in the middle of the performance space. Then, he asked those whose extended family had been affected to form a ring around that circle. Then, those with friends or acquaintances that had been affected formed a second ring. Out of about 70 people there that day, only three or four remained in the original crowd.” Theater created a safe and collective space for common ground to be revealed. Drug abuse was no longer a taboo discussed only privately among families and in newspaper arrest reporting; it was the topic of a community conversation about what to do to confront the problem together.

Higher Ground's Facebook page describes the impact of community-based theater practice on communal meaning: “The project has expanded our ability to reflect and plan, and to apply what we have learned in the creative arena to other aspects of community life. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of us have changed what we think of as possible.”

*Theater created a safe and collective space for common ground to be revealed.*



## LEARN MORE

[Video: Higher Ground](#)

[Mark W. Kidd, "MicroFest: Democratic Arts in Appalachia's Coal Country"](#)

**The Grill Project, a project of the Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI) in Boston, is an example of creative form and process working to disrupt social norms.** Lori Lobenstine of DS4SI writes: “When DS4SI works with artists, we gain access to a way of seeing and playing with how people, communities, and cultures use symbols to make collective meaning. For example, in urban youth culture, the ‘grill,’ a subtly confrontational look one gives to another, can instigate violence. Understanding this aspect of social life makes it possible to work within it as a point of leverage for social change. The ‘grill’ caught our attention because it operated on both the symbolic level (epitomizing a system where violence could start over nothing more than ‘he looked at me wrong’) and also as a literal act that we could point to, play with, and make strange. Working with Artist-in-Residence Judith Leemann, we used both humor and surprise to interfere surreptitiously with the grill’s power to demand hostility. At a barbecue with 70 teens, our interns facilitated a grill game that demanded participants not smile when grilled. Though the players had probably never had the urge to smile when grilled, suddenly it was almost irresistible. For their second intervention, they went out into the streets of their neighborhoods and asked teens to give them their ‘best grill,’ as they posed holding a life-size Polaroid frame. We left participants to make their own sense of the point being made, wondering if perhaps the next time they were grilled their hostility might get sidetracked admiring a good grill or just thinking of our strange intervention.”



### **LEARN MORE**

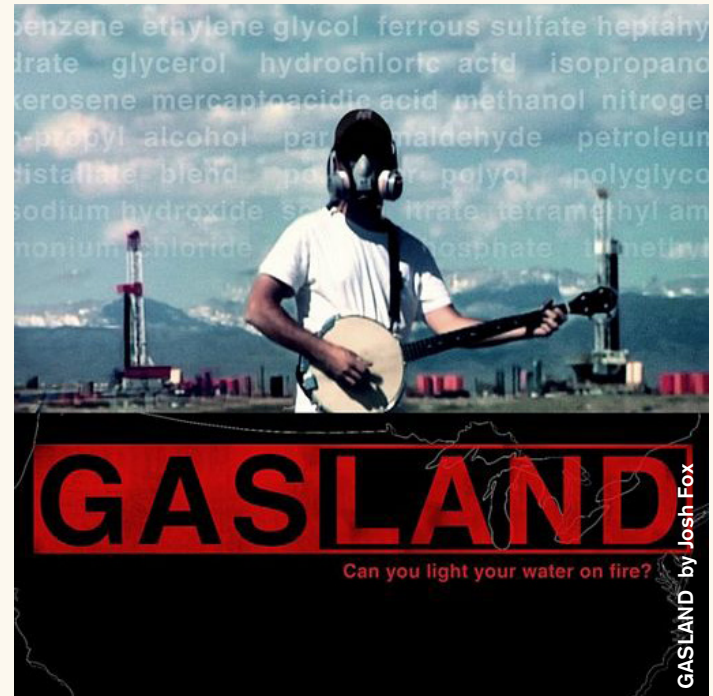
[Social/Justice/Practice: Exploring the Role of Artists in Creating a More Just and Social Public by Lori Lobenstine](#)

**GASLAND**, Josh Fox's 2010 film exposé about the dangers of hydraulic fracking, disrupts the staid stylistic conventions of much social documentary filmmaking to achieve what *Cinemascope* described as "a work of art which also happens to educate quite effectively." Fox had no intention of making a film until he received a letter from a natural gas company inquiring about a land lease on his rural Pennsylvania property, and he fired up his video camera as a tool for a running diary. His cross-country odyssey uncovered a trail of secrets, lies, and contamination described on the film's web site as "part vérité travelogue, part exposé, part mystery, part bluegrass banjo meltdown, part showdown." *Cinemascope* attributed the film's success as much to its strong focus on aesthetic interests as to its documentary intent. Other sources point to the filmmaker's use of dark humor to engage and provide relief from the serious and pressing subject. The film's "unrelenting and unflinching storytelling" enhances a sense of urgency, as do "unapologetically rough and handmade" production qualities, quite opposite the slick production values of most documentaries that aim to be taken seriously. *GASLAND* was nominated for a 2010 Academy Award.

## **LEARN MORE**

[Video: GASLAND](#)

[Cinemascope](#)





Mississippi River Water Walk was a project envisioned and led by Native American elder Sharon Day (Ojibwe), executive director of the Indigenous People's Task Force in Minneapolis. In 2013, she and a group of Ojibwe women walked the length of the Mississippi River, from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, as a "ceremony" to heal the water and raise awareness about pollution. The 2,320-mile walk included songs, rituals, and the portage of a pail of fresh water from the headwaters that Day poured back into mouth of the river, "to remind the Mississippi that it was once clean and pure."

**Cultural Integrity can be observed as an aesthetic characteristic of this project in multiple ways:**

- 1) The cultural background of the lead artist is Ojibwe,** and she has a demonstrated history of studying and practicing Ojibwe forms, as well as a long-term commitment to Native and indigenous communities in Minnesota.
- 2) The aesthetic elements draw from Ojibwe traditions,** such as songs, ritual, and regalia integrated into the conceptual project of carrying water from the river's own headwaters to its mouth as an enactment of purification.
- 3) As a participatory project, it involved the direct experience of stakeholders who live along the Mississippi, both indigenous and non-Native,** by inviting women and allies to walk, sing, and join in ceremony, from March to early May.



### **LEARN MORE**

"Ojibwe Water Walker Prays for Health of Mississippi River," by Jessica Conrad in Commons Magazine



Glenn Wharton



Glenn Wharton

**The King Kamehameha statue restoration project in Hawai'i effectively weighed a local community's unorthodox care practices against the conservation field's aesthetic standards.** In a rural region of the island of Hawai'i, residents and conservator Glenn Wharton were faced with the much needed conservation of a statue of King Kamehameha I, the revered indigenous unifier of the Hawai'ian islands and native son of the Big Island. Should the statue be restored to the artist's 1878 gilded bronze, or should it be re-painted in life-like colors, thereby continuing a longstanding community tradition? For many, this decision took on greater significance as they looked back to the island's history of lost cultural heritage and ahead to development that could threaten other important heritage sites. From Wharton's perspective, it was rare to find a community so emotionally connected to its past through a work of art. Conscious of the conservation field's ethical standard to restore as closely as possible to the artist's intention, Wharton was conflicted, but believed the people of Kohala should be involved in the decision. Recognizing the need for

a sensitive partner, he sought local advice from The Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education (HAAE) which formed a team of local leaders to help engage people with the restoration question and to determine how best to make the decision. They invested in deepening Wharton's understanding of place, culture, and issues. With Wharton, who exercised deep listening and genuine openness, they developed a new approach to participatory conservation that ultimately empowered the community to decide to continue painting the statue, honoring the community's aesthetic.

### **LEARN MORE**

"The Kamehameha I Statue Conservation Project Case Study," by Pam Korza, 2005

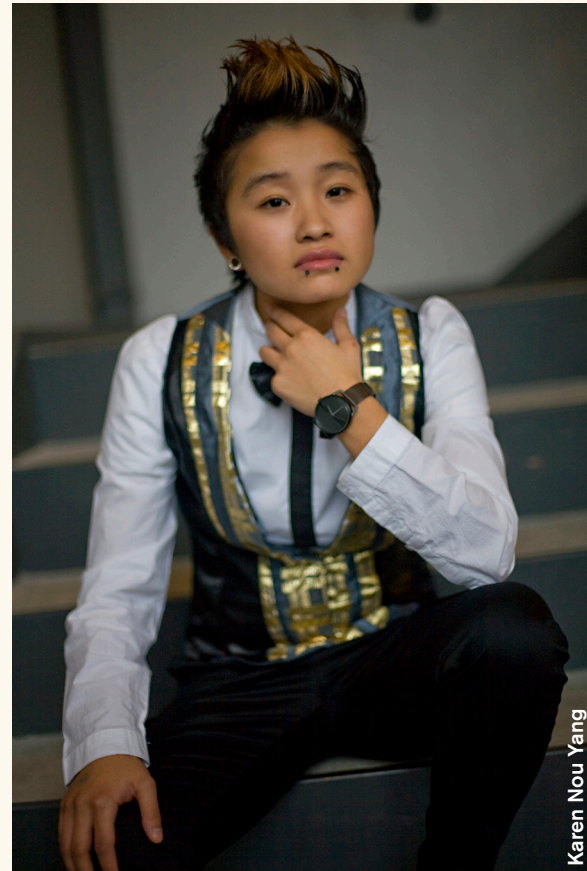
The Painted King: Art, Activism, and Authenticity in Hawai'i, Glenn Wharton, 2012



Artists who are of a culture may interpret their culture's traditional forms for new contexts, making a contribution to social change through the combination of old and new forms. Minneapolis-based artist, Oskar Ly uses her location in the Hmong and queer communities to reinterpret traditional cultural clothing. She has created a collection called Little Black Shh, an exploration of gender expression through traditional Hmong clothing. One outfit offered a fashion choice to a woman uncomfortable wearing a dress or skirt, providing pants and a traditional Hmong man's vest fitted to her. Ly explains that designing clothing is "not just about vanity but is an act of resistance against outsiders who appropriate or erase our narratives," such as companies that borrow from cultures without accurately crediting or compensating originating cultural communities. Within Ly's clothing line, Os.Couture, one project links Southeast Asian source creators with U.S. designers to learn from each other and to create new narratives. "My work is about preserving, yet re-interpreting Hmong arts and culture through fashion, words, and song while navigating a life of assimilation and reappropriation."



Karen Nou Yang



Karen Nou Yang

## LEARN MORE

[Video: 2016 Grantmakers in the Arts conference Idea Lab](#)

["Saint Paul Artist Oskar Ly: An Organizer and Ambassador for Hmong Arts," by Nicole Rupersburg, The Line](#)



**One Million Bones** used the power of visual language, artmaking, and ceremony to elicit emotional reactions regarding the issue of ongoing genocides in places like Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Burma. Over three years, artist Naomi Natale collected 1,000,000 handcrafted bones made by artists, activists and students through a partnership with Students Rebuild for a three-day installation event on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., June 8-10, 2013. The bone laying ceremony and installation served as a site of conscience to honor victims and survivors of genocide. It served as a visual petition against ongoing conflicts and a resounding call for action.

The act of making the bones in community and school-based workshops provided a tactile and visceral connection to the issue for thousands of people. The scale of the final installation, siting the work at such locations as the National Mall and Congo Square in New Orleans, and the act of laying bones in communion with other people proved intensely moving to a broad public. "Most of us will never view a mass grave. Most of us will never understand what a pile of human bones looks or sounds or smells like," Natale said. The idea of recreating a mass grave struck me as a way to express the gravity of this issue to a multitude of people." The project reached over 150,000 students, educators, artists, activists, and community members from thousands of schools and organizations in all fifty states and thirty countries.

## **LEARN MORE**

[Video: One Million Bones](#)



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*"When we make something with our hands, it changes the way we feel, which changes the way we think, which changes the way we act."*

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**CARL WILKENS, THE ONLY AMERICAN TO REMAIN IN RWANDA DURING THE 1994 GENOCIDE**

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**Beware of the Dandelions, a project by the Detroit-based artist collective, Complex Movements, is an immersive sensory installation that explores the relationship between art, science, and social justice movements.** It draws upon the ideas of lifelong activist Grace Lee Boggs about decentralized, community-led social justice movements. As audience members move through the installation, they encounter interactive hip-hop performance, video projections, and other visual/audio technologies. They are provoked to physically and vocally feed their own concepts into improvised sections that support the premise that change occurs through critical connections rather than critical mass.

Jeff Chang's HowlRound article offers a thick description of Dandelion's sensory experience of "warm, resonant sound perfectly suited for the hip-hop and techno-driven score performed live...and 360-degree screens to capture evocative digital visuals." Chang describes how aesthetic choices in formats of narrative, concert, visual installation, architectural piece, and convening space combine to achieve layers of meaning drawn from complex social movements and scientific emergence theory. Chang's piece also alludes to aesthetic attributes of coherence, commitment, disruption, and cultural integrity.



Doug Coombe

### LEARN MORE

[Video: Beware of the Dandelions](#)

["Complex Movements' Beware of the Dandelions," by Jeff Chang, HowlRound](#)

**La Ruta is an immersive, sensory, site-specific theater experience depicting the last leg of an odyssey in which immigrants are smuggled into Texas from Mexico.** Created by Ed Cardona and produced by Working Theater, it is staged first in a tent, representing a safe house, then in an actual 48-foot tractor-trailer. The show turns audience members into border crossers themselves, forced to endure the indignity and the stifling distress of an uncertain passage. Inside the trailer the theatergoers — limited to about 30 — sit on cardboard boxes stacked along the walls, between the truck's cab, where the driver and lead smuggler sit, and a compartment in the rear, where contraband of all sorts is hidden. A sound-scape of the engine's rumble and the whine of brakes at a checkpoint, and visual effects, such as headlights, add to the physical sensations. By forcing feelings of dread, menace, and claustrophobia, the play promotes empathy and conveys that “each person vilified as a lawbreaker is, most often, merely frantic enough to risk everything for a better life.” (Description drawn from a review in *The New York Times*.)

Andrew Burton for *The New York Times*

Lia Chang

## LEARN MORE

["Smuggling a Captive Audience Across a Border," by Daniel M. Gold, The New York Times](#)



## Participant Risk

The Carpetbag Theatre's play, *Speed Killed My Cousin*, is the story of an African-American woman soldier who returns from Iraq with Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) and battles the impulse to commit suicide as she wrestles with Moral Injury. As described by Dr. Lynne A. Santiago (LMHC), formerly with the Veterans Administration Suicide Prevention Program, audience members are given "a rare opportunity to sit close with the soldier's struggles, close enough to actually feel her inner turmoil."

**Because of the potential for the play to trigger emotional and even PTS responses among audience members, Carpetbag's Executive/Artistic Director and playwright Linda Parris-Bailey, with Director Andrea Assaf, work closely with veteran service agencies to understand triggers and potential risks for veterans and their families.** In the development of the play, they conducted Story Circles with and developed workshops for veterans in recovery in partnership with V.A. therapists and social workers. In curtain speeches and post-performance dialogues, they encourage people to participate in breathing exercises, take a break during difficult scenes if needed. They use sensitive techniques in facilitating post-performance dialogues, and make sure service providers are present for on-the-spot assistance, with resources for anyone who might need help.

## LEARN MORE

[Video: Speed Killed My Cousin](#)

["Moral Injury Killed My Cousin,"](#)  
by Lynne A. Santiago



James Geiger

## Stakeholder Risk in Creative Work

Creative work can open up different kinds of risks for stakeholders and artists in Arts for Change work.

**Participant risk** - Participants may experience risk by revealing a story that's never before been told in public, participating in a post-show dialogue that addresses a sensitive community issue, or learning a dance movement that was too challenging just a week prior.

**Artist risk** - Artists may take risk in: creative choices that go against convention within an established art form; developing a project that is unusually ambitious in scope/vision; failing in order to try something new; embracing an issue or topic that is personally challenging.

**Institutional risk** - Organizations may take risk by: presenting work outside of what they usually do; stretching audience expectations; opening up to potential for controversy; challenging boards of directors regarding content, form, and/or financial viability.

## Artist Risk

In 2015, poet and playwright Paul Flores created, *Placas: The Most Dangerous Tattoo*, and in the process of creation was exposed to personal risk due to its gang-related subject matter. The play explores the process of tattoo removal as one possible path for former gang members to move forward. As part of the writing process, Flores interviewed over 100 gang members, parents and intervention workers in California and El Salvador. He developed a partnership with Alex Sanchez, former MS-13 criminal gang member turned founder of the intervention program Homies Unidos LA. Flores described Sanchez as “a superstar in the gang intervention and peacemaking world. He was one of few who could safely cross over gang territories by offering services, jobs, tattoo removal, advice, food, rides, and even to cover funeral costs for homies in need. I shadowed him for nearly three years.” As Flores became more deeply involved in the process of creating the play, he came to realize that, in his words, “Alex validated my presence with the homies in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and El Salvador...So if his word wasn't credible, if my word and my writing weren't credible, if our collaboration did not help homies and represent their true hearts and stories, then we were all in danger.”



### LEARN MORE

[“What is the Role of the Artist/Arts Presenter in a Community in Crisis?” by Paul Flores, Howlround, 2016](#)

## Institutional Risk

In the 2002 exhibition *Mirroring Evil*, The Jewish Museum in New York took curatorial and institutional risks by dramatically shifting the common focus on victims in Holocaust representations to the perpetrators. The intent was to stimulate discussion about complicity and complacency toward evil, and to address an urgent need to help young people find relevance in this history as violence continues around the world. The exhibition featured young artists whose work included several charged representations, including a bust of Mengele, a Lego toy concentration camp, and other depictions that would challenge and even enrage some constituents. Acknowledging that the taboo subject matter and provocative artwork could be contentious, curators and administrators first engaged staff, as well as its board and external advisors, to build ownership for the exhibition and its dialogue goals. They developed an opening video providing historical and cultural context from television, film, and popular culture and offered questions that visitors could consider as they viewed the artworks. Another video at the end of the exhibition captured points of view from artists and diverse members of different communities reacting to the exhibition. The museum partnered with religious and educational organizations to design dialogue opportunities both in and outside the museum that connected deeply within the Jewish community as well as to a public of all faiths.



### LEARN MORE

[“Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art Case Study,” by Jeanne Pearlman, 2004](#)



Artist Brett Cook's public projects often create a fluid pathway among artmaking, daily life, and healing by providing different entry points through which to welcome people. **Reflections of Healing** was a project in Oakland, CA that promoted health equity through participatory public art installations; community workshops featuring arts-integrated pedagogy, music, performance, and food; along with wellness clinics. A signature component of Cook's aesthetic takes the form of multiple, large-scale portraits of community members that are co-created with community people and publicly displayed. Nine prominent Oakland-based healers were selected with help from community organizations to be honored in portraits. Cook's projects typically also include public events to view the portraits and connect them to topics of local relevance. The finished portraits first debuted at the [Life is Living festival](#) in Oakland Park, along with captions translated into languages local to Alameda County, chalkboards for community reflection, and free health and wellness services, and then were part of a year-long public installation at the [Oakland Museum of California](#). The portraits themselves reflected an openness to recognizing people valued by community members, and these participatory opportunities encouraged community members to engage, supporting the goal of catalyzing diverse and under-resourced communities to form new partnerships, celebrate community, and engage in direct healthcare services.



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[Video: Reflections of Healing](#)

**In Perseverance Theatre's Alaskan adaptation of Moby Dick, which aimed to engage people in dialogue about issues of subsistence rights and the urban/rural divide, project leaders consciously chose not to stake out a position in the play but to portray multiple views.** Then Artistic Director Peter DuBois believes the company's production improved as art by offering more nuance on the issue and demanding more thought on the audience's part. He writes, "Thinking about civic dialogue got me thinking about how the best art leads me to engage new questions and fresh associations. This realization allowed me to go into the work and edit out strong 'positions' so that the audience might create their own positions from what they saw. For example, we cut an entire scene about 'leavers and takers', as it appeared to be a heavy-handed critique about Western culture. I felt this critique would limit the conversation and polarize communities...In general, I felt the play served as an excellent springboard for dialogue because it had a level of ambiguity. It, therefore, helped people get to both the gray areas and the areas of common ground quicker."

**When creating staged dance productions through community-based process, Dance Exchange takes great pains to be transparent about its processes with community participants.** Former company member Margot Greenlee said, "To assure quality in the artistic outcome...the power to sequence, edit and re-synthesize the work of others—is necessary. A moment in the process that is really hard for participants is when we start editing...the give-and-take ceases and the artistic stakes take over." By being transparent up front, there are no surprises. When participants later see their gestural phrases incorporated in a beautiful and moving dance piece, their experience of co-creation is invariably reinforced and appreciation for the final product heightened.

*Openness as an aesthetic attribute doesn't mean that a strong point of view is bad or that multiple perspectives is always a value. Some of the greatest social justice oriented artworks of all time have taken a very clear stance. Picasso's Guernica is an iconic example of an anti-war position in the work.*

**ANDREA ASSAF, ARTIST, ART2ACTION**



Perseverance Theater

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["Moby Dick," by Jeffrey Herrmann, Peter DuBois, Susan McInnis](#)



Stan Barouh

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[Liz Lerman Dance Exchange: An Aesthetic of Inquiry, an Ethos of Dialogue by John Borstel](#)



**Pop-up Resource Village, is a resourceful, social justice, design approach that repurposed donated city buses into beautifully designed mobile resource centers to support communities of color impacted by incarceration.** Toward the goal of reducing high rates of re-incarceration in the San Francisco Bay Area, architect-designer [Deanna Van Buren](#) and her organization, Fourm Design collaborated with 5 Keys Charter School and Asian Neighborhood Design to find a way to make services more readily accessible for formerly incarcerated students and women re-entering the community. The need was to reach beyond the confines of a fixed building which, for students, requires time and money to travel to school locations and sometimes presents safety concerns of traversing gang territory. Women inmates who are released during the night face other issues of safety and transportation. Van Buren retrofitted three San Francisco MUNI buses donated by the city. Two were developed as mobile school sites providing classroom and library space for students to get high school diplomas, GEDs, jobs, and life skills training. A third bus was transformed into a mobile safehouse for women and vulnerable inmates. Pop-up Resource Village serves as “a new, micro-local infrastructure that builds on the urban regeneration opportunities inherent in a mobile architecture.”



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[Video : Pop-Up Resource Village](#)

[Oakland Resources Released Prisoners  
Incarceration](#)

[Pop-Up Resource Village Project Description](#)





**The State Hospital: In Memoriam** was organized by artist Anna Schuleit in November 2000 to memorialize the former Northampton State Hospital in Northampton, MA and to promote public dialogue about the mental health system in America. **The project fostered aesthetic coherence by using multiple components, over a number of days, to allow participants to build their own connection between past and present and to reflect on the future of mental health care.** The project centered around *Habeas Corpus*, a one-time site-specific music installation of J.S. Bach's *Magnificat*, through which Schuleit honored the hospital building by "making it sing in memory of the thousands of individuals whose lives were affected by the institution."

**Each part of The State Hospital project cohered on its own, but also was amplified by the other parts, and the overall effect could be compared to the aesthetic harmony of the Magnificat itself.** Working with a local historic museum and education center, Schuleit conceived a set of events to reflect on the former institution, its history, and its people. *The State Hospital: In Memoriam* included an all-day academic symposium designed for mental health professionals and others who impact policy; two artistic exhibitions about the hospital; and a public forum featuring the stories and experiences of former patients and employees. After the forum, participants and community members climbed the hill to the hospital and experienced Schuleit's *Habeas Corpus* installation. At noon, the *Magnificat* was played and echoed through the building while participants listened and observed from outside and around it. Schuleit chose the *Magnificat* because it evokes a feeling beyond the religiousness that it was based on. It is a piece of universal praise, says Schuleit, "Those parts, which are sung by the full choir, are hauntingly powerful in their scope and timeless address."



**"ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON**, the hospital was the site of an extraordinary commemoration ...The building exploded into glorious sound, and continued ringing for the full 28-minute duration of the *Magnificat*. It echoed from the walls, it came from the sky, it seemed to emanate from everywhere and nowhere.... This was a mass event that was also intimately personal; it seemed appropriate to greet your neighbor but not to watch too closely for any reactions. Far better to swim your own course through the sound and spirits. ...All was cold and clear under iron-gray skies, with tattered curtains flapping in open windows, the ground carpeted with brown leaves with a few red and orange stragglers still clinging to the trees. Purest November. There was some gentle hail...early in the *Magnificat*, and when the sun burst through in the chorus "Fecit potentiam," the effect was so perfect that it might have been dismissed as a Hollywood touch if it hadn't been so wonderfully, palpably real..."

**TIM PAGE, THE WASHINGTON POST**

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[The State Hospital: In Memoriam video](#)

**Over time, Tectonic Theater Project has developed ways to keep the story portrayed in its widely produced play, *The Laramie Project*, true and relevant in a national context of continuing homophobia, bullying, suicide, and hate crimes.**

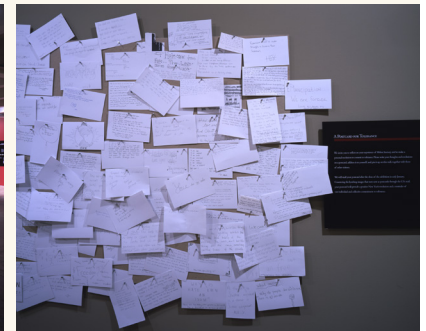
The Laramie Project is one of the most frequently performed plays in America. After Matthew Shepard's murder in 1998, members of Tectonic Theater Project traveled to Laramie, Wyoming to interview residents about how the attack on Shepard had affected the town. Using the form of documentary theater, which relies on verbatim accounts, these transcripts were transformed into the play *The Laramie Project*. Authenticity of the script, a simple set, and powerful messages combined to create a moving and memorable play that was available for production by professionals and nonprofessional across the country. Tectonic created a second play, *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, to take the emotional temperature of the citizens of Laramie and discover how attitudes toward the killing—and the news media scrutiny that followed—had evolved. The Matthew Shepard Foundation also provides creative consultation to enhance local productions and guidance on post-show discussions and community conversations, helping to maximize meaning and impact.



## LEARN MORE

"Laramie's Past Isn't Dead. It's Not Even Past." by Charles Isherwood, *The New York Times*

**The emotional power of images and dialogue in the Andy Warhol Museum's presentation of the exhibition, *Without Sanctuary*, reverberated in the community long after it closed.** The Andy Warhol Museum presented the traveling exhibition *Without Sanctuary* in 2001, featuring photographic prints and postcards documenting the history of lynching in the U.S. Its intent was to refocus dialogue about race in Pittsburgh. Warhol artist educator Krista Connerly observed its ripple effects: "Dialogues continued way past the given dialogue space and...provoked a lot of people to rethink the way they address issues of race and tolerance that manifest themselves in everyday life...The power of the images provoked an intense process of questioning. I approached my teaching outside of the Warhol from a much different angle and found myself thinking and talking to my students a lot about media literacy and how representation affects us."



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"The Warhol Museum as Artist: Creative, Dialogic, and Civic Practice," by Jessica Gogan, 2004





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