



★ ★ ★ *New Community Visions* *part of the*  
Transforming America's Communities Through the Arts Initiative

# Artists & Communities

---

Conversations on Passion, Practice, and Engagement

---

AN ARCHIVE OF RESISTANCE

John Malpede &  
Christina Sanchez Juarez

EDITED BY

Alicia Gregory  
with Elizabeth Sweeney

---

ABOUT THE NEW COMMUNITY VISIONS INITIATIVE,  
PART OF TRANSFORMING AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES  
THROUGH THE ARTS

---

*Americans for the Arts'* New Community Visions Initiative is a national visioning exercise for local arts agencies, arts organizations, artists, and those interested in better understanding the future role of arts and culture in helping American communities thrive.

In this series, veteran community arts leaders come together in conversation with emerging community arts leaders to share their visions for, experiences with, and challenges to making healthy, equitable, vibrant communities through arts and culture. As community-based work receives more recognition, and intersections and collaborations become stronger, these conversations illuminate just how artists and community arts leaders can work to sustain and maintain healthy communities through their practice.

New Community Visions is part of a sustained, three-year suite of large-scale initiatives from Americans for the Arts that are together called *Transforming America's Communities Through the Arts*. Through those initiatives, we hope to:

- generate dialogue on a national, state, and local level around the creation and sustainability of healthy, vibrant, equitable communities;
- activate a diverse set of programming and partnerships spanning public, private, and nonprofit sectors;
- lay the groundwork for a collective movement forward over the next decade and beyond;
- and help leaders and the public better understand and celebrate arts and culture as mechanisms for creating and sustaining healthier, more vibrant, and more equitable communities in the United States.

**[www.AmericansForTheArts.org/CommunityVisions](http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org/CommunityVisions)**

This project is made possible through an ever-growing list of funders, partners, and advisors.



# An Archive of Resistance

— *John Malpede & Christina Sanchez Juarez in Conversation* —  
— *Edited by Alicia Gregory with Elizabeth Sweeney* —

## ABOUT THE CONVERSATION

As residents of Los Angeles, artists John Malpede and Christina Sanchez Juarez both work at the intersection of performance and community organizing, using arts and culture to empower and elevate Los Angeles' working poor and homeless. Speaking to the fact that the basic rights of these vulnerable communities are continually at risk—including rights to affordable housing and a livable wage—John and Christina remind us that arts and culture can be used to amplify the voices, experiences, and needs of all people, helping the greater community prevail.

In the conversation that follows, John and Christina discuss:

- The power of arts and culture to document social issues and drive social change
- The dynamics of community-based work—making space for multiple leaders and multiple voices
- The demands of balancing community-based work—how artists can both sustain their practice and know their limits
- How to embrace instability as part of the art-making and change-making process

## About the Contributing Authors

---



**John Malpede** directs, performs, and engineers multi-event arts projects that have theatrical, installation, public art, and education components. In 1985, Malpede founded and continues to direct the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), the first performance group in the nation comprised primarily of homeless and formerly homeless people. LAPD creates performances that connect lived experience to the social forces that shape the lives and communities of people living in poverty. Malpede has produced projects working with communities throughout the United States and in the UK, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Bolivia. Currently, Malpede is curating the Skid Row History Museum and Archive, an exhibition/performance space exploring gentrification issues in Los Angeles.



**Christina Sanchez Juarez** is a socially and politically engaged artist working at the intersection of performance, community organizing, and popular education to investigate how collectivity and the arts can acknowledge the issues of the working poor and bring about social change. Since 2011, she has advocated for restaurant worker's rights through a series of community engaged art projects—participatory performances, installations, dining experiences, and cooking demonstrations—that focus on archiving and disseminating restaurant worker histories. These projects have been presented in community colleges, cultural centers, farmer's markets, and other public spaces. Christina is a recipient of the inaugural SPART Los Angeles grant and recently completed a two-year public engagement project with the Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

**CSJ:** What is your vision for artists working to achieve healthy, equitable, and vibrant communities today and in the future? A loaded question.

**JM:** I think there are two things that are important: to have a clear understanding and analysis of what’s going on in your community, and to have that understanding be rooted in experience—your own, yes, but more so the perspective of the people you are working with. You need to both develop and articulate a critical analysis to use in your work. And you must also find an alternative narrative, something sustaining and celebratory that offers a different perspective than whatever narrative keeps the inequity in place.

I was reading an article today in the paper about two artists, both professors at Cal State San Bernardino, who are working together on a collaborative project that documents vernacular culture of the city. The poet, Juan Delgado, writes about life in San Bernardino and the photographer, Thomas McGovern, photographs all different part of the city—murals, street signs, memorials. This is a city of immigrants with rich lives and culture, but the narrative the media portrays is one of crime and blight. Together these artists are elevating the life of the community and articulating its unseen essence.

Instead of getting a negative snapshot of San Bernardino from CNN, they’re creating their own narrative that reflects their true lives. This project has gotten a lot of traction among younger artists in the community who are adding their own voices to it. A homegrown representation of life in San Bernardino.

*“This is a city of immigrants with rich lives and culture, but the narrative the media portrays is one of crime and blight. Together these artists are elevating the life of the community and articulating its unseen essence.”*

**CSJ:** Showing what a place truly is, yes. And it's not fabricated by an outside entity.

**JM:** Exactly.

**CSJ:** I keep coming back to the “vision” part of my question to you. In this past year or so, I've co-founded the L.A. Tenants Union where we are fighting for affordable and safe housing for all. I've been thinking a lot more about the artist's role in this movement, but not apart from it, or singled out and special. There was a certain indoctrination that I got through art schools where we were told that artists are and can be leaders and in leadership roles.

But I wonder about co-authorship, about being a part of a greater movement and being able to sit down and put your ego aside. And like you were saying, taking the time to understand, critically reflect on, and learn about the community that you work with. I think that in order for community engagement projects to really succeed, you sometimes need to sit down and shut up a little bit, and really let other kinds of leadership and ideas emerge. I've been grappling with that a lot this year.

But I also have another part of who I am. For example, I've been working on a large commission project with Los Angeles County and playing the opposite role. The one where I am responsible for the whole project, but trying to—in my own way—subvert that structure and surrender ownership to other collaborators. That's much more sustainable, I think.

**JM:** I'm interested in hearing more about your work with the L.A. Tenants Union and the project you are leading with L.A. County.

**CSJ:** The Tenants Union came out of a collective/study group called School of Echoes that the sound art collective Ultra Red started about three years ago here in L.A.

That group met monthly for a couple of years. In that work there was a common thread among the people in the group: a worry about gentrification and the massive displacement of working

people in Los Angeles. There was a big push within the group to take our work beyond analysis, thinking, and studying to some form of action. So the next natural step for us was to form the Tenants Union. We had our founding town hall in July 2015.

The Union gained momentum because there were a lot of people who were members of the Union and in crisis. People who had recently been evicted or were facing eviction. And through organizing together, we started meeting other people who were in crisis and so on. It created a snowball effect to where we had people in all different parts of the city who could start getting together to talk about these issues and how we could build a more unified front—both to get folks on the ground organized and to also begin to craft policy.

My work with the Union has been a big part of my year—I attend bi-monthly meetings and sub-committee meetings, as I am part of both the Outreach and Language Justice Committees. The Outreach Committee is basically the welcome group who keeps everyone in touch and follows up with prospective members and the like. And because we've been committed to being a bilingual organization from the start, we have the Language Justice Committee that makes sure we have Spanish language interpretation at every meeting, and that all of our major press goes out in both Spanish and English. We hope to support other languages as we grow in capacity.

I've also been working on a large public engagement project at Victoria Park in Carson for the past two years. I was commissioned by the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and Los Angeles Parks and Recreation to lead a creative graffiti abatement project in the park. When I began the research and development phase of this project, I was immediately struck by the convivial food culture that existed in the park, as well as the presence of a functioning kitchen. My collective, *Cocina Abierta*, works with food as a medium for engaging communities in conversations about the realities of food labor, so it was easy for us to begin collaborating with the existing community on

food-centered events and exchanges. We ultimately filmed a five-episode community cooking show there, highlighting five stellar cooks from that community and debuted it with a big screening and community potluck in the park this past March.

The original impulse for the cooking show was a big, multi-ethnic Thanksgiving potluck I went to almost two years ago in the neighborhood. It is a diverse community of African-American, Latino/a, Samoan, and Filipino residents. It made me really curious about trying to build new traditions, or new ways of getting all of these different cultural groups in the same room together more frequently than once a year. And so I thought, “Okay. I’ll film these cooking shows one-on-one and then I’ll invite all of these different folks back into the room together to celebrate this achievement and get a new type of tradition going in the park.” Folks don’t really hang—they stick to their own cultural groupings. But it’s an extremely diverse park.

For this project, I’ve worn the leadership hat, but I’ve also done on-the-ground work to both build and identify leadership that already exists in the park, and try my best to work within that team of people and to brainstorm longevity. For example, there is a kitchen in the park, and I’m currently working with the staff to think about how we could either have regular cooking classes there, or if there is some other kind of food-based programming that continues after the project is done. The project is supposed to have a life beyond the original scope. Something left behind in the form of programming or training for park staff and community members to continue positive engagement with the park.

There’s also a beautification part of the project where we repainted tables and did some upgrades to the kitchen and the multi-purpose rooms. So I’ve been able to tap into the art-making side of things, too. Actually physically making things with my hands again for the first time in a long time. So that’s been really challenging, but also a great reminder that I can work beyond the social, that I can still create and build.



**JM:** And you said you work to identify people who use Victoria Park and who are already well known personas there—how have you been able to get them engaged with the project?

**CSJ:** When I first started working there, I surveyed the staff and asked them who the key volunteers were, the people who really give their time to the park. And then I sat down with those folks and did one-on-one interviews, just to get to know what their park programs were, or what sport they organized, or whatever they were doing, and then I asked them about the food traditions that already existed in the park.

From those interviews I was able to identify the people who loved to cook for the Victoria Park community—whether it was an original person I interviewed, or someone else who was mentioned in those interviews. People who are known in the community as amazing cooks, people that give themselves in that way. That is how we identified the five featured cooks in the series. And now those five cooks are planning their own launch event for the cooking shows along with some other community members.

It's been really amazing. For this project, people showed up to planning meetings, donated whatever amount of pans of spaghetti we needed for an event. The community was all in. That kind of participation restores your faith in humanity and is a real testament to how vibrant this community is.

**JM:** What you're speaking about really strikes a chord with some of my current work. I'm working with my colleague Associate Director of the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) Henriette Brouwers on a project in Aubervilliers, which is the poorest suburb of Paris, France, and also the most diverse city

*“The community was all in. That kind of participation restores your faith in humanity and is a real testament to how vibrant this community is.”*

in France—there are immigrants from everywhere. But it's the same deal as what you just spoke of: there are all of these different cultural groups, but no ongoing exchange between them. So we're developing a project to help with that, and one of the concerns in the actual development of it, and hearing you talk about your process is very helpful.

I also want to go back to what we were talking about earlier, in regards to working in concert with other groups. My work and the work of the LAPD deals primarily with Skid Row, the poorest area in L.A. containing the largest concentration of homeless people in the United States. And the cool thing is that Skid Row wouldn't even exist at this point if it weren't for the radical imagination of the community that has been there for the last 50 years. This low-income community has been able to basically preserve and prevent itself from being totally displaced by developers.

For instance, in the 1970s as developers planned to “renew” Skid Row, which meant obliterating low income housing and displacing many residents, activists from The Catholic Worker, Legal Aid, and the Community Design Center introduced their own plan for the neighborhood which involved saving and renovating the single room occupancy hotels of the area that were set to be bulldozed. This plan appealed to those who were sincerely concerned about housing the poor, and also the cynical people who were worried about poor people moving into their nearby neighborhoods if Skid Row was bulldozed. This activist plan was adopted, and as a result, still to this day, the only residential housing that can be built in the 50 square blocks of Skid Row is low income housing. As a result, Skid Row exists and the long-term residents continue to fight for their interests.

LAPD has been very active in working with these folks, but we're only one of the groups there. What's beautiful and sustaining is the fact that there are many different groups doing many important things on Skid Row and everyone rallies behind each other. People aren't fighting for the lead. Sometimes we're

at the forefront of an issue, but we've also taken on the role of documenting the history of Skid Row and creating projects that elevate the fact that a) there is a community there, and b) it is a community in which residents and workers have taken action to not only save the community, but to also provide for their neighbors who live there, who have various needs.

*“What’s beautiful and sustaining is the fact that there are many different groups doing many important things on Skid Row and everyone rallies behind each other.”*

We've done a couple projects in particular, one being a collaboration with Maria Rosario Jackson from the Urban Institute. They were interested in studying how the LAPD has been effective at making community art in the neighborhood. But we said we'd rather use the opportunity as a way to convene the community to look at how and where art and culture comes from in the neighborhood and what's needed to continue to cultivate that.

And so we convened the Skid Row residents and people working in the community and developed this paper—*Making the Case for Skid Row Culture: Findings from a Collaborative Inquiry by the Los Angeles Poverty Department and the Urban Institute*—which reveals that art comes from the ground up. And apart from creating art in programs, a lot of the creation just happens on the street, in people's hotel rooms, etc.

We then gave the paper back to the community, and it was used by Skid Row advocates to help with their own efforts, like collaborating with the parks commission, or city council, etc. There is a real synergy among the individuals and groups working in Skid Row. That's one reason why the community has been able to resist assault after assault and has resisted being displaced up until now.

**CSJ:** I like thinking of these projects as an archive of resistance.

**JM:** That is definitely a way to think about it. In this last year we've established this little museum space on Broadway that we've called the Skid Row History Museum and Archive. And it's dedicated

to exhibiting shows about that history, or about history similar to Skid Row in other places. The most recent show we did was about an anti-gentrification arts campaign that happened in San Francisco called Streetopia. But mainly we've been documenting the different issues in Skid Row, going back to the '70s.

**CSJ:** Can you talk a little bit about the history of how you and the LAPD secured that space, and where the idea, or dream, came from?

**JM:** Well, around 2007 we were making a series of performance, public art, and conversation events called UTOPIA/dystopia, which looked at the gentrification happening in downtown Los Angeles, with the recognition that one person's utopia might have the unintended—or rationalized—consequence of contributing to the realization of another person's dystopia. From that, a public artist named Susan Gray, who was the head of the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles' (CRA) public art program, asked us to do a project with her. And we decided to do a Skid Row history museum without walls—similar to the Hollywood Walk of Fame and with markers in front of all the buildings or parks or street corners associated with various people who have done something significant in the neighborhood. We wanted to feature the activists, artists, people in the recovery movement, people who had started major institutions—like the two women who started The Downtown Women's Center in 1978, which is the only organization in L.A. dedicated to addressing the needs of women overcoming homelessness and poverty in the city.

*“I like thinking of these projects as an archive of resistance.”*

We featured a blend of people whose initiatives were very well known, and others who weren't. And by marking the physical place associated with these people and their work, it would actually take it beyond the boundaries of what is now Skid Row, which is important because there's been so much consolidation of Skid Row and appropriation of the land around it.

But like any good public art project, we ran into a lot of political interference. Namely disgruntled businesses leaders and a city council member who was very connected to business interests and did not want to see portraits of leading activists on their street corners. They weren't going to let it happen.

Anyway, we were able to do a study/exhibit for it as part of our commitment to the CRA at the Box Gallery when it was over in Chinatown. We collected a lot of objects that were used in street protests, like the shopping carts given to the homeless by the L.A. Catholic Worker organization so that they had some sort of vessel for their belongings. The police used to seize them and ticket the homeless for them, but they were affixed with a little sign that said: "This shopping cart is the property of the Catholic Worker and authorized to be used within the County of Los Angeles," so that the police couldn't take it away as stolen property.

Another example is that out in front of the gallery, we established a taped-off area, which was a designated sleeping zone. This was in response to one of the particularly egregious, stupid examples of public policy that emerged in the '90s where certain parts of the streets were designated as sleeping zones and others weren't.

We did many performances, workshops, and activities around that show which integrated people from Skid Row—not just from the LAPD, but other activists and neighborhood folks, too. We collected nominations from people in the neighborhood about who should be honored and how to honor and include them.

A lot of people said, "Wow, it would be really nice to have a place like this in the neighborhood, permanently." A modest space to host exhibitions based on neighborhood history, a place

to gather and have meetings, give presentations, etc. We reached out to one of the nonprofit developers through a lawyer who had a lot of credibility in the neighborhood, but were immediately shut down with, “Who’s going to pay for this space? We get paid by housing people, so we can’t pay for this.”

So anyway, years went by and the idea was still a good idea. And finally, in April 2015, we were able to scrape together some money to get this place on Broadway in a mini mall, where we are now. Actually, Los Angeles City Councilmember José Huizar was leading a “Bringing Back Broadway” initiative—this ambitious 10-year plan to revitalize the Historic Broadway corridor in downtown Los Angeles by providing economic development and business assistance, re-activating the historic vacant theaters and that kind of thing. But to me, ever since I moved here in 1985, Broadway always seemed like the most vital place in the city. It didn’t seem like it needed any bring back.

**CSJ:** It was already there and alive.

**JM:** Yes. So the “bringing back” was basically an upscaling of the neighborhood and its clientele. Originally, Broadway was a place for all the downtown residents, including Latinos and people who live near Skid Row, to buy their food, clothes, musical instruments, wedding dresses—everything, really. So we thought we would do our civic duty by locating the Skid Row museum and archive there as a way of representing the actual culture that’s already there.

**CSJ:** Do you think this is a space that you guys will be able to hold onto for years to come?

**JM:** Well, I don’t know. That’s always contingent on funding, right? The reason we were able to get the space at all—at the low rate that we did and without a long-term lease—is because the building owners were threatening to close it down, to gentrify it, basically.

We’re located on the mezzanine level—you should check it out, actually. There’s a botanica, a couple of barber colleges, a

clothing store, and an artist collective. It's a wonderfully funky place at the moment. And as long as we can keep paying the rent and the developers don't decide they're going to be able to do their renovation, we'll stay there.

We put on exhibits that highlight the longstanding community living on Skid Row. The last show we had was on General Dogon—do you know him?

**CSJ:** I feel like I've met him at some point in time.

**JM:** He was one of the main organizers of the Los Angeles Community Action Network, a civil rights organizer. He grew up in downtown L.A. and makes these tricked out low-rider bicycles. They're these beautiful pieces of art that double as an activism tool—he's used the bikes to lead protests and to organize people in the neighborhoods. The bikes grab your attention and he'd be able to gather folks and pass out leaflets, talk to them about their rights, and then move on to the next block.

So in October 2015, we organized a show of his custom bicycles—they were on view, along with video installations of Dogon talking about growing up in downtown L.A. and the relationship of his bicycles to his work.

**CSJ:** That's very cool. So I have questions for you about longevity and about sustaining the artist life. I have a day job where I teach art to kids; that's how I pay my bills. And I used to be much more resentful about my day job than I am now. Recently, I was able to change my teaching style to something that I can be proud of and that I can do long-term without feeling like it is taking away from my art and projects.

**JM:** How did you do that?

**CSJ:** Last summer I was feeling really restless. I was unhappy at my job and knew I had to find a different way to teach that would help me feel more satisfied. I was researching new project ideas for my students, and I ran across an online forum about a teaching methodology called "Teaching for Artistic Behavior."

Which is basically more of a Montessori<sup>1</sup>-style approach to teaching art production with youth.

Basically, I now teach the habits of artists. My classroom is set up like a studio where I have artist tools prominently displayed and available for students to access at any time. I do a quick mini lesson at the beginning of every class, and then I set my students free and encourage them to make art about whatever they want. There are some parameters, but it's no longer a teacher-directed curriculum. Like how if we were studying Picasso, for example, we would all just make Picasso-esque collages. That's the way I was taught to teach art, and I taught like that for a very long time. But I've realized there should be much more freedom in the process.

The added layer is that I teach at a school for students with learning differences like dyslexia and ADHD/ADD. So I wanted to find a different way to reach these students, and also a way to be happy doing it—to serve more as a co-creator than strictly as a leader. The shift I made has been really helpful and inspiring. I feel much happier during the day.

I've also been thinking about how I can interject my love for justice into the work that I do. I should also mention that I work with an affluent community. So this year, I went to The National Association of Independent Schools' (NAIS) People of Color Conference. For the first time, I got a glimpse into this whole world of educators that are thinking about issues of race, class, gender, identity, politics, etc. And bringing these conversations home to their schools. So that has also been helpful to envision myself continuing to do this.

**JM:** Have you been able to figure out a way to bring those conversations and that learning back to your own school in a way that is useful?

**CSJ:** Yeah. We're definitely starting the conversation, but it will most likely be a slow process. When we came back from the conference, we gave a presentation on what we experienced, and now we're at the stage of trying to figure out how to be active in



the local NAIS people of color chapter. The main question is: where do we start? My personal opinion is that we start with the faculty and begin to have those conversations about differences as faculty and break the ice there. Then we can figure out how to talk to our students about these kinds of things.

*“...I have questions about longevity and the commitment to remaining an artist.”*

There's not a formalized curriculum for talking about difference, and again, this is a privileged population. Many of my students may grow up to have positions of power and influence in the future. As educators and artists, it's our social responsibility to try and guide them as far as thinking critically about some of the pressing issues of our time. I've never done this facilitation work outside of our own social justice circle/bubble. So I'm scared, but I'm also excited.

**JM:** Yes, but what a great position to be in—that kind of charged in-between. You had mentioned wanting to talk about longevity. What were you thinking about in regard to that?

**CSJ:** Well, aside from investing in this conversation and finding my identity in my day job, I also love my own projects. One of the big things I've figured out this year is that I don't think I'm comfortable living grant to grant, or funding stream to funding stream. I need a regular paycheck, and that's been a constant fight for me. I'm very much at the beginning of my career so I have questions about longevity and the commitment to remaining an artist. What has that journey been like for you?

**JM:** Well, if you figured out that you like having a paycheck, that's a very useful thing for an artist to know about herself. Personally, I used to talk about LAPD as the harebrained idea that wouldn't die [laughs]. So it's sort of a miracle that it has existed for about 30 years now. And I think a lot of the success has been about being willing to be marginal in some way, along with just rolling the dice and living from project to project. And even being

strategic within that. There was a period when we had very few resources.

And then out of nowhere in 2000, I was invited make a project at Appalshop in eastern Kentucky. I had the idea to recreate Robert F. Kennedy's two-day, 200-mile inquiry into poverty in southeastern Kentucky in 1968—what came to be called *RFK in EKY: The Robert F. Kennedy Performance Project*. We only had money for me to do some research, but the idea gained substantial traction and we were eventually able to realize not just one moment from his visit, but to do events along his entire route.

So while I was working on that individually, the LAPD had been working on *Agents & Assets*, a series of performances and a symposium which talked about the consequences of the war on drugs in communities. And because *Agents & Assets* had turned out so well, we got the idea of touring it as a residency project. So as I was being supported for the research phase of what turned out to be *RFK in EKY*, Julia Carnahan and I wrote grants and raised the funds to then do *Agents & Assets* in Detroit in 2002 and Cleveland in 2004—it ultimately turned into a decade plus project. So by working double-time, and by being supported from this huge project in Kentucky, I was able to get more resources. So the answer to seeking sustainability was doing more work, basically. And it's been a lot of willfulness, too. As well as certain things just coming together when we needed them to—I've been lucky in that way. But I don't think that everybody would choose to leave so much to the wind. It could have easily gone in a different direction.

Actually, during that period when the LAPD had very few resources, and we were thinking how badly we needed to get it together, there was still so much commitment to the project within Skid Row, within the community. That was a big factor in keeping it going at that point. But also, I think it's okay not to have things go on forever. But as it happened to turn out, the LAPD has continued to be a meaningful entity that we've been able to sustain one way or another for 30 years now.

**CSJ:** Yeah. I think—for better or for worse—this feeling of instability or limbo is a part of the art-making process. And I’m realizing there are times when I’m more comfortable with that than at other times. Maybe it depends on what bills I have, or what goals I want to reach financially, but there are times when I have faith in the process that things will work out, that opportunities will come up. I feel like I’ve been very lucky in the past year or so where I get surprise phone calls or invitations. And I think, “Okay. I’m doing the right thing. I’m keeping my head down, and I’m working, and people are hearing about the things that we’re doing.” And then there are times where I think, “Oh my gosh. I need to come up with a more sustainable game plan.”

*“...the LAPD has continued to be a meaningful entity that we’ve been able to sustain one way or another for 30 years now.”*

Just being able to plan and scheme for the long term—that kind of process is not something I have inherently in me. I really admire people who are able to do that. And I guess I’m beginning to think, “Okay. How do I build that within myself?”

**JM:** Right. How to have a more long-term perspective on what you’re doing. How to build sustainability into the practice somehow?

**CSJ:** Yeah. For a while now I’ve been jumping from project to project. And the work has a lot of legs—things that are food-based, recipe-based, story-based—

**JM:** I think you need to figure out what the domain is of each project. Which is useful in terms of seeing long-range. But in the constraints of that construction, you have to keep reimaginging it.

**CSJ:** Yeah. Exactly.

**JM:** And responding to the current conditions, which actually provide you with the way to reimagine what you're doing and still keep it fresh and honor what it is.

**CSJ:** I can really relate to that right now. My partner and I had this vision for a mini cooking school for back of house workers in restaurants. But as we started doing more food-based projects together, I began to see how exhausting those kinds of commitments were on him—it was a lot to meet the demands of the project with the demands of his day job as a cook. And we started to rethink the way that we work in public space.

I felt like I had let myself down because the vision for the project changed. But there was some growth. It was an evolving thing and a learning process in evaluating how much is possible.

**JM:** Similar to how we figured out the demands of our rent parties were too much when held against the demands of the daily grind—

**CSJ:** Yeah. I connected with that right away when you spoke about it. I know that deal very well.

**JM:** So you guys are not planning on having a cooking school anymore?

**CSJ:** Right now, no. I'm not saying it can't happen. I've realized an initiative like this calls for a really good partnership with a particular kitchen or community space where we could work almost like a temporary pop-up. The desire is still there, definitely.

**JM:** You're clearer about what the conditions need to be for you guys to do it without killing yourselves—

**CSJ:** And there was a time where I thought we had a partnership with a space that could potentially work, but it didn't end up working out. Luckily we have a really strong relationship with the Restaurant Opportunity Center of L.A. And through them we're able to meet different food entrepreneurs who are trying to do the right thing for workers.

So I think the connection to a space will come with time. But it's also about making sure the partner shares our same values and shows that they are down for workers. Because a project like we are envisioning needs to be affiliated with a space that really does treat their workers with respect and tries to go beyond minimum wage and substandard working conditions. That's the other layer, too—really thinking about who you're going to partner with.

*“...it's also about making sure the partner shares our same values and shows that they are down for workers. ”*

And to go back to the Carson Park project, to bring this conversation full circle, the other thing that has been really good about this year is that for a while, we were featuring different restaurant workers as the cooks that we collaborate with. And we've switched over to working with different community members. Just everyday people who cook and have amazing culinary skills. That's been really interesting, too. Elevating regular folks within their communities has been a great additional layer to the project.

And so when we film the cooking shows, we would have a restaurant worker from our collective, *Cocina Abierta*, paired up with one of those community cooks. And the *Cocina Abierta* member acted as the co-host, asking questions, being the eyes, ears, nose for the audience. And also tapping into their own expertise to be able to ask meaningful follow-up questions about the recipes and different techniques.

**JM:** That's an example of a really solid partnership that is about lifting each other up.

**CSJ:** Yeah. It was really an interesting partnership where the restaurant worker did not overtly take the position of the “professional” in the room. Instead they were someone who could ask questions and appreciate the community member's cooking skills and their story.

**JM:** Will the shows be on your website? How can we access them?

**CSJ:** A micro-site is currently being designed and will be linked to the Los Angeles Arts Commission website, as well as my own website. It will include recipes and profiles of the key volunteers of the park and act as a digital archive of the whole project.

The cooking shows are longer and feature in-depth recipes. But the profiles are great spotlights on the park community, and I see those as having a life beyond this particular park, and having a lasting effect throughout the park system as another model of what can be done with these kitchen spaces. A lot of parks have kitchens that are rented for baptisms, parties, and similar events. But we're trying to show that they can also as being a center for programming. There's a lot of possibilities there.

And what do you have going on in the next few months?

**JM:** Well, I talked earlier about *What Fuels Development*, a show about community organizing that defeated a gentrification initiative. It looks at the power dynamics in downtown L.A. as well as the community organizing that triumphed. LAPD members Kevin Michael Key and Ronnie Walker took the lead in fighting against this development and the performance is about the moment in which we won a crucial hearing, melting the hearts of the Zoning Commissioners and ultimately dooming the gentrification project. And that manifestation of resident power has chastened the developers and led to the abandonment of other development projects.

We also have several new projects in the works that will keep us busy for the next two years. *The Back Nine* (with support from the Mike Kelley Foundation) will be a playable miniature golf installation and a performance at our museum space that will address the new zoning and community plan that the city is about to devise—which we believe will attempt to overturn the ban on market-rate housing in Skid Row. “The Back Nine” is where crony political deals are made.

The other project *Public Safety FOR REAL*, which is funded by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, is both resistance to the aggressive policing of Skid Row and a community process of envisioning what real public safety would look like. It involves street engagement and eventually a performance. It's a continuation of our previous work on mass incarceration, and police abuse. Playing on the term and function of a Business Improvement District (BID), we will devise informal community policing vehicles that maintain respect for the well-being of our Skid Row neighbors.

NOTES

1. An educational approach characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychological, physical, and social development.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

---

**John Malpede** directs, performs, and engineers multi-event arts projects that have theatrical, installation, public art, and education components. In 1985, Malpede founded and continues to direct the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), the first performance group in the nation comprised primarily of homeless and formerly homeless people. LAPD creates performances that connect lived experience to the social forces that shape the lives and communities of people living in poverty. Malpede has produced projects working with communities throughout the United States and in the UK, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Bolivia.

Malpede has taught at UCLA, NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and The Amsterdam School for Advanced Research in Theater and Dance. He is a 2013 recipient of the Doris Duke Performing Artist Fellowship. Currently, he is curating the Skid Row History Museum and Archive, an exhibition/performance space exploring gentrification issues. In 2014, earlier iterations of the Museum were installed as part of the Queens Museum's retrospective on LAPD and at the Mike Kelley Mobile Homestead at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Malpede has received New York's Dance Theater Workshop Bessie Creation Award, San Francisco Art Institute's Adeline Kent Award, Durfee Sabbatical Grant, LA Theater Alliance Ovation Award, Individual artist fellowships from New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, the City of Los Angeles' COLA fellowship, the California Community Foundation's Visual Artist Fellowship, and numerous project grants.



**Christina Sanchez Juarez** is a socially and politically engaged artist working in the public sphere. Her discursive practice operates at the intersection of performance, community organizing, and popular education to investigate how collectivity and the arts can merge to acknowledge the issues of the working poor and bring about social change. Since 2011 she has been actively invested in advocating for restaurant workers' rights through a series of community engaged art projects that focus on archiving and disseminating restaurant worker histories. These projects manifest themselves as participatory performances, installations, dining experiences, and cooking demonstrations, and have been presented in community colleges, cultural centers, and other public spaces such as farmers markets.

She has presented works at the Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, SUR: Biennial 2013, and LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions). She is the recipient of the inaugural SPART grant, a funding initiative that supports Los Angeles-based social practice art projects. Christina recently completed a two-year public engagement project with the Los Angeles County Arts Commission at Victoria Community Regional Park in Carson CA, as a part of the Open Spaces Creative Graffiti Abatement initiative. She holds a bachelor of arts in studio art from San Francisco State University and a master of fine arts in public practice from the OTIS College of Art and Design.

## THE POWER OF “ARTS AND”

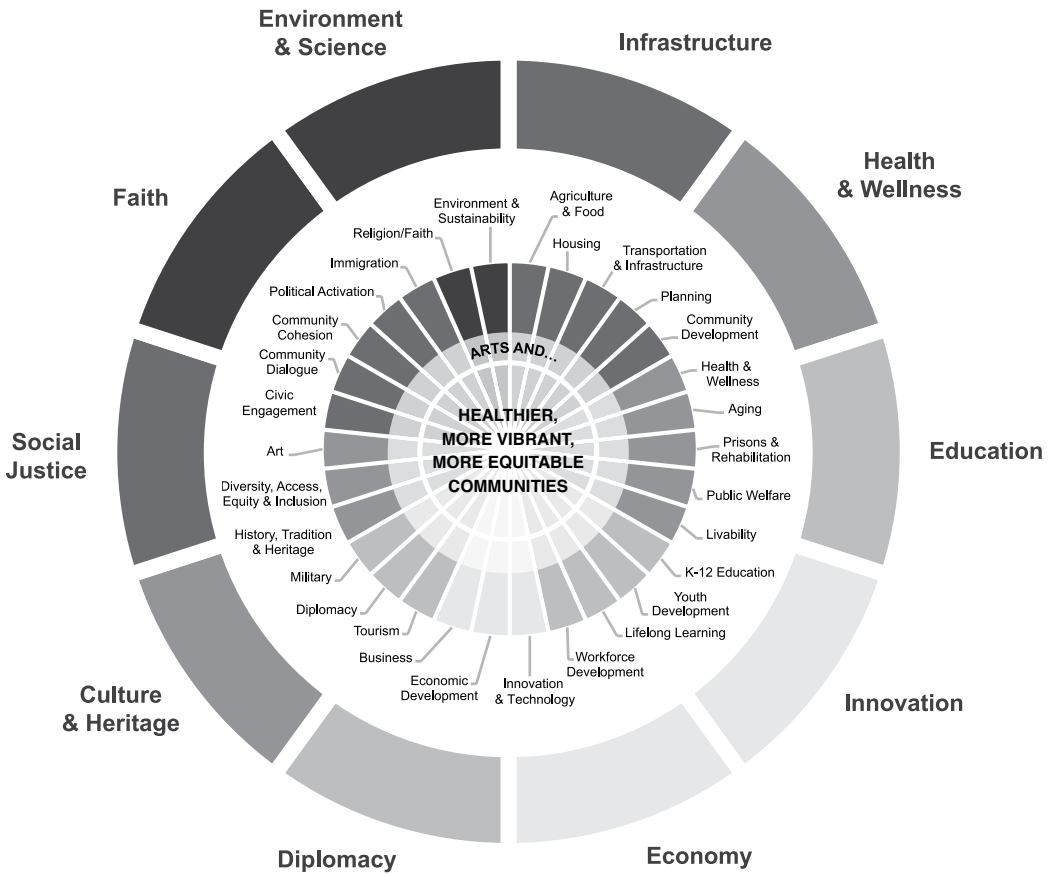
---

Between 2015 and 2017, Americans for the Arts will look past the here and now and well into the next decade with a concentrated theory of change we call *Transforming America’s Communities Through the Arts*. Community development was a foundation of our sector, and the pursuit of healthy, vibrant, equitable communities has been the impetus behind Americans for the Arts’ work for 55 years. This work, collectively, embraces and advocates for what we’re calling the “Arts And” frame, and aims to, in collaboration with different stakeholders on a state, local, and national level, provide the tools and services to help communities map a path forward and integrate the arts to get where they want to go.

The **New Community Visions Initiative** is one of the major, outward components of *Transforming America’s Communities Through the Arts*. The New Community Visions Initiative is designed to *surface new knowledge* and *create new systems and tools* for arts agencies, presenters, artists, and supporters, along with public and private policymakers, including civic leaders, so that they can encourage use of arts and culture to help create healthier, more vibrant, more equitable communities over time.

We are hoping to do this by:

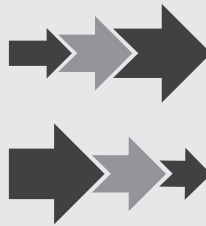
1. **Curating cross-sector and inter-sector “think tank” conversations**, and **encouraging new relationships**, that end up being useful to those in the room as they return to their communities to pursue their own work of building visions and plans.
2. **Detecting the common systems and barriers** that facilitate or impede community progress (community-defined), and figuring out how the arts can be of service to larger societal and community shifts as they occur.
3. **Strengthening and amplifying those common systems** with national-, state-, and local-level arts agencies, arts organizations, foundations, and artists throughout the country through the development of programs, services, and tools that can help communities embrace the arts to make progress.



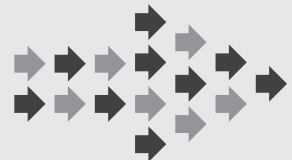
*When integrated fully, the arts can:*



**Transform systems** by working at the intersection of different sectors, individuals, and communities



**Amplify positive impacts and mitigate negative impacts** by providing alternative common ground for thinking and communication



**Increase participation, opportunity, and access** by reducing barriers, encouraging creativity, and celebrating multiple points of view

Americans for the Arts designed this initiative with the goal of enhancing the health, vibrancy, and equity in places, both within the arts and through the arts within the larger community. The people who come together in meetings across the country are invited to explore together what the end result might be, how they might move toward that result, and how we all might make that movement easier.

## **The Theory of Change**

The theory of change that underlies this project has to do with the ways that a set of interlocking, overlapping contributors to communities interact, and the role that the arts can play in those interactions over time. Americans for the Arts has identified 30 linked-but-separate contributors to healthy, vibrant, equitable communities that relate to social justice, the environment, faith, culture and heritage, the economy and workforce, innovation, education, health and wellness, the military, and infrastructure, and that together strongly inform the life and experiences of individuals and the communities in which they move.

By encouraging the “Arts And” integration of the arts into the vital work of all of these contributing components of a community, we believe that we can help transform America’s communities through the arts over time.

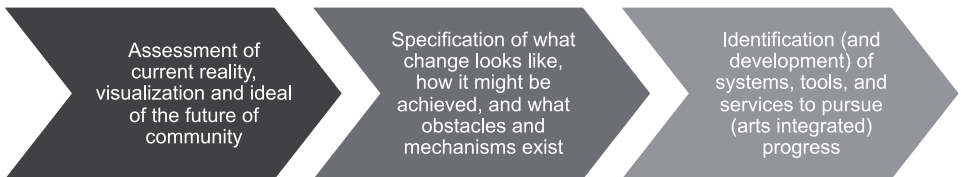
All of this work echoes and reinforces the strategic goals of Americans for the Arts:

- to lead and serve individuals and organizations to help build environments in which the arts and arts education thrive and contribute to more vibrant and healthy communities.
- to generate meaningful public and private sector policies and more resources for arts and arts education.
- to build awareness and appreciation of the value of the arts and arts education.
- to ensure the ability of Americans for the Arts to continue to stably exist and creatively serve and empower a dynamic field.

## The Mechanism

We will pursue this integration with an 18-month set of activities that move from vision and ideation, through specification of outcomes and obstacles, to the identification and ultimate creation of systems, plans, tools, and services that are deeply practical and can be used by all community stakeholders. What starts as a general interrogation of what each individual in the room thinks is a more ideal community eventually transitions into a collective conversation about the mechanisms that can be crafted and deployed at a local and national level to ensure that, as we pursue our more idealized communities, we are:

4. Ensuring that the arts are seen as a necessary tool and artists are active partners.
5. Building a deeper understanding of the role that arts and culture play in the creation of healthy communities.
6. Assembling a set of examples about the ways in which the arts are currently working with other sectors to carry forward critical community progress towards equity, health, and vibrancy.



## Why “Healthy, Vibrant, Equitable Communities?”

We chose the words “healthy, vibrant, equitable communities” deliberately, because they speak to our goal that this work explore the impulses driving people from their most basic to their most complex needs. Health, equity, and vibrancy each exist in tandem with each other. Inequalities manifest within each area, and this work aims squarely at those inequalities. We hope we are making spaces where Americans for the Arts, as well as the others assembled, can listen to challenges communities face, surface visions communities are moving toward, and begin to explore what arts-based tools might help that movement.

We recognize that “community” is a concept with more than one meaning, but in this context we view community as a collection of affiliated individuals, which may be geographic, or not. Community identity is fluid and sometimes impermanent. With this project, we seek to learn from the relative agency, expertise, and idiosyncrasy of the individuals in the room as it pertains to every community through which they move—and to determine if there are common tools, skills, and systems that can help move communities in a more desired direction.

## **What Else?**

The New Community Visions Initiative is just one way in which we are Transforming America’s Communities Through the Arts. As we carry forward the visioning work, we also continue to educate and empower decision makers and advocates through programs like the pARTnership Movement (tailored toward business leaders), the Arts Education Navigator (focusing on providing online strategies for those invested in advancing arts education at the local, state and national levels), strategic partnerships (with non-arts entities such as the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Lieutenant Governors Association, The Conference Board, the National PTA, and many others), and the National Initiative on Arts and Health in the Military (working with the Army, Veterans Administration, American Legion Auxiliary, and others to demonstrate the healing power of the arts to our returning veterans).

These and many other programs are critical to helping our nation’s leaders understand the transformative power of the arts as a community development tool and problem solver.

Visit us at [www.AmericansForTheArts.org/CommunityVisions](http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org/CommunityVisions).

---

FORUMS CURATOR AND DOCUMENTARIAN

---

Michael Rohd and the Center for  
Performance and Civic Practice

Margy Waller and the Topos Partnership

---

FUNDING PARTNERS

---

Americans for the Arts would like to thank the following  
funding partners for their significant support of the  
New Community Visions Initiative.

 **Knight Foundation**



We would also like to thank the City of San José Office of Cultural Affairs, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Applied Materials Foundation, The California Wellness Foundation, Ken and Mary Ann Ferguson, Kirkpatrick Foundation, Cultural Development Corporation, The Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, Arts Council Oklahoma City, Mayor Weinberger and Burlington City Arts, the Vermont Community Foundation, Allied Arts, Norman Arts Council, Oklahoma Arts Council, and the Oklahoma City Museum of Art for their generous support of the New Community Visions Initiative.

*Support as of March 15, 2016*

---

## NEW COMMUNITY VISIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

---

The New Community Visions Advisory Committee, which has informed the nature and trajectory of the project, includes:

- Jennifer Cole, Metro Nashville Arts Commission
- Deborah Cullinan, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
- Shannon Daut, Alaska State Council on the Arts
- Carla Dirlikov, opera singer
- Randy Engstrom, Seattle Office of Arts & Culture
- Floyd Green, Aetna Inc.
- Tatiana Hernandez, Hemera Foundation
- Maria Rosario Jackson, The Kresge Foundation
- Michael Killoren, National Endowment for the Arts
- Jeremy Liu, PolicyLink
- Ron Ragin, composer and artist
- Bahia Ramos, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
- Holly Sidford, Helicon Collaborative
- Nick Slie, performing artist, Mondo Bizzaro
- Regina R. Smith, The Kresge Foundation
- Katie Steger, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Carlton Turner, Alternate ROOTS
- Nella Vera, Serino/Coyne
- Laura Zabel, Springboard for the Arts



---

## REGIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL PARTNERS

---

The regional gatherings associated with New Community Visions would not have been possible without the participation of this growing list of regional, state, and local partners who have contributed thought leadership, proposed the names of participants, and assisted in crafting the regional events.

Special thanks to our national funding partners, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, for their significant support.

### **Regional**

- Arts Midwest
- Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation
- Mid-America Arts Alliance
- New England Foundation for the Arts
- SouthArts
- WESTAF

### **State**

- California Arts Council
- Georgia Council for the Arts
- Minnesota State Arts Board
- New Mexico Arts
- Oklahoma Arts Council
- Oklahomans for the Arts
- Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
- Vermont Arts Council
- West Virginia Division of Culture and History

## **Local**

- Allied Arts
- Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia
- Arts Council of Oklahoma City
- Burlington City Arts
- Philadelphia Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy
- City of San José Office of Cultural Affairs
- City of Santa Fe Arts Commission
- Clay Center for the Arts & Sciences of West Virginia
- Creative Santa Fe
- Cultural Development Corporation
- Flynn Center for the Performing Arts
- Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance
- Macon Arts Alliance
- Metropolitan Regional Arts Council
- Minneapolis Office of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy
- Norman Arts Council
- Oklahoma Arts Council
- Oklahoma City Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs
- Oklahomans for the Arts

---

## COLLABORATORS AND VOICES

---

### **Collaborators**

- Michael Rohd, Center for Performance and Civic Practice
- Margy Waller, Topos Partnership
- Barbara Schaffer Bacon and Mara Walker, Americans for the Arts

### **Voices**

- Jennifer Armstrong
- Hilary Bass
- Roberto Bedoya
- Rosa Cabrera
- John Davis
- Matthew Fluharty
- Maryo Gard Ewell
- Julie Garreau
- Ian Garrett
- Talia Gibas
- Deana Haggag
- Brea M. Heidelberg
- Sean Hendrickson
- Christina Sanchez Juarez
- LaMoine Laughlin
- Liz Lerman
- Clayton Lord
- Robert L. Lynch
- John Malpede
- Laura Mandala
- Libby Maynard
- Donna Neuwirth
- Cherie Norton
- Michael Osowski
- Marty Pottenger
- Felipe Buitrago Restrepo
- Judy Rollins
- Jay Salinas
- Kahikina de Silva
- Jessica Solomon
- Vicky Holt Takamine
- Erik Takeshita
- Judith Tannenbaum
- Lindsay Tucker So
- Carol Tuynman
- Mark Valdez
- Michael Warlum
- Constance Y. White
- Laura Zabel

---

# EVERY DAY THE ARTS TRANSFORM AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES THROUGH

---

EDUCATION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ECONOMIC IMPACT HELPING AT-RISK

---

HEALTH AND WELLNESS CELEBRATING DIVERSITY BUILDING A CREATIVE WORKFORCE

---

ENVIRONMENT CRIME PREVENTION TOURISM RETURNING MILITARY AND VETERANS

---

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION POLITICAL ACTION INFRASTRUCTURE ACTIVISM

---

*The arts transform America by working with other sectors to contribute to the health, vibrancy, and equity of communities nationwide.*