

## ARTS & CULTURE: Inspiring Change

*“It is the chants we sing in resistance that have kept the memory of our movements alive. It is the streets we bomb with resistance graffiti. It is the strategy sessions we have to keep media accountable. It is the radio, video, web, and theater pieces we create to validate our experiences and use our culture as resistance.”*

Third World Majority

Art moves and inspires. It has the power to transform communities, to provoke thought and lead to insight, to change hearts and minds, and to inspire action. It can expand our vision or awe us with beauty. From Diego Rivera to Mahalia Jackson to Bill T. Jones, art has also been a force for progressive social change. Intuitively we know that art has a role in social change. If we begin to change the way we see the world, we can discover and reveal an alternative worth fighting for. If the majority of the world can perceive their current environment as changeable by the force of their resistance, we are considerably closer to personal, social, political and economic liberation.

### Arts and Social Movements

Many social movements have been propelled and shaped by art and artists: the Mexican muralist movement that followed the Mexican Revolution, the ground-breaking music in the Civil Rights Movement, arts activism in the HIV/AIDS fight, and the political music in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Looking at these varied examples, one can see that art can provide frames, mobilize resources, communicate information, activate and reach diverse constituencies, and build community. At the heart of each of these functions is the ability of art and artists to arouse emotion and convey a new story, a peripheral narrative at odds with generally accepted cultural narratives. As a movement, we can champion both the creation of these stories and their integration into our cultural understanding.

Artists' response to the AIDS pandemic, for example, illustrates the diverse roles that art can play. Art, wrote the AIDS activist and critic Douglas Crimp, has the power to save. But to support this power, *“we will have to abandon the idealistic conception of art. We don't need a cultural renaissance; we need cultural practices actively participating in the struggle against AIDS.”* In the 1980s when the crisis first erupted, artists were instrumental at all levels:

- critically acclaimed writers, artists and performers, like Tony Kushner and Paul Monette created work to educate a high-end public audience;
- local arts collectives like L.A.'s “Artists Confronting AIDS,” and San Francisco's “Love Like This Theatre Project” reached into their communities to raise awareness;
- activist and community-based organizations, like ACT UP and the Gran Fury, used sophisticated advertising strategies and art world connections to detonate political consciousness in spaces where demonstrations were not invited;
- arts activism around AIDS continues to evolve as the struggle continues and international human rights organizations such as Breakthrough address the global pandemic through arts and popular culture.

Other contemporary examples abound:

- Alternative art spaces, like Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) are building community and nurturing not only young and under-recognized artists, but also newly emerging art forms, and they are providing the impetus for dialogue about contemporary arts and culture.

- Youth organizations have capitalized on the power of hip-hop to engage young people and mobilize them around issues relevant to them.
- In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Finding Our Folk Tour allowed evacuees to share their journey through art and culture and feel connected to their community and to a common narrative.

## Arts and Culture Funding Landscape

Support for arts and culture made up almost 13 percent of foundation funding in 2003, for a total of \$1.8 billion dollars. But if you look more closely at these numbers you will see that almost 60% of these funds went to support museums and performing arts institutions. Most arts funding is to mainstream organizations, rather than community-based arts or arts and culture focused on social change, and less and less funding is reaching artists directly. An integrated approach to supporting art and artists for social change may be in our future but this is just a starting point

## Looking Forward

Whether you are passionate about visual arts, music, poetry media or any other art form, there is an opportunity to support art for social justice. In developing arts funding strategies, there are issues, priorities and principles to keep in mind so that the arts might play a more integrated role in our movement:

- **Funding arts and culture is not an adjunct to social change philanthropy — it is a central and powerful strategy.** As such, as much priority and strategic analysis should be given to arts funding as we give to funding in support of economic justice, sustainability or any other issue.
- **Investment in arts and culture to inspire social change requires investment in individual artists. Many foundations are unable to invest in individual arts,** but as individual donors we have an opportunity to nurture and support their role within their community as change agents and leaders in the movement.
- **Organizations with artists at their core can better represent the interests of artists and take chances.** There are organizations that work with or support individual artists, but those that involve artists at all levels of the organization are much better positioned to serve them and their audiences. We need to look at the community of artists themselves; not the growth of institutions and commercial success, but art and artists rooted in their communities
- **Employ a rigorous race, class, and gender analysis to your funding strategy.** Arts and activism are inextricably linked but we must be conscious of who is being reached and how. There is an opportunity for artists and the communities that support them to use media to tell different stories than those we hear in the mainstream media channels and to engage marginalized communities in the creative process.

There is an opportunity for us as a community of individual donors to be thoughtful and deliberate in how we support art as a vehicle for social change. In the following pages, we present funding strategies that attempt to address some of these priorities. These strategies push you to think beyond the art itself to the process of creation, the community leaders doing the creating, the stifled stories being told and the communities being engaged.

## Funding Strategy One: INVEST IN INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

Often when we think about the role of art in social change movements, we think primarily of the product, the art itself. But it is clear that the process of creating art and sharing it can be just as powerful as the art itself. The transformative practice of the creative process can generate new ideas and inspiration that in turn will develop new leaders and new voices for the movement.

The cultural wars of the 80s and 90's had a chilling effect on the arts community. Mainstream cultural institutions — museums, music halls, galleries — are just now beginning to experience some semblance of stability. But the individual artists' hands, feet, tools, space are still under attack — by a stifling political environment, by caution and conservatism among mainstream and government arts funders, by neighborhood gentrification that has robbed many artists of workspace, and by the basic challenge of getting by in the current economy. Artists are being starved of their creative time and space and of their ability to engage in collaborative processes.

Alternative models of funding do exist. For example, witnessing increasing challenges for individual artists to simply continue to work and create, the **Lambent Fellowships in the Arts** award unrestricted grants to individual artists. The award supports diversity and stimulates New York City's cultural dialogue by selecting visual and performing artists in all five boroughs of New York whose artistic work intersects with social justice visions. This award has encouraged the fellows to take risks in creative explorations in ways that were unimaginable to them before.

### Suggested Strategy:

- Support programs and/or organizations that prioritize support for, and investment in, individual artists. These include fellowship programs, community-based artist-in-residency programs, and alternative arts organizations that have individual, emerging artists at their core
- Support organizations that nurture and strengthen the work of individual artists. These include local organizations that provide technical assistance, institutional structure, rehearsal/studio space and fiscal sponsorship for artists' projects, and regional and national networks that promote artists' work and bring it to a larger audience.

### What to Look For:

- **Remember the middle of the country:** many artists feel the need to move to the coast in order to pursue their work and obtain funding opportunities, leading to a creative brain drain in some regions. Look instead for opportunities to enable artists to stay in their communities across the country.
- **Support initiatives that engage artists as decision makers:** Many organizations and funders use arts committees that are made up of artists themselves.
- **Connect with other grantmakers:** affinity groups such as Grantmakers in the Arts are valuable resources to learn about emerging artists and the organizations that support them.

### Possible Organizations to Fund

#### FUNDS/PROGRAMS FOR INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

- Creative Capital
- Astraea Foundation for Justice Visual Arts Fund
- Frameline Completion Fund - for LGBT filmmakers
- Women in Film
- National Performance Network

#### ALTERNATIVE ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

- The Kitchen (New York)
- Diverse Works (Houston)
- Lower Manhattan Cultural Center.
- Conjunction Arts (New York)
- LACE (Los Angeles)
- The Luggage Store (San Francisco)
- Mad Art (St. Louis)
- SPACES (Cleveland)

## Funding Strategy Two:

# INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED ARTS ACTIVISM

**SUPPORTING SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS THAT USE ARTISTIC PRACTICE AS AN ORGANIZING TOOL, AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS ROOTED IN A SPECIFIC COMMUNITY.**

Many social justice organizations understand the inherent role and value of art, and the strength it can bring to their work. They have built partnerships among artists, organizers and educators, working together to mobilize their community around specific issues. Similarly, many arts organizations have emerged out of specific disenfranchised communities and serve to bring voice and visibility to those communities and to inspire them to action. Whether strengthening local communities and local organizing efforts or having a broad, national reach, each of these models of using art for social change are powerful alone, and even more powerful when they work in partnership. Examples include:

- **Blackout Arts Collective** is a grassroots coalition of artists, activists and educators working to empower communities of color through the arts. BAC uses the tools of culture and education to raise awareness and catalyze action around the critical issues that impact its communities.
- The **National Hip Hop Political Convention** is the initiative of a coalition of organizations, artists and educators committed to the community-based movement at the origins of hip hop culture and to using hip hop to engage young people and support the movement towards increased civic and political participation by the Hip Hop generation. They held the first of what are to become bi-annual events in 2004, where they voted on, adopted and endorsed a political agenda and trained local organizing committees to implement that agenda across the country.
- **Afro Solo Theater Company** in San Francisco organizes an annual Arts Festival in San Francisco that combines performances by emerging and established African American artists with forums bringing together artists, organizations, activists and other community members to discuss the issues, such as the impact of HIV/AIDS, that are explored in the art.

### Suggested Strategy:

- Support community-based organizations that utilize art and the creative process as a central organizing, base-building tool. A particular priority is organizations that effectively bring together professional artists, grassroots organizations and communities in partnership.
- Invest in culturally specific art centers that are grounded in communities and that partner with community-based, social justice organizations that work with emerging artists.

### What to Look For:

- Don't just look at the end product or judge impact by marketing, audience numbers, box office exhibitions, etc. — the artistic process, and its success in engaging, mobilizing and inspiring a community, is often more important than the product.
- When investing in new technology-based media, be sensitive to issues of access and the digital divide — this divide exists in arts and culture too.

### Possible Organizations to Fund

#### CULTURALLY SPECIFIC ART CENTERS

- Studio Museum of Harlem
- The Mexican Museum
- El Museo de Barrio
- Intermedia Arts (Minneapolis)
- Blackout Arts Collective (National)
- Queer Latino/a Artists Coalition (QUELACO)

#### COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS THAT USE ART AS AN ORGANIZING TOOL

- Groundswell Community Mural Project
- Precita Eyes
- Hip Hop Association

## Funding Strategy Three: MEDIA ARTS AND ACTIVISM

### INITIATIVES TO INTEGRATE PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL CHANGE IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Strengthening alternative community-based arts organizations and individual artists — as described in the first two strategies — is crucial if we are to counter the narrow and misleading view of reality as portrayed in the mainstream media. But the fact is that we live in a media-driven culture. To reach a broad audience, the progressive movement needs to be actively engaged in the mainstream too. This means both monitoring and challenging media misrepresentations, and pushing for the inclusion of progressive cultural and social change perspectives and diverse worldviews and opinions. Media has the powerful ability to shape and guide public opinion through images, words and texts. This is especially true with today's monopolized ownership and content control of the multiple communication mediums: radio, television, cable, print, etc. Organizations that focus on monitoring the ownership and content of these shared communications commons are necessary alongside organizations that are working to re-create value based media.

- **Breakthrough**, an international organization with offices in U.S. and India, partners with the creative world through radio, music, art, television, theater and other communications to promote values of dignity and equality. Working in partnership with women's groups, Breakthrough produced an award winning music video highlighting the issue of domestic violence that was widely distributed and aired on MTV.
- **Adbusters**, is working to “advance the new social activist movement of the information age” through a range of media including its magazine, website, spoof ads, flash media, social justice advertising agency, and more.

### Suggested Strategy:

- Invest in initiatives and projects (such as Breakthrough) that support and encourage community-based, non-arts-focused social change organizations to integrate the use of arts and culture that interface with broader popular culture and mainstream media.
- Support “media watchdog” social justice organizations that work to ensure fair, accurate and inclusive representation of marginalized communities in the mainstream media and pop culture.
- Fund social justice organizations that provide media literacy training to youth, women, low-income communities and communities of color.

### What to Look For:

- Recognize that this work exists in a larger regulatory landscape, where issues such as media ownership and communications policies impact community based organizations working in the field.
- Support for alternative media organizations and the development and distribution of publications that challenge mainstream perspectives remains crucial to the progressive movement.

### Possible Organizations to Fund

#### ORGANIZATIONS INTEGRATING ARTS

- Breakthrough
- Esperanza Peace and Justice Center (San Antonio)

#### MEDIA JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS

- Third World Majority (Oakland)
- Media Alliance (San Francisco)
- ColorLines Magazine
- Paper Tiger Television (New York)
- AdBusters
- Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)
- The Media Justice Fund (an initiative of the Funding Exchange)

#### MEDIA LITERACY

- 911 Media Arts Center (Seattle)
- Alter.net