

EXPLORING CIVIC ART

Understanding need to support art
as a tool for civic dialogue



THE
BLUE
HOUSE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents a 5-month research and experimentation project to explore the intersection of art and civic dialogue in New Orleans, led by the Blue House Civic Studio (BHCS).

January 2018

Phase 1

Preliminary research via public discussion, online survey, review of existing practices, and conversation

Phase 2

Interviewing artists and arts organizations

Phase 3

Compiled and analyzed interview data

Phase 4

Determined potential programs

Phase 5

Group critique of proposed programs

Phase 6

Prototyping new programming

May 2018 and onward

PROJECT GOALS

1. Explore how The Blue House might leverage art and arts programming to further its mission of fostering dialogue about civic issues in New Orleans.
2. To identify opportunities for the Blue House to support and contribute to the on-going work of organizations and individuals in New Orleans already fostering civic dialogue through art.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

To increase prevalence of artwork in New Orleans focused on civic issues, and as a result, greater public understanding and engagement with civic issues.

THREE CENTRAL FINDINGS EMERGED FROM THIS PROJECT.

First, artists and arts organizations in New Orleans are **in need of a common set of resources and services**, regardless of the thematic focus of their work.

Second, many artists and arts organizations in New Orleans are **interested and eager to incorporate civic issues** into their work, however, most are focused on survival and would need funding and support to do so sustainably.

Third, there are **multiple opportunities to create low-cost programs** (suggested by artists and arts organizations) that could provide a platform for artists and arts organizations to engage with civic issues, while also addressing their common needs.

Artists, community and technical experts, journalists, and Blue House staff gather for a dinner and dialogue workshop to discuss the Louisiana court system



INTRODUCTION

Over five months, the Blue House Civic Studio researched the overlap of visual art and civic dialogue in New Orleans. Emerging out of a series of conversations and events hosted by BHCS, this research brought to light the immense potential for art to facilitate dialogue about civic issues, building broader public engagement and understanding of those issues. BHCS was interested in finding ways to support artists and arts organizations in doing this work, and launched a 5-month exploratory research project to understand the current landscape of art and civic dialogue work in New Orleans, and identify opportunities for BHCS to develop programming or resources to support those already doing this work in our city.

This report only scratches the surface of the landscape and opportunities for art to facilitate and contribute to civic dialogue in New Orleans. BHCS worked to gather information through public forums, interviews, an online survey, and numerous informal conversations, however, we found much more content than we had time or resources to fully review. This report shares our initial findings and preliminary insights from a representative sample of artists and arts organizations in New Orleans. In the future, we hope to secure funding to expand this research and build a more comprehensive understanding of opportunities and existing efforts around art and civic dialogue in New Orleans.

We were inspired and motivated by what we learned through this research, and are currently planning next steps, building partnerships to test out ideas, and exploring funding to continue this work. If you would like to learn more, partner with us, or discuss support of any kind for this work, please don't hesitate to reach out to us -- hello@thebluehousenola.com

HOW WE LEARNED

We used a mixed methodology to conduct this research, hosting events, using surveys, looking to other programs, and conducting interviews to gain inspiration and insights into the use of visual art for civic dialogue in New Orleans.

“Understanding the Field”
on page 8

Looking to precedents that intersect arts with civic issues

Online survey soliciting feedback and ideas around programming

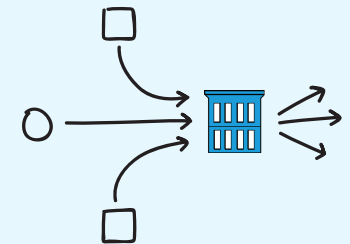
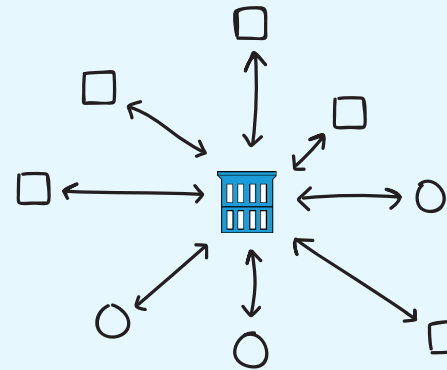
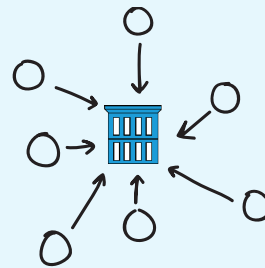
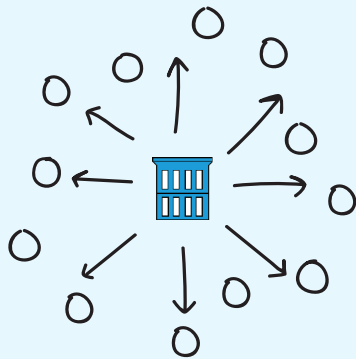
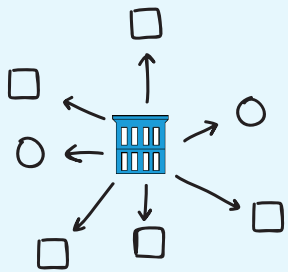
Public group brainstorm during Fika coffee hour




“Interviews and Insights”
on page 10 & 11

Interview with arts organizations and artists

“Potential Solutions”
on page 12

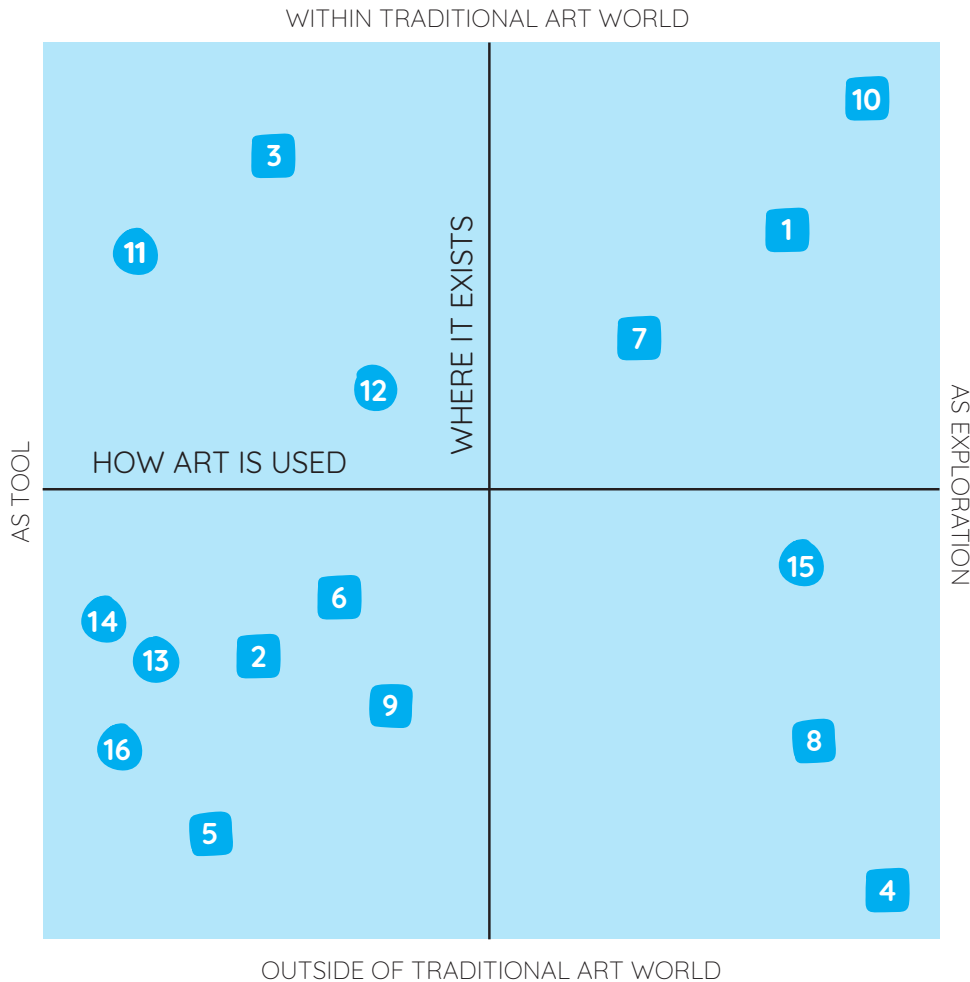
Review data with stakeholders for feedback



-  = The Blue House
-  = Individuals (non-member)
-  = Organizations

UNDERSTANDING THE FIELD

Learning through looking at other programs



- = Organization
- = Artist/Project

Art + [] = Civic Dialogue

To do this research, we had to define some terms. To us, the intersection of art and civic dialogue meant art beyond it's typical world and purpose. This led us to look at programs that applied art to different subjects, whether as a tool, exploration, problem solving process, or all of the above.

Through exploring these collaborative and interdisciplinary examples of how organizations in other cities and countries have leveraged art to facilitate civic dialogue and engage the public, we found that these programs varied widely. Some programs are traditional nonprofit artists residencies, others are programs within government or research labs. No matter the funding structure, purpose, scale, or role of art within the program, each program mixes art with something else: community problem solving, scientific inquiry, city government. From this realization, two main spectra arose: how the art is used, and where art is being applied. From these axis, we found that of the seven key examples we found, that each program mixes the use and application of art, providing a rich landscape and opportunity for future work around the intersection of art and civic dialogue.

PRECEDENTS

1. Slow Research Lab, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2. Public Artist in Residency, New York City, NY
3. Coleman Center for the Arts, York, AL
4. Research Residencies, Stanford University, CA
5. SETI Institute Artist in Residency, Mountain View, CA
6. Shared City Residency, Berlin, Germany
7. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA,
8. Artist in Residence, Denali National Park, Denali, AK
9. Antarctic Artists & Writers Program, Antarctica
10. Creative Time, New York City, NY
11. Theaster Gates/Stony Island Arts Bank, Chicago, IL
12. Jackie Sumell/Herman's House, New Orleans, LA
13. Mel Chin/Fundred, New Orleans/traveling (based in Houston, TX)
14. Jer Thrope, St. Louis Map Room, St. Louis, MO, (based in New York City, NY)
15. Candy Change/Before I Die, New Orleans, LA
16. Rick Lowe/Project Row House, Houston, TX

INTERVIEWS

We held 10 interviews to learn about the current state of arts in New Orleans to learn more about needs and opportunities.

ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

Blights Out: artist collective working around gentrification via place-based installation, performance, design, and community organizing

New Orleans Arts Council: support arts and culture and demonstrate how they transform communities

Pelican Bomb: curatorial organization that supports local artists and writers by connecting audience with their work and serving as New Orleans' home for critical writing

St. Roch Community Church Residency: nine-month low barrier artist residency for non-locals to visit New Orleans and produce work in St. Roch community

Cultralyt: Online platform for artists marketed to the city to address income gap between artists and cultural economy.

BAR NONE: nonprofit that works with those affected by incarceration through visual arts and music

ARTISTS INTERVIEWED

Fari Nzinga: cultural anthropologist, writer, artist, professor, co-founder of Color Bloc, and artist behind The Rent Is Too Damn High

Anne Nelson: painter and professor, Joan Mitchell Center resident, and member of Staple Goods

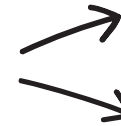
Shoshana Gordon: printmaker, community organizer, Paper Monuments team member

Jeremy Paten, Kurston Melton + Caitlin Waugh: collaborators on new mixed media project around race, nature, and plants

INSIGHTS

Needs and opportunities informed by local artists and arts organizations

Artist Events



A variety of artist-oriented gatherings (salons, forums, panels) that allow artists to learn about new topics and connect with each other

Low-stakes opportunities to speak about process and work, and to receive feedback on content and presentation skills

Professional Development



Workshops to get feedback on portfolio format and its content

Business workshops on graphic design, website development and pricing

Consulting on projects and collaborations: what organizations and entities to connect with

Direct Resources



Artists need more funding, sales, and ways to make money doing meaningful work

In-kind access to space and equipment to document artwork

Creating programs and residencies fund and support artists to produce new work.



Artists and organizations repeatedly suggested focusing on pre-emerging and aspiring artists for new programs

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Using the insights we found, we developed potential solutions for the Blue House and other entities to consider

Artist Events

Salons: supporting and/or hosting small, intimate events that allow artists to share and critique current work.

Lectures: coordinating talks, panels, and evening programming about thematic topics that more purposefully keep artists in mind, whether through directly promoting them to artists, or putting artists in discussion with topic experts.

Connecting Artists: hosting happy hours, artist “speed dating” events to connect with peers, curators, and/or mentors; database of local artists; and opportunities to connect with organizations that need artists.

Artists have many needs. Organizations working in entrepreneurship support, event planning, academia, journalism, and finance would particularly benefit artists’ ability to create work around civic issues.

Direct Resources

In-Kind Resources: meeting artist needs by providing photo equipment and space to facilitating a regular work-documentation day; hosting a Portfolio Review Day for artists to receive feedback on the structure and content of their portfolio; coordinating a low-barrier arts markets; creating database of funding resources.

Residency: creating new avenues for artists to learn new information, techniques and/or produce new work, especially with funding and studio space.

Professional Development

Business Development

Workshop: coordinating pricing, social media, branding, and other business development workshops specifically geared towards artists.

Design Clinics: providing pro-bono design services to artists to turn creative work into digitized logo, business card, or web graphic.

HURDLES

Factors to consider for successful programming

Time: Build trust between partnership and coordinate meetings with busy organizations and artists takes a significant amount of time and can slow project pace. Particular effort should be invested in measures to keep project momentum moving forward.

Capacity & Resources: many organizations, the Blue House included, lack the capacity and funding to take on new exploratory programming.

Structure: a unique challenge for the Blue House is our LLC structure. Though being an LLC allows for us to be nimble and implement ideas relatively quickly, this tax status means we are not eligible for grant funding. However, by working with nonprofits, the Blue House and partners can leverage the assets of both organizational structures.

FUNDING

Potential avenues for program or project funding.

Methods to fund and support work include:

sponsorship, grants, crowdsourcing, in-kind donations, tickets, fee for service, and subscription models.

Grants Opportunities

National Endowment for the Arts:
Challenge America
Art Works
Our Town
Research
Platform Fund
PEN America
Greater New Orleans Foundation
Office of Neighborhood
Engagement
ArtPlace America
Surdna Foundation
Graham Foundation
CurryStone
Kresge Foundation
Open Societies Foundation
Nathan Cummings
Caesars Foundation
Entergy
Decentralized Louisiana
Arts Fund



MOVING FORWARD

Over five months, the Blue House Civic Studio researched the overlap of art and civic dialogue in New Orleans.

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The Blue House is a shared space for dialogue, collective learning, and collaboration. We are a community of civic-minded people and organizations who share workspace, resources, and expertise, and support and challenge each other to do our most meaningful work. The Blue House also regularly hosts programming such as community potluck dinners, workshops, lectures, and events that bring people together to engage with civic issues.

The Blue House Civic Studio is a collective formed by Blue House members to pursue research, projects, and opportunities that bridge the gaps between sectors and disciplines in New Orleans, using dialogue, collective learning, and collaborative action to work toward systemic change in our city. The Blue House Civic Studio is guided by four values; **be good neighbors, challenge injustice, learn and experiment, and work with partners.**



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