

Exhibit "C"



HOME

ABOUT

GRANTS

NEWS

LIFETIME HONORS

PUBLICATIONS

ARTISTIC FIELDS

CONTACT

Home » Art Works Blog

ART WORKS BLOG

Taking a Look at the Role of the Modern Local Arts Agency

October 9, 2014

By Jennifer Cole, Metro Nashville Arts Commission



Jennifer Cole, Executive Director, Metro Nashville Arts Commission. Photo by Jerry Atnip.

"Artists can't thrive if the city doesn't thrive. The city can't thrive if the artists aren't engaged and safe--safe to live and safe to create."--Jennifer Cole

I'm sitting in yet another meeting where I'm the playing the role of United Nations translator.

This time, I'm the arbiter between music industry leaders and planning officials trying to balance the push for mixed-use infill with a historic music studio district. I de-code TIF (tax increment financing) and SP (specific plan) and UDO (urban design overlay) for my studio friends, frame the current recording context for urban design pals, and suggest that a good idea is here somewhere if we can simply speak the same language.

I move on to my next meeting, where I will reprise my role as translator, this time between an aerial dance company and the division of city permits.

I run a local arts agency and this is my job.

At **Metro Arts**, our vision is really simple: all Nashvillians participate in a creative life. We came to this beautiful, simple reality a few years ago after stealing liberally from (former NEA Chair) Bill Ivey's notion of "expressive life" and radically changed our *raison d'être*.

We moved away from imagining the cultural institutions we fund as our main audience and chose to *focus on the citizen*--their experience, their access to the arts and the transformation that they experience when they are part of a vibrant cultural community. It's another blog post all together to describe how we slowly made that pivot. But we have, and what it means is I now spend far more time translating than reviewing grants or running events.

We adopted the notion of an ecosystem. Our belief is art is created within a messy, complicated and sometimes charged intersection of artists, organizations, for-profit businesses, makers, and educators who are, in part, functioning in the large context of a pulsing city.

Artists can't thrive if the city doesn't thrive. The city can't thrive if the artists aren't engaged and safe--safe to live and safe to create.

We came to believe that our work wasn't about giving out grants or installing public art, but about creating the conditions that allow communities and artists to thrive --TOGETHER.

On my grumpy days, I blame Richard Florida. He lit the torch, fanned by Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley and Michael Bloomberg, that cities are modern petri dishes for innovation. There is an all-out arms race to grab what a 2011 CEOs for Cities report calls "The Young and the Restless"--the artists and makers who are evidently holding the sway of humanity (or at least local economies) in their hands. Mayors now throw around "creative class" like golf clubs and back slaps. This isn't a passing fad like BitCoin; it is a permanent mental shift in the way cities and leaders operate.

It is also a candy-coated, bright neon opportunity for Local Arts to create a new municipal narrative.

In the short term, our work has become ambiguous. It means sitting with a group of fashion designers and pattern makers and debating what a city context would look like for job training and light manufacturing districts. It means framing public art like capstone research projects for high school juniors. It means convening developers and community development financial institutions to design new loan products for arts co-ops. It may go nowhere, but it might go everywhere.

Ecosystems are subject to healthy transformation over time or perilous extinction if some jarring event occurs. Cities are changing rapidly, and local arts agency work has to adapt in language, tone, and execution to remain relevant.

It is the stuff that isn't sexy on an annual report, and it is very hard to explain to your Aunt Mildred at Thanksgiving.

It means getting under the city's skin versus decorating it.

It's why I sit in meetings and translate.

I pull out chairs for artists and make sure they are at the table. I teach myself Housing and Urban Development agency policies and programs. I speak out at meetings on transit planning.

I accept my role in this evolutionary biology of arts and culture in America.

I also wonder what core conditions we as arts leaders could adopt that would help fuel the inevitable adaptation of our world?

Required Municipal Practice in BA and MFA programs: What would happen if studio practice was balanced with an understanding of cities and communities? What would happen with arts administration programs if there was

more alignment with social issues and pedagogy in urban studies and policy programs? What would happen if we created *and* translated?

Philanthropic Funding of Change Management in Communities: What would happen if we didn't focus on the shiny ball of a placemaking project, but instead, funded the collaborative process that made it happen? What would happen if local arts agencies could frame a change map for their city and were supported to help shift the ecosystem, shift the language, and shift the relationship of artist to community over time versus through the lens of a time-sensitive project? What would happen if we funded transformational leadership versus transformational projects?

Offices of Creative Practice: City managers and mayors love offices of sustainability, innovation, and new mechanics. Several cities have gone so far as to appoint poet laureates or artists in residence. What if instead we had a nation full of offices of Creative Practice, supporting the practice of creative innovation and approach to storm water and school desegregation and job training? Think about how LEED certification has become the bare minimum cities will even consider for buildings to remain competitive in a global world. What would creative practice certification look like for city departments and for neighborhoods?

These ideas pop into my unconscious as I moderate between a glassblower and the fire marshal. I'm excited and quite uncomfortable. I'm process versus product. I'm orchestrating a series of "ah! moments" that I hope become practice and that I pray become public policy. I'm edging towards a reality that is less about what I give in grant money and more about what I craft in community reality.

I'm not quite sure how to do it, but I'm exactly where I need to be.

Jennifer Cole sparks conversations that drive creative life in Nashville, Tennessee. When she isn't translating she works on recipes, poetry, pithy Facebook posts, and motherhood.

Add new comment

Your name *

E-mail *

The content of this field is kept private and will not be shown publicly.

Homepage

Comment *