NATIONAL ▾ ASSEMBLY ▾ OF ▾ LOCAL ▾ ARTS ▾ AGENCIES

M O N O G R A P H S

▾ Published Monthly for Members ▾ Volume 4, Number 2 ▾ February 1995

The Public Art of Re-Collection

by Yankee Johnson, Arts Program Director
Office of Cultural Affairs, City of San Jose, California

Beginning this month, the next four NALAA Monographs will focus on the issues addressed by the four preconferences at our 1995 Annual Convention in San Jose. This month's Monographs addresses issues of public memorials and the difficulties in defining a community's history. In the coming issues, we will explore further examples of arts in education plans, innovative fundraising techniques, and a new kind of cultural facility — arts incubators. These Monographs are intended to spark your imagination and make you think about these subjects before you arrive in San Jose, as well as provide a useful reference document once you return home.

Bronze Men

Bronze men sit astride bronze steeds,
Frozen, forgotten in city parks, patient perches for pigeons.
Bronze men rear on deserted islands,
Still, circled by eyeless cars, gathering urban grime.
Cities are full of equestrian bronze men,
waiting for their day to come again.

Suppose, for once, instead of hurrying past, you were to pause before one of these equestrian figures. You'd inspect the plaque, identify the rider, learn nothing about his horse. The bronze rider's patron, now 100 years dead, would issue you a terse invitation to celebrate the muscular virtues — discovery, empire, military conquest, manifest destiny — confident that the heroic rider's right to posterity had been permanently won. And who would have argued with him? After all, when the rider assumed his mount, the world was supposed to be, if not homogeneous, at least content with his dominion. The record of his acts was thought then to be as immutable as the bronze from which he was cast.

Today, monument makers face subtler challenges than they did 100 years ago. History's victims rise like the ghost of Hamlet's father crying out for redress. The discovered resent the discoverer, the conquered the conqueror. Erstwhile antagonists live as neighbors and share equal rights. No gender or race or ethnicity can claim a monopoly on heroism and achievement. No longer is there one history over which a dominant culture has hegemony, but many histories, each with its own heroes and heroines, each with its own stories to tell of achievement, sacrifice and pain.

Public art programs that once resisted commemorative projects, perceiving them not to be public art at all, have now begun to undertake projects that will tell some of the untold stories of these histories and begin to redress centuries of neglect. They face a daunting task for which most are ill-equipped. They have no reliable map, no coherent body of experience, to guide

MONOGRAPHS is one of the benefits of membership in the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, mailed monthly to all members. To discuss ideas for submission, contact Deborah Wolfer Bissen, Publications Coordinator, NALAA, 927 15th Street N.W., 12th Floor, Washington, DC 20005-2304, Phone 202.371.2830. Editing and Design: Deborah Wolfer Bissen.

them through a minefield of such explosive issues as cultural equity, the ownership of history and the relativity of historical truth.

"It took the most elegant and powerful memorial of our time and perhaps any time, the Vietnam Memorial, to lend legitimacy to the idea that new forms with contemporary relevance could connect communities meaningfully to their pasts."

Until recently, of course, commemorative art was about the only public art in this country. Unfortunately, far from providing useful models, the monuments of the past — the mounted generals, the Minute Men and Doughboys — have only compounded the problem for public art programs that undertake commemorative projects. The very ubiquity of representational statuary has established the popular understanding that the form is *de rigueur* for memorials, as though history could only be told in historically sanctioned ways. A petition to develop a commemorative project, typically originating from one of many competing interests in the community, will already be freighted with the sponsor's expectation that the memorial will be representational and narrative in form. Any move that appears to deviate from that direction will normally be resisted.

It took the most elegant and powerful memorial of our time and perhaps any time, the Vietnam Memorial, to lend legitimacy to the idea that new forms with contemporary relevance could connect communities meaningfully to their pasts. Here was a memorial, at last, that seemed to have been created for *E Pluribus Unum,* speaking to Vietnam vet and anti-war protester alike, healing, not exacerbating divisions. Here, too, was a memorial that people toiling in the public art field — legitimately fearful of seeing their programs captured by parochial commemorative statuary — could regard as strong, legitimate public art.

Yet even the Wall's phenomenal success could not hold at bay for long incursions by bronze infantry, nurses and, conjecturally, any other group that feels it has been denied its fair measure of public recognition. The lesson, simple to learn, is more difficult to apply. Memorial statuary is exclusive, including only what it represents. Memorial statuary begets memorial statuary as those who have been ignored demand their own heroic icons.

The paradox of the monumental figure is that it can survive for centuries as an *object,* but it will retain its power as a *memorial* only so long as people carry to it the memory it was meant to invoke, or extrinsic forces cause it to be invested with new meaning and energy. The evocative power of the statue of Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial continues to be recharged by its association with such landmark events as the Miriam Anderson concert on the Memorial steps and the civil rights marches, replayed like a mantra through the popular media. The extensive use of the image of the Iwo Jima Memorial for everything from postage stamps — our most pervasive commemorative art form — to souvenir ash trays, serves to amplify the impact of the original. History is unlikely to be as kind to commemorative statues undertaken today.

To further the interests of both public art and commemoration, public art programs must equip themselves with the tools necessary to steer commemorative projects adroitly in more fruitful directions. This will certainly mean learning the right questions to ask, questions, often striking to the very heart of the meaning of E *Pluribus Unum*, that are remarkably similar from one community to the next. The accounts of commemorations that follow in this *Monograph* ask a number of these questions, either explicitly or implicitly, and show how various programs have sought to answer them.

The issues raised in this *Monograph* will be debated and explored in depth at the NALAA preconference on public art, *The Public Art of Re-collection: A Commemorative Art Symposium*, to be held in San Jose, California, from June 8 - 10, 1995. ▼

Monument Making in Pluralistic Times: A Tale of Two Locals

Two cities — San Jose, California, and Santa Fe, New Mexico — are in the middle of extended efforts to negotiate new approaches to creating public art that commemorates their layered pasts. In a strange conjunction of circumstances, both communities were thrust into their investigations by larger-than-lifesize equestrian statues of historic figures who, far from being universally accepted, were anathematized by substantial parts of their communities.

San Jose, California

by Yankee Johnson, Arts Program Director
Office of Cultural Affairs, City of San Jose, California

San Jose, California, a city of more than 800,000 with no majority population, is learning about the complex problems of monument making for E *Pluribus Unum.* The lessons began five years ago when activists in San Jose's substantial Latino community learned that a larger-than-lifesize bronze equestrian statue of Thomas Fallon, by sculptor Robert Glenn, was being readied for installation on a traffic island at the heart of the original Pueblo San Jose de Guadalupe. Fallon, a fairly undistinguished early mayor of San Jose, is presumed to be the first person to raise the American flag successfully over the Mexican pueblo, and the statue — in fact, two equestrian figures — was represented to be a commemoration of that act.

The battle lines were drawn. On one side, an effective force of *antifallonistas* mobilized quickly. They packed the Council chambers to protest immortalizing a man they regarded as a second-rate spoiler. They wrote letters to the newspaper excoriating the Mayor for self-interest (an historian, the Mayor had published a book purporting to be Fallon's journal). They attacked the City's Redevelopment Agency for not consulting with the public before spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to celebrate what for them was a symbol of oppression. The media

weighed in on the side of the protesters. As often happens when controversy rages around public art, no one challenged the merits of the work itself. Indeed, no one had even seen it.

On the other side, the Mayor and the Redevelopment Agency, accustomed to withstanding criticism that inevitably arises in any redevelopment effort, were joined by only a handful of active supporters. The Arts Commission stayed on the sidelines because, although the statue was commissioned prior to adoption of the City's public art ordinance that defined procedures, the Commission was disturbed that a project of that magnitude had been done with no public process.

"What began as opposition to the statue and all it seemed to signify had become a demand for public recognition of the value of other heretofore undervalued histories. The statue's installation as planned had become unthinkable."

After withstanding four months of unrelenting attacks, it had become clear to the Mayor and City Council that the controversy over the statue, like the devastating Loma Prieta earthquake that hit the year before, was symptomatic of a deep fault line running through the center of the community. The literal representation of one bit player in San Jose's history had raised inevitable questions about the relative importance of all players. What began as opposition to the statue and all it seemed to signify had become a demand for public recognition of the value of other heretofore undervalued histories. The statue's installation as planned had become unthinkable.

Finally, the Mayor and City Council asked the Arts Commission to assemble an Historic Art Advisory Committee (HAAC) to recommend not only disposition of the statue but also other figures and events in San Jose's history that should be commemorated. The Commission, determined that the HAAC would truly reflect San Jose's cultural diversity, put in place a formal application process. Selection criteria emphasized an interest in and knowledge of the history and cultures of San Jose. The Commission deliberately excluded any criterion related to art because the question that had to be answered was *what* should be commemorated, not *how* it should be done. Ultimately, decisions about the form any artistic commemoration should take had to remain for the Arts Commission's public art process to define. After public interviews, the 15 member HAAC included eight people of color, among whom were three leaders of the *antifallonistas*.

The HAAC undertook its first job — to recommend the Fallon statue's fate — in the full glare of publicity. A public hearing was held and dominated by the same angry denunciations. Expert testimony was invited on the history of the period. The issue was hotly debated for two months. To bring the Fallon issue to closure, the Chair directed the HAAC's attention to a series of isolated questions:

- Should the City accept the statue? (Yes: 11 to 3)

- Should the statue be placed at the designated site? (No: 14 to 0)
- Should the statue be placed somewhere else in the downtown area? (Yes: 11 to 3)
- Where then should it go? After considering seven options, the HAAC approved an alternative site. (Yes: 11, No: 2, and 1 abstention by an *antifallonista* who felt it was the best alternative but that a yes vote would be inconsistent.)

"Whose history has value and, having value, has the right to have its story told? Who has the right to interpret and tell that story? Does precedence convey that right? Power? Ability to pay?"

Finally, the HAAC voted unanimously to recommend that the Fallon statue be placed in storage, not to be installed until the committee's four highest priority commemorations were completed.

The HAAC's second charge, to recommend other figures and events deserving of commemoration, was ultimately more challenging. For eight months, an astonishingly diverse group of individuals deliberated on complex questions of ownership of history in a pluralistic community. Whose history has value and, having value, has the right to have its story told? Who has the right to interpret and tell that story? Does precedence convey that right? Power? Ability to pay? The HAAC's challenge was tantamount to negotiating a settlement in a property dispute when every litigant can produce a valid deed of ownership.

Subcommittees were established to investigate three time periods: 1) from the millennia during which the area was inhabited by the Ohlone, the indigenous peoples, through the establishment of the Pueblo San Jose de Guadalupe as California's first civil community by *mestizos* representing the Spanish crown, to the Mexican period that began with Mexican independence from Spanish rule; 2) from the beginning of California statehood, marked by the events that the Fallon statue had already been created to celebrate, to the onset of WWII; and 3) from WWII to the present. Before the sub-committees began their investigations, the HAAC voted unanimously that the highest priorities of each would share equal priority, and that the first committee would come forward with two recommendations.

Each subcommittee met with historians, anthropologists, community activists, cultural groups and others, convening periodically as the HAAC to report their progress and receive feed back. The Fallon statue loomed large throughout their deliberations, to some an arrogant assertion by European Americans that they had preeminent rights of ownership over history, to others a legitimate expression, albeit poorly managed, of an important moment in the city's history. Members of the HAAC knew that if they failed to emerge from the negotiating process with an absolute consensus, their work would have accomplished little more than shifting the battleground.

With a spirit of amity no one would have imagined possible when the Fallon controversy was

at its peak, the HAAC unanimously approved the set of recommendations that was carried to City Council with the Fallon recommendation. The four equal highest priority subjects for commemoration were:

- The Ohlone Way of Life
- The establishment of the Pueblo San Jose de Guadalupe in 1777
- Agriculture as the engine that drove the economy for more than a century, to which everyone contributed, from the largest grower and cannery owner to the most recent immigrant in the fields
- The late Dr. Ernesto Gallarza, the Chicano educator and activist who taught at San Jose State University and was the spiritual father of the farm labor movement

"... an incredibly diverse community is attempting to invest in its people a spirit of ownership over their history and in the public art that celebrates it."

Although the HAAC included some content for these commemorations in its recommendations, it refrained from considering or commenting on either form or site. The HAAC also provided recommendations for future commemorations once the priority work has been completed. The HAAC's package of recommendations were accepted by the City Council in 1991 with a direction to the Arts Commission to proceed toward implementation. No funding was provided.

Having inherited a problem brought on by a figurative bronze statue that had been imposed on the community, the Arts Commission had a sense of the limitations, for commemorative purposes, not only of that form but of any form that did not emerge from the demands of the subject and consultation with the community. It was critically important to the ultimate success of this enterprise, therefore, that a clean line had been drawn and maintained between the HAAC's responsibility for negotiating the subjects that should be commemorated, and the Arts Commission's responsibility over the public art process that leads to the commemorative work itself. At times, it was not easy to hold this line. Bronze statuary was in the air. Ohlone chiefs. *The fundadores.* Dr. Gallarza. But the HAAC understood the limits of its charge and delivered broadly defined commemorative subjects that left creative scope for the artists who would ultimately be engaged to undertake the projects.

This tale of San Jose is of necessity a partial tale or, perhaps more accurately, the first tale of a trilogy that tells the story of how an incredibly diverse community is attempting to invest in its people a spirit of ownership over their history and in the public art that celebrates it. The second tale in the trilogy is also complete. Financing for each of the four priority projects — modest at about $200,000 each — was identified and appropriated from either the Redevelopment Agency's capital budget or San Jose's two percent for art funding. Public Art Program staff, with the Arts Commission, sought out and met with representatives of the communities that were stakeholders in each of the projects to develop with those communities the *goals* of

each of the commemorations. Again, it was critically important that the facilitated discussions that were held stay on values and themes and away from site or form. With project goals set, juries, each including a representative from a key stake-holder community, sitting with artists and arts professionals, selected artists:

- Jean LaMarr and L. Frank Manriquez, California Native American artists, for the Ohlone Way of Life
- East Los Streetscapers of Los Angeles, for the establishment of the Pueblo
- Tony May of San Jose, for agriculture
- Kim Yasuda and Torgen Johnson of Los Angeles, for Dr. Ernesto Gallarza

The final tale in the trilogy is now well under way. All artists' design agreements require that they have a minimum of two public meetings *before* they begin to design. At the first meetings, they introduce their past work, ask for written responses to key questions they have developed about the subject and engage in a conversation about the responses. Again, no discussion about the form of the commemoration is entertained. At the second public meeting, the artists present *preliminary* design concepts for reaction and discussion. This phase is now complete.

By the time of the NALAA preconference on public art, final designs will have been approved, and in most cases, fabrication begun on these works. However, the jury is already in on two questions. Statuary was not found to be an appropriate form to express any of the four commemorations, nor was it promoted at any of the community meetings once project goals and themes had been developed. And the statue of Thomas Fallon will remain in the warehouse until it can be dedicated as one part of a much larger celebration of San Jose's layered past.

The Story of Santa Fe

Pd'e Gae . . . A Public Art Project Honoring New Mexico's Native Americans

by Barbara Gonzales, Santa Fe Arts Commissioner, Chairperson of the "Pd'e Gae . . . Native American Monument Symposium" and tribal member of San Ildefonso Pueblo
and Sabrina Pratt, Executive Director, City of Santa Fe Arts Commission

In 1988, at the behest of community members who included descendants of the original Spanish settlers, the city adopted a public art project to honor Don Pedro de Peralta, an emissary appointed with the King of Spain. It was a project that generated controversy among its advocates, as well as from area Native Americans. Peralta had established Santa Fe as the capital of the province in 1610.

"While many public art projects are controversial, this one was expected to be particularly so because of the history of Spanish settlement of the area and subsequent habitation by people of other cultures."

The Commission held two competitions before an artist was selected. The first time, five artists were asked to develop proposals. All five proposals were rejected; the primary reason was that the proposals were too abstract. When the Arts Commission was preparing to issue a new call for entries, discussions centered on whether the artwork should be a heroic figure of Peralta or left open to artistic interpretation. The Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council entered the discussion with a strongly worded letter condemning the proposed sculpture. In spite of this, the second call for entries was very specific, requesting a bronze figure standing next to or astride a horse.

In September 1991, a one-and-a-half-times-lifesize bronze by New Mexico artist Dave McGary was dedicated. The composition was Peralta on a horse with a male figure standing beside his, representing a surveyor assisting with the layout of the city.

In early 1992, the Arts Commission resolved to initiate a public art project to honor the contributions and culture of Native Americans. Having just completed the Peralta sculpture, the city's largest project to date, the consensus of the commissioners was that a Native American theme should be next. Three commissioners were Native Americans at that time. While many public art projects are controversial, this one was expected to be particularly so because of the history of Spanish settlement of the area and subsequent habitation by people of other cultures. From past experience, the Arts Commission knew that the involvement of the many communities within the city and its environs was required. Concern for sensitivity to cultural issues was important in order to assure goodwill and stimulate interest in a work of this magnitude.

Conceptual work began in 1992. The Commissioner who initiated the commemorative monument proposal was Barbara Gonzales from San Ildefonso Pueblo. She suggested gaining the support of area Native Americans before proceeding with the project. The first step was to present the idea to the governors of the Eight Northern Indian Pueblo Council and the All Indian Pueblo Council (AIPC). The former is a formal organization of eight pueblos north of Santa Fe. The AIPC is composed of the 19 pueblos located in New Mexico. The governors reacted positively, expressing the feeling that such acknowledgement is overdue. (Of course there were also tongue-in-cheek replies, much as that of one governor who suggested that the artwork be of New Mexico Governor Bruce King on a horse with 19 arrows through him. A more serious suggestion was that the Cross of the Martyrs erected in memory of the priests who lost their lives in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 should be removed.)

In the Fall of 1993, after almost two years of consideration and discussion of the project, it was determined that the next logical step was to seek input from the community at large. A public symposium was proposed to create a dialogue among artists, community members, and

Native American people. It was hoped the result would be the education of everyone involved, and the airing of all possible concerns regarding the proposed work of art. Potential controversies would be addressed and perhaps resolved through this community-wide discussion. Funding for the public symposium came from the National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Program.

The symposium, titled "Pόe Gae . . . Native American Monument Symposium," was held October 14-15, 1994. Pόe Gae, meaning "the water place," is a Tewa word used for centuries by the northern Tewa pueblo people. ("Pόe Gae" refers to Santa Fe and the Santa Fe River.) Over 120 people attended the event, over the course of the two days. Most were Native Americans from the city and surrounding pueblos; many were Native American artists.

Artists Sharon Dryflower Reyna, Linda Lomafaftewa and Luis Jimenez, members of one of the first day's afternoon panels.

The symposium was structured by a volunteer steering committee chaired by Barbara Gonzales, and Johnpaul Jones (FAIA), who was hired to be the facilitator of the process. Jones is a Native American architect from Seattle who is experienced in similar projects.

The first day featured key speakers in the morning and panels with audience interaction in the afternoon. The second day's plan encouraged more input from the general public through small group discussions.

When considering a commemorative public art project, it is difficult to keep participants in the conceptual process from speculating about the final form of the artwork. The symposium steering committee sought to prevent this from happening. Speakers, panelists and key participants were given instructions to leave the solution to the artist(s). They were asked to focus their remarks on thoughts that would lead to the solution, and to assist the group discussion moderators in keeping the conversation on this level.

Three questions were posed to direct the discussion:

- What does "monument" mean?
- Where should the artwork be located?
- What is the meaning to be represented by the work?

We also asked if the project should be pursued further, allowing the Native American community to voice their opinions of whether they even wanted such a public artwork.

Door prizes donated by the Pueblos and others were distributed by Duane Maletima, co-chairperson, Barbara Gonzales, chairperson, and Priscilla Vigil, Elder of Tesuque Pueblo.

A central interest of the participants was the notion of peace. Native American participants focused on making a spiritual place. Many people found the idea of a monument antithetical to the Indian way of life. They also rejected the idea of a monument dedicated to themselves, preferring instead to have a place where all people could gather. There was a general consensus that recognition of the Native Americans and their contributions in all areas of life, especially the arts, is long overdue.

The symposium brought together a diverse group of people who are committed to ongoing involvement with the project. A new committee is now being formed to shepherd the project further. Before the request for proposals is issued, more public forums will be held to discuss the project's many implications. ▼

Creating the Memorial During the War: The AIDS Dilemma

by Tom Finkelpearl, Director, Percent for Art Program
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

"A memorial is not only a device for keeping a memory alive, but also a concrete, three dimensional definition of that memory. The battle over the representation of a memory is a battle over the power to define history."

Within the controversial history of public art, the conceptualization and construction of memorials has proven to be a particularly contentious proposition. It is easy to forget that it took 85 years to iron out all of the differences and get the Washington Monument built, or that the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial by Maya Lin, a legendary success of contemporary memorial art, was so controversial that another work had to be added at the site. A memorial is not only a device for keeping a memory alive, but also a concrete, three dimensional definition of that memory. The battle over the representation of a memory is a battle over the power to define history.

So how can one create a memorial during the contentious battle over AIDS and its representation? AIDS touches on emotional issues related to homosexuality, boundaries of the public and the private, and struggles over access to funds for scientific research and education. For some people grief, mourning, and anger are a constant fact of life. Attending AIDS memorial services every month creates a relentless sense of urgency. While the AIDS crisis is well into its second decade, there is no end in sight, so there is opposition from many in the "AIDS community" against spending scarce resources on anything aside from research and prevention. A well-organized four year process in San Diego recently failed to produce an AIDS memorial because of an odd combination of resistance from the right and the left. Almost nothing is acceptable to everyone when it comes to AIDS and its representation.

But a memorial does not need to be an object in a specific place. As we are reminded each May, a memorial can also be a day. In a similar spirit, Day Without Art was conceived by Visual AIDS, a group of artists and curators in New York, as a "day of mourning and call to action in response to the AIDS crisis." Although originally intended to be a sort of art moratorium, this open-ended invitation to artists and arts institutions has resulted in a wide range of activities at thousands of sites, from closing museums to presenting special AIDS-related programs. Because the structure of Day Without Art is not prescribed, it insists on the active participation of the organizers at each site.

One of the most interesting, often-repeated gestures on Day Without Art is the draping of public monuments with black cloth. Covering the monuments asks: What if the person

memorialized by the sculpture, or the artist who created it had died of AIDS? Who are we losing to this disease? What would have been created that we will never see? The image of the draped sculpture attests to the aesthetic power of subtraction — playing on the memory of the sculpture that is hidden. Ironically, covering the sculpture often makes it more visible. Public monuments that have outlived the people personally invested in their erection often fade from consciousness. When these monuments are hidden, they reappear as a loss.

"The AIDS ribbon is a memorial that functions as an open call for interaction. . . . the artists wished for an omnipresent symbol, one that could stand as a memorial for those who had died and as a show of support for people living with HIV and AIDS. The intent was to create a universal symbol that could be made from three cents' worth of ribbon."

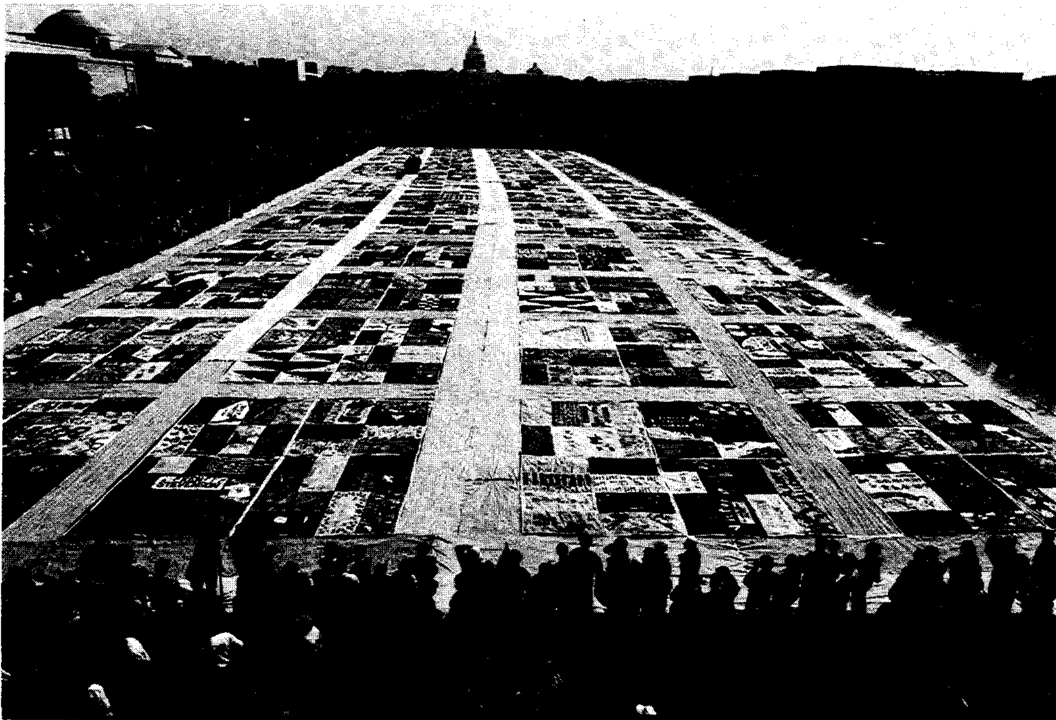
Night Without Light, in which the skylines of cities have been dimmed in recognition of losses to AIDS, is a similar gesture. By switching off the lights on the Empire State Building, the organizers have appropriated the symbolic value of the structure. Looking at New York's skyline without the Empire State Building, there is a sense of loss, and an appreciation of the (sexual?) optimism inherent in the thrusting verticality of the structure. Day Without Art and Night Without Light are temporary events, but memorial nonetheless.

The AIDS ribbon is a memorial that functions as an open call for interaction. The red ribbon was conceived by artist members of Visual AIDS during the Persian Gulf War. At the time, yellow ribbons were everywhere, the constant reminder of "support for our troops." By appropriating this tactic, the artists wished for an omnipresent symbol, one that could stand as a memorial for those who had died and as a show of support for people living with HIV and AIDS. The intent was to create a universal symbol that could be made from three cents' worth of ribbon. The ruby-encrusted models came out later as a fundraising device for AIDS organizations (and some shameless opportunists).

The ribbon was remarkably successful in a number of ways. Its popularity — from the Academy Awards to the Democratic National Convention, to the U.S. Post Office AIDS Awareness Postage stamp — was something akin to the peace symbol or the black arm band of the Vietnam era. But perhaps its most important contribution was the one-on-one conversations that it has sparked. As a wearer of the ribbon in the early years, I was constantly being asked about it's meaning, and why I wore it. Scores of conversations took place on the subways or on the street, breaking New York's code of silence between strangers. I often thought of the millions of conversations world-wide that the ribbon was generating. I also imagined the ribbon as a single entity moving through the city on thousands of lapels, through the mail on thousands of stamps, intersecting the lives of millions of people. As a public memorial, it wove its way through the city, the media, and the collective consciousness.

Perhaps the most remarkable memorial to come out of the AIDS crisis is The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, which started in San Francisco. A patchwork of over 10,000 three-foot-by-six-foot panels, each piece a memorial created to commemorate the death (and life) of a specific person, usually a family member, lover or friend. A project open to anyone who cares

to contribute, the Quilt is the result of creative effort by tens of thousands of people — artists and non-artists alike. The power of the Quilt lies in the personal nature of the enterprise, the accumulation of individual effort and love that is poured into the panels. The enormity of the Quilt gives scale to the AIDS crisis, but the individual is never lost. Viewing the Quilt is cathartic because it gives a human face to the numbers — not just the numbers of those who have died, but also the numbers of those who are living and grieving. Memorials, after all, are for the living, to help us deal with loss.



NAMES Project
AIDS Memorial Quilt
The entire AIDS Memorial Quilt on display in Washington, D.C., in 1988.

Photographer: Marcel Miranda III

Finally, the AIDS Memorial Grove in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, is an ongoing project that is restoring and recreating a section of the park that had fallen into disrepair. Recognizing the therapeutic power of working *with* nature, the organizers of the grove have created "Workdays" in which thousands of people come to garden together — to make a place of beauty in memory of those who have died of AIDS. Dedicated in 1991, the grove has been the site of numerous memorial services, ceremonies that have invested the place with a new identity. Ground was broken for the final construction phase on December 1, 1994. Those in charge of the design of the memorial spaces have had the rare chance to watch the meaning of the place transformed by the authorized and unauthorized use of the space *before* they put pen to paper.

The AIDS Memorial Grove, the Quilt, and the ribbon, give everyone the opportunity to participate, to begin to be publicly active. It is not surprising that some of the most successful AIDS memorials are participatory, or that no individual has stepped forward as the single artist behind the projects. AIDS is happening now, and those hardest hit are heavily invested in activism. Indeed the memorials mentioned here are not without their critics as well — primarily questioning their effectiveness as political tools. Perhaps the time for the big-budget AIDS memorials will come after the cure, but it is difficult to imagine how official monuments might be as moving or useful as the memorials created out of immediate need. ▼

Searching for Common Ground: Public Art and Historic Preservation

by Gail Lee Dubrow, Associate Professor of Urban Design and Planning,
Director of the Preservation Planning and Design Program, University of Washington

"... the time has come to examine the possibilities for commissioning and siting public artworks within a wider sphere, weaving them into the existing historic fabric of the city and the traditional cultural landscape of surrounding regions."

Much contemporary public art sponsored by state and local agencies is commissioned for sites of new development, a byproduct of percent for art ordinances that require artworks to be attached to or located in sight of the capital construction projects which have generated funding. While the principle of making art an integral feature of new development remains a worthy goal, the time has come to examine the possibilities for commissioning and siting public artworks within a wider sphere, weaving them into the existing historic fabric of the city and the traditional cultural landscape of surrounding regions.

The frequent linkage of public art with new construction has kept artists from working in places where the urban fabric is largely intact, such as historic sites, buildings, and districts. So too, opportunities have been lost for commissioning public artworks in landscapes that merit protection from development, but which are imbued with cultural meaning. Contemporary efforts to develop place-specific public art, securely grounded in the existing physical context and woven into the surrounding social fabric of communities, would be enhanced by commissioning work for older places that have evocative histories, particularly sites and buildings significant in the heritage of the many groups that have contributed to the development of our cities and regions.

Artists have demonstrated that it is possible to engage historical subjects within the context of new construction. This is best accomplished when they define their scope of work to include the historical succession of claims, patterns of dispossession, and meanings of the place in social, cultural, and political terms. Sadly, the lure of commissions at sites of new development has hindered the emergence of a vocal preservation ethic within the public art community. Where new construction threatens the integrity of existing cultural resources, or tramples on the claims of underrepresented groups to their fair share of public space, artists and public art administrators must forge the necessarily alliances to become effective advocates for preservation.

Sites of recognized historical significance beg for artist involvement when there are sides of the story that have gone untold. While the landmarks of past generations typically were dedicated to patriotic sentiments of an unequivocal sort, contemporary understandings of history

provoke a more complex set of emotional responses that the best public artworks have the capacity to encompass. So too, the tradition of using bronze plaques to mark places as historically significant has none of the power of art make places memorable. Curators and interpreters can make history coherent, but artists are needed to establish the presence of the past in the landscape as well as on city streets.

If much work remains to be done at the designated landmarks, perhaps the most interesting sites are the lesser known ones, whose value and meaning have not so much been forgotten as obscured by the powers that be. Artists working with academic and community historians can help to establish their place in the public memory. The challenge for artists working in these environments is to find ways of marking seemingly ordinary places as significant, mining the documentary sources for a visual vocabulary that expresses and amplifies their meaning, both for the tourists who seek out such places and the passers-by who come upon them unintentionally.

"Whether in the context of new construction or at historic sites and buildings, artists can take the initiative of collaborating with historians and community members to better understand the places they intend to work."

Can public art programs and projects be reshaped to allow for more rich and varied forms of engagement with historical sites and subjects? Much depends on the ability of public art programs to separate the commissioning of artworks from capital construction projects that generate funding. Pooled funds create new opportunities for artists and administrators to take the initiative in choosing the sites of public artwork. Then, public art funds can be redirected from sites of new development, which relatively few players participate in creating, to the old and often familiar places that have acquired their identity and meaning as a result of collective activity.

Whether in the context of new construction or at historic sites and buildings, artists can take the initiative of collaborating with historians and community members to better understand the places they intend to work. Where history clearly is an issue, public art programs can engage historians as consultants to artists on particular projects, as the Seattle Arts Commission did for its massive program of temporary works, *In Public: Seattle 1991*. Some public art programs have successfully mobilized interdisciplinary talent despite being limited to funding the visual arts, by commissioning teams that are at least nominally led by visual artists. To date, there are precious few examples of more ambitious interagency initiatives linking public art with humanities and preservation programs, yet they have a common interest in increasing the involvement of diverse public audiences in programs devoted to understanding and celebrating their cultural heritage. In some localities, the staff of public art and preservation programs exist side by side yet remain uneasy colleagues, forced into competition for scarce funding for cultural programs. By developing joint initiatives, local agencies can pave the way for more ambitious efforts to commemorate history in public places, extending the reach of limited funding while becoming allies in the process. ▼

Mapping Urban History Through Public Art

by Donna Graves, Executive Director
Headlands Arts Center, Sausalito, California

"... developing artworks at a number of sites related by historical theme is a powerful method for creating richer interpretations of the past."

Public art projects commemorating a single person or event are important aids to public memory, yet, by their very focus, cannot communicate the fullness and complexity of history in urban areas throughout the United States. As several recent efforts across the country have shown, developing artworks at a number of sites related by historical theme is a powerful method for creating richer interpretations of the past. Such multi-part programs can help citizens and visitors to better understand the origins of their present-day surroundings and can also provide a method for negotiating competing claims to local history that can not be satisfied by a single image.[1] The brief profiles of three projects that follow begin to illustrate the variety of approaches available for this type of urban commemoration.

Replacing narrowly conceived landmarks and memorials with a more inclusive view of urban history was the founding goal of REPOhistory, a New York-based collective of visual and performance artists, writers, and teachers. Their inaugural effort, The Lower Manhattan Sign Project, was a temporary installation in the city's financial district that stressed power relations and social struggle along with everyday activities. Where the "official" story of the Wall Street area might revolve around important architectural landmarks or the accomplishments of a small elite, REPOhistory's effort called attention to places whose histories have been overlooked, "repossessing" a past that features Native Americans, African Americans, working women, draft resisters, and anonymous homeless people.

REPOhistory was initiated in May 1989 with the intention of creating a site-specific historical project related to the Columbus Quincentennial. After considering a temporary guerrilla action, they decided to work within municipal guidelines to ensure longevity and greater visibility for the project, and spent an additional year securing the necessary permits and support from funders and civic agencies, including the Department of Transportation, whose sign shop printed the 18" x 24" metal plaques. In late June 1992, 35 silk-screened signs combining graphic imagery and text appeared on lampposts and traffic light poles throughout the neighborhood. By appropriating and transforming a conventional format used for official designation, REPOhistory made its challenging content accessible to the diverse Wall Street audience of workers, business people and tourists, while also calling attention to the amount of interpretation already present in the urban built environment. As one of the most

"landmarked" areas of Manhattan, the Financial District is ripe for the collective's goal of questioning "how history is constructed, to demystify the official versions, and insert the stories, peoples and events which have been omitted."

REPOhistory's project encouraged more complex understandings of New York's past by juxtapositions such as a sign marking the site of the city's first slave market, which appeared directly across the street from the officially designated location of the first outdoor stock market. Not content to merely challenge official history, each sign also included a series of questions intended to prompt viewers to consider history itself as a contested activity and their own part in creating and sustaining historical "truths:" "Who makes history?" "How do you know the past?" "Can memory be colonized?" "Is history truth or desire?" Instead of reframing urban history as a singular account in opposition to a dominant narrative, REPOhistory fashioned the city into a repository for conflicting collective memories.

Todd Ayoung with REPOhistory, *Indian Giver* or *When Will America be Discovered?* The words "reservation, enterprise, ownership," and "plantation" overlay this slot machine at Battery Park and Battery Place.

Photographer: Tom Klem

One of the most successful aspects of this project was its attention to the links between historical and present-day concerns, which is rarely attempted in contemporary public art projects. Viewers could begin to see the historicity of their own experiences when they considered connections between 19th Century tenement houses and contemporary homelessness, or between Civil War draft riots and Vietnam-era draft resistance. Performances, guided walking tours and a brochure accompanying the sign project reinforced REPOhistory's attempts to reach their audience on several levels.[2] The collaborative team of sculptor Houston Conwill, poet Estella Conwill Majozo and architect Joseph de Pace have created several public art commissions that re-envision local history. The team has re-mapped areas of Chicago, Harlem and Washington, D.C., to highlight the physical, spiritual and cultural journeys of African Americans with the aim of "recogniz[ing] the sacredness of a place, resonating with its history and rechoreographing history in the African Diaspora with an impulse toward freedom."[3]

These elegant diagrams, which the team calls cosmograms, bring an encompassing geography to a single site; rivers from Africa, Asia and the Americas often form the structure for these artworks. In contrast, their recent project, *Stations,* positions a repeated motif across several sites around New York's Niagara County to mark locations at the northern end of the Underground Railroad.

Stations' sculptures were originally created in 1988 as a temporary installation at Artpark. The team had based the imagery of seven related sculptures on a house form in which attics and cellars — traditional hiding places — are prominently featured. The attics are embossed with maps of railroad sections and symbols of African American culture. Cellars are marked with cryptic notes taken from correspondence between station captains along the path to freedom: "By tomorrow evening mail you will receive two volumes of the *Irrepressible Conflict* bound in black. After perusal please forward and oblige." At about six feet, the tall narrow sculptures mimic adult human form, a theme given further resonance by the inclusion of a mirror at about eye level in each attic's gabled form. Referring to "the light in the window" that welcomes strangers, the mirrors also incorporate the viewer into the work, highlighting the connections between history and individual lives.

In its original incarnation at the sculpture park, the bronze, copper, wood and concrete structures lined a meandering path leading to the Niagara River, the crossing point to freedom in Canada for enslaved African Americans. Feeling strongly that the work should bear a more sustained connection to its environment, Conwill, Majozo and de Pace worked to find an institution or organization to purchase the work. The Castellani Art Museum at Niagara University proved to be an inspired partner for completing and extending the Stations project. The Museum bought two of the sculptures outright and raised funds to place the rest of the works in communities throughout the county. Dedicated to "inviting the public to take an active role in shaping the institutions who serve it,"[4] the Museum organized extensive community involvement for each phase of the project, which was retitled *Stations of the Underground Railroad.* Churches, historical societies, community centers, senior citizen centers, and local individuals helped to determine which sites related to the history of the Underground Railroad should become permanent locations for the sculptures. Two churches were selected to reflect the roles of white and black congregations in the Underground Railroad. Several private homes (some of which have since been converted to public use) refer to the families who helped the passage of an estimated 30,000 escaping slaves over the border into Canada. Spread throughout the county, the Stations commemorate the courageous escapees, and the men and women who risked their own lives housing and transporting them. Lively dedication ceremonies, including symbolic pouring of water on the site and a call and response poem by Estella Conwill Majozo, were held for each sculpture as they were installed at the various sites over

1992. The following July, a freedom march from Georgia to Canada traced the route of escaping African Americans. Developed by Houston Conwill and historian Charles Blockson, the march commemorated the 200th anniversary of the Ontario Anti-Slavery Act in Niagara-on-the-Lake, the sole Canadian Station.

"... The Power of Place developed an itinerary of sites in the city's downtown that revealed the contributions of men and women from the major ethnic groups that had populated L.A. since the mid-nineteenth century.... the itinerary was published as a pamphlet and served as the framework for an ambitious plan to commemorate each site through multi-part projects created by interdisciplinary teams."

Perhaps the most ambitious of these case studies is The Power of Place, a non-profit organization dedicated to revealing an alternate history of Los Angeles through "new approaches to urban design, public art and historic preservation."[5] Founded by architect and historian Dolores Hayden in 1983, The Power of Place developed an itinerary of sites in the city's downtown that revealed the contributions of men and women from the major ethnic groups that had populated L.A. since the mid-nineteenth century. Developed through research by Hayden and several UCLA graduate students, the itinerary was published as a pamphlet and served as the framework for an ambitious plan to commemorate each site through multi-part projects created by interdisciplinary teams.

As a subject for The Power of Place's first public art project, Biddy Mason exemplified the organization's goal of positioning working men and women at the center of L.A.'s history. Mason came to California as a slave, later winning her freedom in an important courtroom trial, and went on to emerge as a community leader through her skill as a midwife and her philanthropy.[6] A parking garage and retail complex were being developed on the site where Mason lived when The Power of Place began to plan a series of works communicating her role in the city's history. An interdisciplinary team was assembled by project director Dolores Hayden, including sculptor Betye Saar, graphic designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, book artist Susan King, and myself, a curator and urban planner. Together the team developed a program that included permanent installations and pieces that could be distributed off-site. A poster and an artist's book were distributed by The Power of Place to schools, history organizations and museums. A public history workshop and a scholarly article on Mason's life by Hayden were geared to popular and more academic audiences interested in the African American history of Los Angeles.

The developers of the Broadway Spring Center had already satisfied the percent-for-art requirements mandated by the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, so The Power of Place raised the funds to construct on-site works by Saar and de Bretteville. Betye Saar created an installation in the building's open air elevator lobby. Using a photo mural of Mason and friends on a local front porch along with clapboard siding and a picket fence, she recalled the neighborhood's vernacular architecture in the last half of the 19th Century. A shuttered window houses an assemblage of objects recalling Mason's life in a more poetic fashion. Sheila de Bretteville designed an 80 foot long wall in a pedestrian passageway using

text and images to tell Mason's story against the backdrop of the city as it grew during her lifetime. Structured as a timeline, the black concrete wall traces Mason's rise from slave to property owner, popular midwife and community leader. Elements such as a midwife's bag or wagon wheels evoking aspects of Mason's life were embedded in the concrete forms, and appear as reverse reliefs in the finished wall. Historical documents, including views of L.A. during various decades, Mason's freedom papers and the deed to her property are photo etched on granite panels.[7] ▼

"... as these case studies demonstrate, the rewards for this work are at least as great. They can provide the means to build alliances between a range of organizations and agencies, from local arts councils and history societies to labor unions, neighborhood organizations and chambers of commerce."

Without intending to diminish the hard work and creativity that went into each of these projects, I would like to consider their possible weaknesses. It could be argued that Stations is, in some ways, a sophisticated version of "plop art." Although remarkable care was taken to select sites with rich historic resonance, the sculptures themselves do not convey the particular aspects of each place. How much stronger would the project have been if Conwill, Majozo and de Pace had been able to develop works in reference to each historical site? Building the kind of broadly-based community support developed with the Stations project is crucial to insure that a program can survive beyond any individual leader. Without that kind of community infrastructure, The Power of Place, which relied on UCLA as its main support, has been stalled with Dolores Hayden's relocation to the East Coast. If The Power of Place's goal of creating a series of permanent works across an urban center was perhaps too ambitious for the narrow base of support it relied upon, REPOhistory, on the other hand, was perhaps not ambitious enough. It would be wonderful to see their reclamation of Lower Manhattan history take some permanent forms.

The Power of Place, Stations of the Underground Railroad, and REPOhistory have all met with great critical and popular success, yet their complex strategies are only infrequently attempted by other organizations. The impediments to developing this type of public art program are significant; from managing the complicated process of developing a multi-site historical framework, to the difficult prospect of raising sufficient funds for and gaining access to several sites. However, as these case studies demonstrate, the rewards for this work are at least as great. They can provide the means to build alliances between a range of organizations and agencies, from local arts councils and history societies to labor unions, neighborhood organizations and chambers of commerce. In addition, linking such projects with schools can become the basis for more lively curricula in history, art and social studies at all grade levels.

"By visually manifesting the complexities of urban history and of heterogeneous audiences, these projects begin to trace the contours of a much needed intercultural common ground."

Although the case studies selected differ in their range of historical focus and their methods, employing interdisciplinary teams appears to have been a crucial factor in each effort's success. Using a multi-disciplinary perspective can yield projects that speak on many levels to a broad audience. Likewise, each of these projects demonstrate the importance of extending the artworks' impact through public ceremonies, exhibitions, performances and publications. Finally, it is also important to note that each project was driven by a commitment to communicate particular histories, rather than the more common impetus for public art projects — the construction of a building. Because of their genesis in this passion, each of the ventures described above challenge unreflective conceptions of cities as "givens" by revealing their status as social artifacts shaped by human actions. Challenging residents to understand that the creation of history is a social and political task is, I believe, one of the most important goals for such projects. As the REPOhistory collective put it: "Our intent is not to substitute 'our version' for 'their version' but to provoke critical and multiple readings."[8] By visually manifesting the complexities of urban history and of heterogeneous audiences, these projects begin to trace the contours of a much needed intercultural common ground. ▼

NALAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Executive Committee Chair
Michael Marsicano, Ph.D.

First Vice Chair
Janet L. Brown

Second Vice Chair
Harriet Sanford

Third Vice Chair
Patricia Holihan Steinhardt

Treasurer
Bill Bulick

Secretary
Ramona Baker

At Large
Jerry Allen
Raymond J. Hanley
Cynthia L. Schaal

Caroline Bock
Tina D. Burdett
Ken Fergeson
Gretchen Freeman
Flora Maria Garcia
Michael Garcia
Sandra Gibson
John Haworth
Betty Jo Hays
Pamela G. Holt
William Lehr, Jr.
Robert Moore
Adolfo Nodal
Janet Sarbaugh
Sherry Shannon
Joan Small
Beverly Morgan Welch

Footnotes

[1] The City of San Jose has embarked on a series of commemorative sculptures recognizing the contributions of several ethnic/racial groups important to the city's history. This program was not conceived on its own, however, but came about in response to the popular outcry over the 1990 commission of a monument to Thomas Fallon, an Irish mercenary soldier who raised the first US. flag over the Mexican town of San Jose. In response to criticism from the Latino community, the city charged a specially appointed commission to advise the city on developing a more comprehensive program for memorializing its populace.

[2] REPOhistory has since taken on several other projects, including a smaller series of signs marking gay and lesbian historic sites in Lower Manhattan as part of Storefront for Art and Architecture's 1994 "Queer Space" exhibition. They are currently developing a project for the 1996 Atlanta Festival in Atlanta's Buttermilk Bottom neighborhood, an historically African American residential area.

[3] Houston Conwill, Estella Conwill Majozo, and Joseph De Pace, "Artists' Statement," The New Merengue, (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum), 1992.

[4] Castellani Art Museum, "Stations of the Underground Railroad" (pamphlet), 1993.

[5] Dolores Hayden, Gail Dubrow and Carolyn Flynn, The Power of Place: Los Angeles (Los Angeles: The Power of Place), 1985. The author of this article served as Executive Director of The Power of Place from 1987-1991.

[6] For a biography of Mason, see Dolores Hayden, "Biddy Mason's Los Angeles, 1856-1891," *California History* (Fall 1989) 86-99.

[7] A second public art project focused on the Embassy Theatre and the history of Latino community and political organizing that took place there. Although the organization was not able to complete any permanent works at the site, the project team of artists Rupert Garcia and Celia Munoz, historian George Sanchez, architect Brenda Levin and I produced a poster, and artist's book and a community workshop in 1991.

[8] REPOhistory Mission Statement (unpublished) 1992.

NALAA STAFF

President and CEO
Robert L. Lynch

Vice President, Government Affairs and Development
Nina Ozlu

Director of Finance
R. Brent Stanley

Director of Programs and Member Services
Mara Walker

Director of Research and Information
Randy I. Cohen

Director of Meetings
Kate Kershner

Arts in Education Coordinator
Nancy Langan

Communications Coordinator
Jennifer Neiman

Membership Coordinator
Perea Campbell

Publications Coordinator
Deborah Wolfer Bissen

Statewide Assemblies Coordinator
Ellen Morgan

Bookkeeper
Austin Lawson

Executive Assistant
Kelly Kinneen

Government Affairs and Development Assistant
Claudia Goldman

Administrative Assistant
Anna Lincoln Rianhard

The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies represents the nation's 3,800 local arts agencies in developing an essential place for the arts in America's communities. It helps member agencies with leadership and professional development, research, information and publications, public policy development and public awareness. To reach the NALAA staff, write or call:
NALAA
927 15th Street NW, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
tel 202.371.2830
fax 202.371.0424

Bibliography

Yankee Johnson
Arts Program Director
Office of Cultural Affairs
291 South Market Street
San Jose, California 95113
408.277.5144 Fax 408.277.3160

Sabrina Pratt
Executive Director
City of Santa Fe Arts Commission
P.O. Box 909
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504
505.984.6707 Fax 505.984.6745

Tom Finkelpearl
Director, Percent for Art Program
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Wo Columbus Circle, Fourth Floor
New York, New York 10019
212.841.4100 Fax 212.247.4216

Gail Lee Dubrow, Ph.D
Associate Professor of Urban Design and Planning
Adjunct Associate Professor of Architectures
Landscape Architecture, and Women Studies
Director of the Preservation Planning and Design Program
410 Gould Hall, JO-40
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195
206.685.4170 Fax 206.685.9597

Donna Graves
Executive Director
The Headlands Art Center
Room 944, Fort Berry
Sausalito, California 94965
415.331.2787

TO ORDER ADDITIONAL COPIES OF THIS AND PAST *MONOGRAPHS* . . .

Call or write:
NALAA MONOGRAPHS
927 15th Street N.W., 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20005-2304
tel 202.371.2830
fax 202.371.0424

Additional copies are $5 each (plus postage and handling).

MONOGRAPHS

Title	Date
The Public Art of Re-Collection	February 1995
Arts in Education Planning: Three Local Communities, Volume I	January 1995
NALAA 1994 Annual Convention Keynote Speeches	December 1994
Local Arts Agency Facts 1994	November 1994
1994 Crime Bill Analysis: Funding Opportunities in the Arts and Humanities	October 1994
HUD: Integrating the Arts into Community Development and Revitalization	Aug/Sept 1994
Arts Resolution Services: A National Mediation Program for the Arts	May/June 1994
Arts in Education: From National Policy to Local Community Action	April 1994
ISTEA: An Arts and Transportation Partnership	March 1994
Jobs, the Arts and the Economy	Jan/Feb 1994
International Arts and Cultural Exchange	December 1993
Summer Youth Employment Programs: Four Local Arts Agency Models	November 1993
Inside Images: Art For A.R.T. (At-Risk Teens)	October 1993
The Religious Right	Aug/Sept 1993
Tolerance As An Art Form	May/June 1993
Public Trust or Public Trough?: The Ethical Crisis Facing Nonprofit, Tax-Exempt Cultural Institutions in America	April 1993
Arts Programs that Revitalized a Downtown: Tucson, A Case Study	March 1993
Local Art Facts	February 1993
An Arts Magnet	January 1993
Olimpiada Cultural: It's More Than A Game	December 1992
An Overview: The National Cultural Facilities Study	November 1992
An Elephant In Your Living Room, or the Squaw Peak Pot Controversy	October 1992

National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies
927 15th Street, N.W.
12th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
tel 202.371.2830
fax 202.371.0424

Printed on recycled paper