

## Creative Cities Working Group Statement of Purpose

Cities have been hubs of creative expression and innovation for millennia. As sociologist Howard Becker reminds us, art is a collective activity, and cities supply many of the social needs—audiences, patrons, suppliers, markets, capital – that enable the creation, distribution, and consumption of art.<sup>1</sup> Of course, cities are not always nurturing environments for creative production. City governments may regulate, harass, and censor; city land prices may be too high for artists to afford.<sup>2</sup> But for better or worse, cities are more than just a background or a setting for art; they actively shape the creation and reception of art in countless ways.

The relationship is reciprocal: just as cities shape art, art shapes cities. Urban art can claim space for an individual or a community; it can enhance the use value or exchange value of urban space.<sup>3</sup> It can formulate or contest civic identity, establish or undermine a city's "brand."<sup>4</sup> It can comment on urban issues, or document the experience of urban life.<sup>5</sup> It can shape the public memory of the past, and imagine possibilities for the urban future. It can enhance the quality of urban life by bringing beauty and joy, and perhaps as well by building cultural, social, and economic capital.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, many voices have taken up the claim that creative production can save, or at least improve, the economies of post-industrial cities. Perhaps most prominently, Richard Florida has argued that attracting the "creative class" is critical for cities to flourish.<sup>7</sup> Building on his ideas, as well as those of Ann Markusen

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<sup>1</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Berkeley: UC Press, 2008 [1982]).

<sup>2</sup> On harassment and censorship, see Sarah Schrank, *Art and the City: Civic Imagination and Cultural Authority in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), esp chapter 3; on high prices forcing artists out, see Rebecca Solnit, *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism* (New York: Verso, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> On claiming space and enhancing use value, See Andrew Herscher, *Unreal Estate Guide to Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); on enhancing exchange value, see e.g. Aaron Shkuda, *The Lofts of SoHo: Gentrification, Art, and Industry in New York, 1950 – 1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Schrank, *Art and the City*.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996 [1890]).

<sup>6</sup> See the work of Mark Stern and the Social Impact of the Arts Project, at <http://impact.sp2.upenn.edu/siap/>.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

and Anne Gadwa, the National Endowment for the Arts has advocated “Creative Placemaking,” an urban development strategy in which “partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities.”<sup>8</sup> Critics of Florida’s approach contend that it turns the arts into an entering wedge for gentrification, and the displacement of low-income communities that often follows.

Our discussions in this working group on “creative cities” will likely interrogate these ideas, but they are not our sole focus. We will range much more broadly to examine the relationship between creativity and urban places from a broad array of disciplinary perspectives. Our questions may include: How do artists imagine urban life, and what is the impact of their vision? How can art and creative expression contribute to the creation of just, equitable, and sustainable cities? Who makes urban art? Who consumes it? Who pays for it? And who benefits? What is the role of art and creative production in urban society, economics, politics, culture, and environments? How can art respond to challenges facing cities now, and in the future? Ultimately, what can we learn about art by looking through an urban lens, and what can we learn about cities by looking through art?

We bring to these discussions a broad understanding of “art,” encompassing the performing, visual, and literary arts, and including “old” and “new” media. We employ an array of disciplinary approaches: our ranks include architects, artists, art historians, anthropologists, curators, literary scholars, urban planners, and more. Our geographic interests are wide-ranging, and our definition of “city” is similarly open. We hope that by bringing together scholars and practitioners with such varied backgrounds and approaches to these questions, we can, through our own collective activity, arrive at some answers, or at least some interesting new questions.

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<sup>8</sup> Markusen and Gadwa, “Creative Placemaking,” A white paper for the Mayors’ Institute on City Design. <http://arts.gov/pub/pubDesign.php>