



PORTRAIT OF A LOCAL ARTS ECOSYSTEM
SOUTH LOS ANGELES

California Arts Council
Grant Making Evaluation

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With a Foreword by Peter J. Harris



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15. C. Jerome Woods, Cultural Historian, Archivist, and Founder/Director of the Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Project

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

This report is part of a Field Scan commissioned by the California Arts Council. The Field Scan combines statistical analysis of the available data on nonprofit arts organizations in California with qualitative research on how the arts are supported in three local communities to provide deep analysis of California's arts infrastructure and access to funding through the lenses of equity and access. The other components of the Field Scan are available for download on CAC's website [arts.ca.gov] and can be made available in other formats upon request.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To complement the analysis of existing datasets, which are limited to nonprofit organizations and biased in several ways, we used qualitative research to explore how the arts are created, shared, and supported in three dissimilar communities across California. We selected the communities based on three criteria:

1. Potential to learn about parts of the arts ecosystem that aren't captured in quantitative datasets;
2. Potential representativeness of other communities across California;
3. Potential for successful community engagement.

In each community, we recruited local "Connectors," who served as our primary contacts and

helped us identify and recruit other local artists and community leaders for the study. After an initial round of one-on-one video conferences and phone interviews, we visited each community for two days to meet all available interviewees in person, experience the settings in which they live and work, and meet with additional artists and culture bearers. A final video conference was held to share preliminary findings with the community members who contributed to the research in each location and receive feedback. This research was conducted between summer of 2021 and spring of 2022.

A NOTE ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This report summarizes qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and group conversations. Qualitative research provides an excellent means of capturing the experiences and perspectives of research participants. Since questions are answered in narrative form, researchers can understand the specific context for each respondent's reply, and also observe how respondents make sense of their experiences and what causal inferences they draw. However, one cannot assume that the views gathered through qualitative research proportionately reflect the views and experiences of the community as a whole. Nonetheless, the range of perspectives shared by the diverse group of participants consulted for this Ecosystem Portrait can shed light on challenges and opportunities in the field.

A FOREWORD FROM SOUTH LA'S CAPITAL CITY

BY PETER J. HARRIS, CONNECTOR

South LA's Leimert Park felt like my capital city from the beginning, in the summer of 1992, when I first taught at Marla Gibbs' Crossroads Arts Academy and first learned about World Stage Performance Gallery and joined its Anansi Writers Workshop.

I found, all in one city block, storefront gift shops, street vendors, a literal Museum in Black, drum circles, jazz festivals, a blues club, a comedy club, barbershop, poetry, dance, and art, so much art (from stained glass to abstract to framing). I even found an optician! For more than a decade, until Leimert Park Eyewear closed, I bought my glasses from owner Ruth Nuckolls.

I also immersed myself in a palpable, cross-generational energy that imprinted me and still circulates within me like Earth Wind and Fire's Serpentine Fire! How dazzling it was in the early '90s to see Ms. Gibbs, our Matriarch, Auntie, and Big Sister from network TV, stroll Degnan Boulevard, Leimert's main street, which connected Crossroads (in the direction of 43rd Street) with Ms. Gibbs' other major property, Vision Theatre (located on 43rd Place — and now owned by the City of LA). I even wrote an article, "Leimert Park Village," that was published in the June/July 1992 issue of the Smithsonian Institution's American Visions magazine.

Three decades later, Leimert Park remains my Cultural Briar Patch, and whenever my cultural work takes me beyond Degnan into productive collaborations that foster intellectual growth and ethical exchanges, I feel like an ambassador. For sure, as the Connector for "Portrait of an Arts Ecosystem: South Los Angeles," I felt my portfolio demanded that I contribute a rigorous, savvy, joyful scope and expansiveness to my work as collaborator with Project Researchers and as recruiter of the artists who became Community Representatives. I won't say it was pre-ordained that I would be invited into this study. But I'm confident that my years of work in Leimert Park and in S/LA prepared me to be a high priority, if not inevitable, choice for this project.

Ironically, I've never lived in S/LA, but in my own elemental and embodied way, I LIVED South LA as both a geographical territory and as a Conceptual Space. Ultimately, that's how I encouraged Project Researchers to frame this study. In my 'overture' memo, as we began our work together, I wrote that S/LA should be viewed in two fundamental ways.

GEOGRAPHICALLY (with evolving epicenters over the years), located ... South of Interstate 10/Inglewood and Watts to the south/Central Avenue to the east/LaBrea to the west....



African American, but with substantial cross cultural interactions comprising writing, music, theater, dance, and visual arts marked by virtuosity, political consciousness, ideological assertion, and entrepreneurship all functioning robustly in a region framed by historical residential segregation, fraught relationships with police, even with Hollywood, the music industry, and the museum industrial complex.... influenced by historical epicenters including the Central Avenue Corridor, Jefferson High School, Compton, Watts, and Leimert Park....

CONCEPTUALLY (with Leimert Park having evolved into an acknowledged, effervescent, contested — almost mythological — epicenter), ... a dynamic, dimension, oasis, crossroads, threshold, kaleidoscope, node, prism, reverb, pivot zone, energy source, and web of apprenticeships, connections, nurturing, interlocks, interconnections, and exchanges ... an independent headquarters of a “vibrant community arts movement” so inextricably tied to the pain, aspirations, resistance, and visions of its participants/constituents that poet and World Stage Co-founder Kamau Daáood claimed them as an “Army of Healers,” and his mentor Horace Tapscott often introduced Pan Afrikan People’s Arkestra songs to audiences by saying, “This is one more you wrote through us.”¹

From the ‘90s into the 21st Century, as this witness and practitioner has viewed it, art making at its best in this conceptual space robustly expands to embrace metaphysics, natural healing, yoga, Africa and its diasporas, festivals, parades, politi-

1 Steven L. Isoardi, *The Dark Tree: Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles*, xvii.

cal rallies, public mourning, quilters, drum circles, food culture, street vending, public oratory, and philanthropy. Taken together, these forces reflect a Core Cultural Imperative demanding persistence and insistence on building and making work that leaves the world better than how you found it!

Consequently, researching and drawing a portrait of the ‘non-NonProfit’ arts ecology — more precisely identified as a ‘community arts movement’ by Isoardi in *The Dark Tree* — demands a complex analysis after intense and candid conversations with our Community Representatives. The analysis should reflect a web of connections, exchanges, nurturing, and creative/social/stylistic overlaps obvious and subsonic. Given S/LA’s huge geographical and conceptual footprint, art makers converge from throughout Southern California, and may not be residents of S/LA.

Nonetheless, the art-makers recognize S/LA as both sacred destination and formative rite of passage, where history is in tectonic play with contemporary promises. They know that S/LA is a living, breathing power center, where the arts have literally defined the ‘hood writ large — especially as epitomized in/by the Village of Leimert Park — as it now morphs into its next incarnation in the face of gentrification fueled by the outsized impact of politics and money and public policy, even by the return of well-resourced artistic Native Son Mark Bradford.

I knew going into our work, it would be impossible for one research project to cover the rich scope of S/LA’s arts ecosystem. Nonetheless, the individual interviews with our 15 Community Reps, the site visit, and the culminating Zoomer

with most of the 15 artists organically coalesced around an ethic that “what is valuable about any of us is learned through interaction with others ... , that leadership is building the capacity of others,” to quote Daniel Widener in his book *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* [page 289].

That ethic was on display when the World Stage was “not offered a lease by the new property owners” of 4344 Degnan, organized a moving party on Saturday, February 27, 2016, and moved across the street after 27 years, according to Michael Datcher’s book: *Animating Black and Brown Liberation: A Theory of American Literatures*. “Over 50 people showed up,” Datcher writes. “Dozens of primarily Brown and Black people carried congas, computers, microphones, desks, chairs, speakers, paintings, amplifiers, snares, basses, kick drums, and a safe across Degnan Boulevard” to the new venue.²

In the spirit of Datcher’s “Ankhing” process, which blends “inspiration strategy and communal labor ... , rigorous self-interrogation and group interrogation toward creating healthy, emancipatory best practices and outcomes,”³ it has been my honor to be Connector for our project.

Even when I couldn’t reach prospective Community Reps, or folks I really wanted to participate told me no thanks, my outreach conversations have been an exhilarating extension of my sojourn within S/LA’s vital art-making ecosystem. I anticipated creative tensions, different perspec-

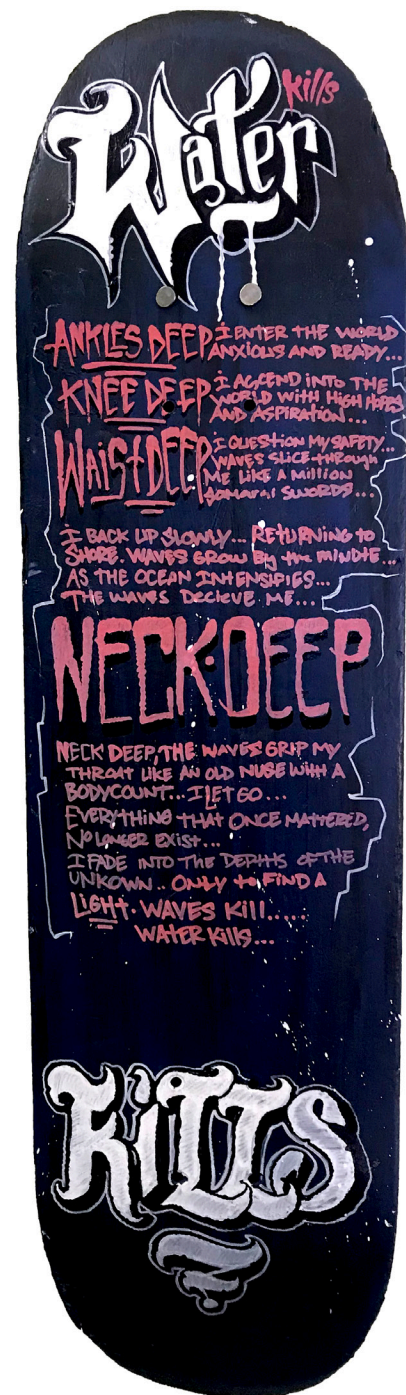
2 Michael Datcher, *Animating Black and Brown Liberation: A Theory of American Literatures*, 135.

3 Datcher, 33.

tives, political variations, even outright dismissals. I also fully expected — from those folks who said yes — clear and compelling and imaginative testimony, wonderful retrospectives, and insights into a proud tradition of creativity.

This report fulfills my expectations.

INTRODUCTION



“IF YOU’RE GOING TO COME IN HERE AND START ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT CULTURE AND WHAT SUSTAINS THE ARTS IN SOUTH LA, YOU’D BETTER BRING YOUR TALL BOOTS, BECAUSE THE WATER IS DEEP.”

That was the seductive caution Peter J. Harris gave us in one of the first phone calls we held to explore the possibility of studying the arts ecosystem of South LA. Peter would later join our team as the local “Connector,” who proposed interviewees, brokered introductions, and, in more than one way, served as our tour guide in this process of collecting and documenting the experiences and perspectives of artists in South Los Angeles. He also contributed the Foreword to this report.

Peter moved to Los Angeles over 30 years ago, and though he never lived in South LA, he found himself drawn in by the creative energy of Leimert Park, which soon became what he describes as the “cultural briar patch” for his work. The cultural energy of Leimert Park and the artists that gather there have nourished his work as a poet and sustained his artistic career through the decades.

Peter proposed early on that “South LA” exists both as a geographic location and a conceptual space — a distinction he explains in his foreword. Our interviews with a diverse group of fifteen artists and cultural producers have supported those dual interpretations, but have also highlighted how contentious the term “South LA” is. Many of the artists we spoke to for this project prefer the historical moniker “South Central.” They see the city’s rebranding of the area as an attempt to erase both the rich African American cultural history and the history of violence and oppression against Black communities in South Central they have witnessed. For this study, we’ve decided to use the term “South LA” and interpret it in the broad, conceptual sense to situate the arts and culture of this area within the larger fabric of Los Angeles.

Our interviewees highlighted the fluid boundaries of a conceptual interpretation of South LA, which is sometimes expanded to include neighboring communities such as Compton and Inglewood. At the same time, they noted that a large area in the center of the region, now predominantly populated by Latinx immigrants, is often overlooked in the cultural narrative of South LA and lacks many of the cultural resources that were the focus of our interviews. We heard from artists who used to live in South LA and have left, and others who live in South LA, but work in other areas of the city.

On a conceptual level, our interviews suggest that the cultural space held by South LA sits between the commercial film, music, fashion, and publishing industries on one side and institutes of higher education ranging from community colleges to elite universities on the other — nourishing both sides culturally and creatively but with South LA receiving limited resources in return.

Through our conversations with the project’s interviewees, we sought to open up a window — small and limited as it may be, but a window nonetheless — into the creative soul of South LA. We intentionally focused on artists and cultural workers/organizers who operate outside of, or on the margins of, the nonprofit arts sector. Our objective was to hear from people whose arts activities may not be captured through formal data reporting processes.

Peter’s networks and outreach allowed us to speak with a remarkable roster of artists. Many of them are virtuosos in their artistic practices and truly inspiring in their dedication to their work and their commitment to their community. We are deeply indebted to Peter and all of the artists in South LA who agreed to speak with us for this project. A list of the artists who participated can be found in the acknowledgements on page 4.

Frankly, it is impossible to capture the full diversity of South LA in a sample of just fifteen individuals. Inevitably, the pool of artists we spoke to is shaped by the expertise and networks of our local Connector. While our sample of interviewees includes considerable diversity, African American artists over 50, who are well established in their careers, are particularly well represented. There's also strong representation of literary artists.

We also want to acknowledge that some artists chose not to participate in our data collection. One distinguished artist — a pillar in South LA's artist community — noted that if CAC wants to know about South LA, the agency should hire him to tell CAC staff about what's going on there, rather than hiring researchers to interview him. After several decades working in the field, largely

overlooked by the powers that be, he expects little to change as a result of our information gathering exercise. Even some artists who did ultimately participate were initially reluctant to do so. One noted, *"When they [CAC] say, we're going to do this study to find out who we're reaching and who we're not, we're all like: 'They know! They know who they get. They know who they're not reaching. They know!'"*

The interviewees shared a range of experiences and perspectives, and we have made no attempt to reconcile their differences. To us, they are all valid and valuable reflections of the arts ecosystem in South LA. In the summary of Key Findings that follows in this report, we try to highlight consistent themes that emerged through our interviews, but also recognize divergent perspectives.



KEY FINDINGS

A CULTURE OF OPPORTUNITY

“Rich, diverse, prolific, regenerative,” “a beautiful, everchanging canvas... with layers of colors,” “a myriad of experiences and engagements that span the visual, literary, and performance arts,” “one phenomenal gathering of African American culture,” “vibrant,” “extremely rich,” “multicultural, multi ethnic, dynamic, that — in regards to the flavor of Los Angeles — has always been overlooked”

These are the words that our interviewees used to describe the arts ecosystem in South Los Angeles at the outset of our conversations. Some specified that these exuberant and colorful descriptions pertain, in particular, to specific communities such as Leimert Park, the Crenshaw District, and Watts. Other interviewees noted the lack of cultural infrastructure in other areas of South LA. But the overarching impressions we are left with, after speaking with these fifteen artists, is one of richness, vibrancy, and community.

That is not to say that being an artist in South LA is easy. We heard about the numerous sources of insecurity artists face, including gentrification and

feeling underappreciated. However, the artists we spoke to in South LA don’t let the barriers, needs, and deficits define their existence, even as they acknowledge historical and current challenges. Rather, project participants define the South LA arts ecosystem through a framework of cultural vitality and resourcefulness. Some interviewees noted that this resourcefulness has deep roots in African American history and culture and is embedded within the aesthetics of art forms such as jazz, hip hop, and assemblage. One artist explained, *“Historically, art within [Black and Brown] communities is a necessary, everyday practice that is a lot about survival.”*

Interviewees emphasized the doing in their creative processes rather than planning, fundraising, or seeking approval from authorizers, which may reflect the tenuous existence of many South LA artists and organizations that often precludes long-term planning (see also p. 23). *“We learned a way of doing, not asking, ‘can we do this or that’ — we just do it and invite people in,”* as one Interviewee noted. In some ways, the intentional focus on what can be accomplished with the available resources, rather than dwelling on the scarceness, may be responsible for South LA’s vitality and cultural richness: *“We keep creating anew. There’s so many cultures and everyone*



is bringing their own perspectives. ... We tend to build on what's been done before. There's always more, there's never less. We never run out."

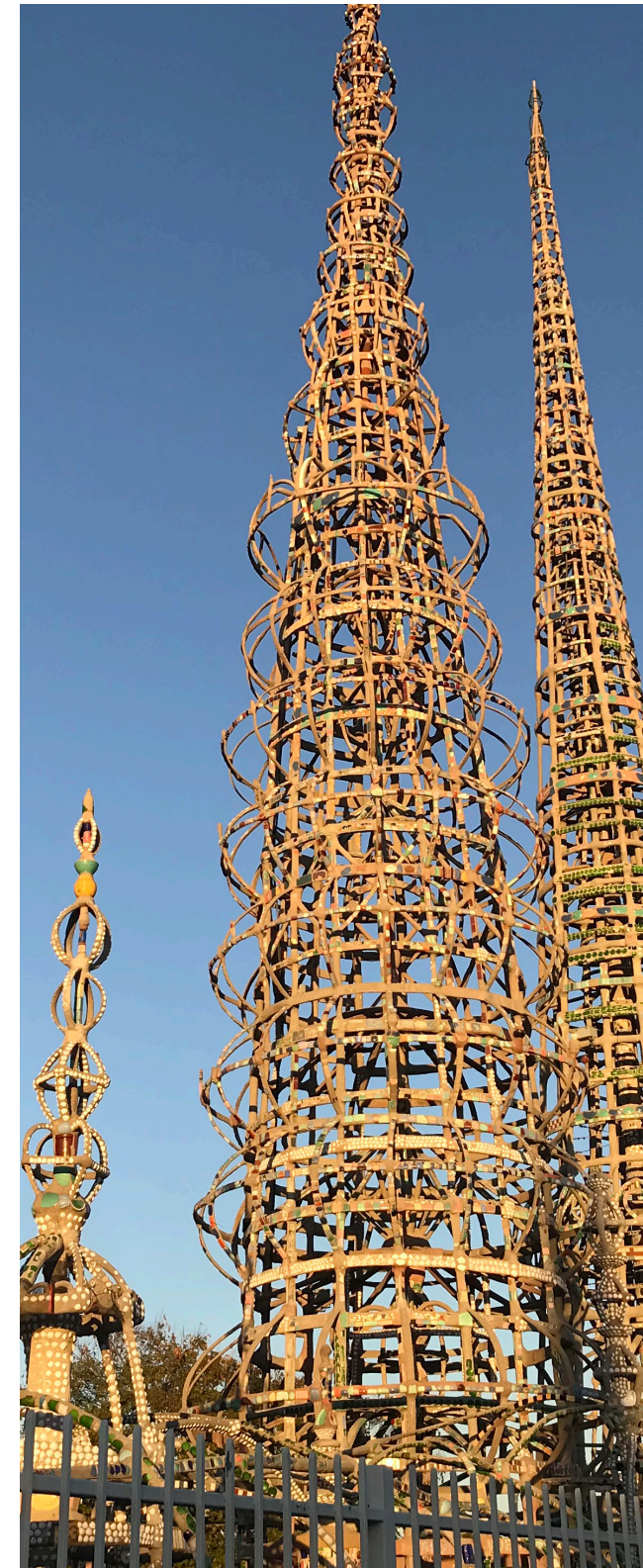
The Latinx and Asian American artists we interviewed lamented that their communities don't have the same vibrancy and sense of belonging that they see in the African American community of South LA. One interviewee explained,

I'm thinking of the heart of South Central. Like Slauson Avenue, Gage Avenue, all the way to Manchester. So I'm thinking about that core area where it's really poor and there's a lot of marginalized people. That whole area is completely empty and devoid of any art. ... Leimert Park is its own little microcosm that is very much about the Black community. And South Central isn't all Black, as you know. It's very much Latino, and immigrant.

The interviewees who aren't part of the African American community appreciate the cultural richness of the Black communities in Leimert Park and Watts, occasionally present their own work there, and one interviewee is currently engaged in an oral historic project to preserve the cultural legacy of the Watts Writers Workshop. However, there remains an awareness that it's not "their" cultural community.

Even within the Black community, one artist cautioned that a focus on vitality should not prevent us from understanding the extent to which the lack of resources drains the energy of the artists and prevents the arts ecosystem from realizing its full potential. As she pointed out, *"There are so many things we never see come to life"* due to lack of resources. What more would be possible if artists were appropriately resourced? Another interviewee described artists, specifically in Watts, as operating in "survival mode," and added that *"whenever the artist is in survival mode, the art suffers."* In part, these comments aim at dispelling the romantic notion of being a "starving artist." One interviewee confronted that trope head-on: *"Nobody really wants to be a starving artist. You want to have the money to go buy the paint, to get the canvas, you know, to rent the rehearsal room for the dancers, to have somebody taking care of the costumes while you focus on the choreography, whatever. You want to be able to function."* For some, the lack of resources reflects how arts and culture, especially arts and culture from historically marginalized communities, are not valued by society at large.

Despite all the challenges, the mindset we encountered among our cohort of South LA creatives was fundamentally one of opportunity. We got the sense that whether you are seeking to refine your artistic skills, present your work to the public, find art classes for your kids, or launch your career as an artist, opportunities exist in South LA, despite being under-resourced.



CULTURAL LINEAGE

In part, our interviewees' optimism about the cultural potential of South LA (particularly of the African American community there) is rooted in their knowledge of the rich cultural history, and the fact that artists from that community have had a profound impact on the arts globally. In our final video conference, one artist emphasized the outsized role South LA plays in shaping cultural trends across the country and the globe, from jazz to the visual arts, and from Hollywood to hip hop. As he put it, *"South Central has fed the world culturally. That is unique."* Indeed, many of the artists we interviewed are known and have worked internationally yet continue to operate from within the local community. One of the younger writers remarked, *"So these artists, though they're local on Degnan [Boulevard], the work that they do as traveling performing artists has really been all over the world. And to me, that's powerful."* People who got their start in South LA have gone on to become international superstars across generations and arts disciplines. Charles Mingus, Dr. Dre, Kehinde Wiley, and Ava DuVernay, are among some of the notable figures that were mentioned.

In individual interviews and group conversations, participants, especially those from the African American community, frequently paid homage to artists from older generations, who opened the doors for them and created the artistic community which they joined and work diligently to preserve for future generations. The superstars mentioned above, while occasionally name-dropped, weren't the primary focus of the historical genealogy that was described. Rather, the artists we talked to see themselves as part of

a lineage of community builders. Referring to the likes of John Outterbridge, Samella Lewis, William Pajaud, Cecil Ferguson, Richard Wyatt, and Charles Dickson, one interviewee noted,

Those are the ones who I take pages from, as far as how active they were, and making a difference, because without them, I wouldn't be here doing what I'm doing. You know? And so what I'm doing now is spreading the same things ... given to me, whether it be to the younger generation, or the ones who are starting later.

Another artist emphasized, “[Our Writing] Workshop is the grandchild of the 1965 Watts Writers Workshop ... If you see me present and give energy to this work, I'm pulling from Kamau [Daáood] and Father Amde [Hamilton].” Indeed, intergenerational support and collaboration was cited as a characteristic strength in the cultural ecosystem of South LA. One interviewee commented on the value of “knowing there are elders that we can go to ask. There are elders who have done it the right way and the wrong way.”

For some of the artists, honoring their cultural lineage is part of a larger commitment to documenting the community's artistic history. One interviewee shared, “Art [in Black and Brown communities] is not necessarily something pretty to look at. It's usually very useful, very practical, and it's a voice to make change, a way to be heard, a way to document. Artists are historians in these communities.” Many of the artists we engaged with are actively working to preserve these memories, which are not well-known even though they are key to our understanding of American history. For many, documentation is in fact a form of artistic activism. It was noted that the contributions of artists of color and other historically marginalized communities such as the LGBTQ+ community have faced deliberate erasure from institutional history. Some interviewees described the lack of support for efforts to preserve those histories as a deliberate act of cultural violence. One attributed the lack of support to the perception that “Artists are considered to be dangerous. We're seen as a threat. Because we document. For what we're seeing.”

COMMUNITY-BASED ARTS

While it may be an artifact of the process through which we recruited interviewees for this study, it stands out that all of the people in the network of artists we consulted in South LA see their work as deeply rooted in, and in service of, their local community. Most of the participants emphasize that they are less motivated by the need to advance their personal careers or organizations. Rather, they're operating to uplift their community, defined as both the artistic community and the larger community that surrounds them.

Describing, in particular, the area around Leimert Park, West Adams, Baldwin Hills, and Crenshaw, one interviewee explained,

It's very community based, very community driven. Artists live and work there, and I feel in a lot of ways, it's through the arts that those communities, those areas, are defined and known. They bring something that the community rallies around and [they] bring the community together.

In describing their process and connection to the community, several cited the Community Arts Movement as a touchstone of their practice. One artist recalled, “The ethos of the Community



Arts Movement that I learned about from South LA became a bedrock principle that is ... a big part of my worldview." Explaining what that means to him, he elaborated:

When I heard Horace Tapscott say, at Skylight Books in 1998, that "Art is contributive, not competitive" ... that helped me a lot, because it gave me a model. So when I started throwing events ... I was like, "Hey, let's bring everybody in. We're all gonna rise together."

In some ways, this approach is seen as a counterpoint to capitalist forces in the the arts and in society at large, under which artists are often perceived as the precursor of gentrification, as outsiders coming into a community and changing

it to enable investors to displace existing inhabitants. "I think only seeing art as a commodity in a corporate and capitalistic marketplace doesn't sit well, particularly for communities of color," one artist remarked. Another noted, "When you talk about African American art, it seems we all feed each other," and that's true across artistic disciplines: "the dance, the drumming, the visual, the poetry."

Many of our study's participants made it clear that community service is a foundational part of their practice, that it fuels innovations in their own practice, and benefits the artist, the community, the arts ecosystem, and the culture at large. One of the artists, who works with recycled materials, mentioned that the community brings her materials that they know she can reuse. To give back to the community, the artist makes her space available for community meetings free of charge and organizes yard sales, where



the community can buy up-cycled furniture and other artworks at an affordable price. Another artist is reimagining how community members can help collect and tell their own community history through his various open source tech-art projects. The bottom-up strategy behind this approach is not necessarily linear (i.e., a sequence of actions that are expected to lead to predetermined outcomes), but rather operates from the belief that investing in mutual support and reciprocity will lead to new opportunities and will benefit everyone.

One interviewee drew a connection to adrienne maree brown's work on social change,¹ stating, "I really do believe in the Emergent Strategy that's been defined now." brown's notion of Emergent Strategy is rooted in the idea that complex social change can be created from the bottom up, and that intentional shifts towards social justice in our daily lives and immediate environments can ripple through complex social systems and change society at large in ways that are not entirely predictable.² In the creative practice of the interviewee, that has meant investing in the ecosystem that surrounds him: "[What] I had to do is develop a healthy ecosystem around my business ... People you're helping and working with, they've got your back. That's always been my business model."

An example of the mutual support among artists may be seen in the founding of Sims Library of Poetry. When founder Hiram Sims built wrap-around shelving into his garage with the intention of starting a public poetry library, he found that his 300 poetry books were woefully insufficient to fill the shelf space. He recalls:

So I invited all these poets ... and I'm like, "I'm starting a library in my garage, please come donate books." And so 50 poets came, and we had a poetry show. And at the beginning of that day, we had my 300 books. At the end of that day, we had 2,000 books of poetry. Often people donated ten or fifteen, and then Kamau Daáood came and donated a really nice collection of African and African American poetry books. Food and Socks [Oshea Luja and Melanie Luja] came and donated some books. And so the library grew.

Another important part of the ethos of the arts community we encountered in South LA is its emphasis on inclusivity, the idea that art is for everyone, and everyone can participate in making arts. The costs of participation are kept to a minimum, and several artists mentioned that their venues and programs are open to children, creating opportunities for the next generation, but also allowing parents to participate without needing to find childcare. This creates opportunities for participants to interact across generations and ability levels, and learn from each other. For one artist, who is legally blind, it is important to give back to the community and institutions that support people with visual impairments, so she has organized "touch tours" of her sculptural exhibits and installations, noting that several major institutions at which she has exhibited around LA "had no idea this existed, and what was needed, or expected" and that participants "came away saying they had always felt excluded from museums and the visual arts."

1 adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds (AK Press, 2017).

2 brown, 24-25.

CULTURAL HUBS

Throughout our conversations, there were a small number of organizations and venues that interviewees mentioned time and time again. These include the World Stage, the Watts Towers Arts Center, and KAOS Network. At least within the 15-member cohort of South LA artists that we spoke to, these organizations play an important role as places where artists connect with each other, hone their craft, find support, and explore their artistic identities.

The World Stage may serve as an illustrative example. Founded in 1989 by legendary Jazz drummer Billie Higgins and poet Kamau Daáood, the World Stage quickly became a staple in the African American cultural community around Leimert Park. The Stage presents live performances on weekends, hosts music and writing

workshops on each day of the week, and produces a jazz jam session each Thursday. Notable artists share their work with peers and develop their craft through the World Stage’s workshops, but the workshops are open to all. The Jazz Vocal Workshop includes participants as young as eight. Participants are asked to contribute five dollars, but no one is turned away for lack of funds. Describing the Anansi Writers Workshop, one interviewee noted that a community member struggling with mental health issues routinely attends the Wednesday workshops, and is given the same opportunity to share and discuss her work — and receive rigorous critique — as everyone else. Another interviewee shared that musicians who have gone on to successful careers will occasionally return to perform or jam at the World Stage *“to see if they’re still real or whether*



they’re just working in their own disconnected world.” As if to prove the point, on the day we visited the World Stage, the renowned Latin Jazz flutist and saxophonist Justo Almario showed up unannounced to play at the Instrumental Jam Session. There he played alongside a student he had brought from UCLA, a medical doctor for whom the Jam Sessions are a creative outlet, and an elderly gentleman perched near the stage, who didn’t appear to be fully part of the Jam Session, but added gentle percussion with shakers and a guiro. The following day, the rising Jazz star Joshua White performed a concert with his trio.

Having heard about the celebrated artists who have come out of the World Stage and the important role it plays in the local arts community from so many of our interviewees in South Los Angeles, we were struck by the humble nature of the organization. The venue itself is a converted store front, consisting of a single room that is used for performances and workshops, and an upstairs office/sound booth. The main room has a maximum capacity of 100, but only eight chairs can be set in each row of seats due to its long, narrow shape. The building must be entered from the parking lot in the rear, because the stage blocks the front entrance — a configuration that was selected so that people getting up to use the restrooms at the back of the main room wouldn’t disturb the performances.

Based on the most recent five years of publicly available IRS 990 forms, total annual revenues for the World Stage average about \$91,000. None of the officers receive salaries (though they occasionally receive stipends for specific assignments or projects). On the evening we stopped in,

unpaid Vice-President Rene Fisher-Mimms, who founded the resident S.H.I.N.E. Mawusi African Drum Circle and also hosts the Vocal Jam Session for The Stage, was taking admissions at the door and selling beverages. In every sense, the World Stage is a community organization, while also providing a testing ground and artistic home to world-class musicians, writers, poets, and filmmakers. Without exaggeration, one can say the artists who have come through and continue to work with the World Stage and similar organizations in South LA have generated billions of dollars of economic activity throughout their careers.

Over the years, there have been dozens of organizations like the World Stage that have served as cultural hubs for the African American community in South LA, including the Jazz clubs along Central Avenue from the 1920s through the 1950s, the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra (1961- ongoing), the Watts Writers Workshop (1965-73, and recently revived), the Communicative Arts Academy in Compton (1969-1975), and the Crossroads Arts Academy and Theatre (1981-1999). Our interviewees emphasized that over the years there have been many more organizations that have functioned as vital points of connection and cultural rootedness in the community, with many of these hubs hobbled by lack of funding, and even active opposition from political and police authorities. Consequently, the continuous succession of cultural organizations is a testament to the resilience of the African American creative community of South Los Angeles. (While a full cultural history of these hubs lies beyond the scope of this study, an incomplete list of such organizations, assembled from the recollections of our interviewees, is featured in the Appendix.)

In searching for defining attributes of cultural hubs in South LA, it stands out that there is no single organizational model that they follow. Some are private businesses, while others are nonprofits; some are schools, while others are performance venues; some have brick-and-mortar spaces, while others are itinerant organizations. Looking at just three of the most frequently referenced cultural hubs that are currently active as examples: The World Stage is registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that operates in a rented space; the Watts Towers Arts Center is owned and operated by LA's Department of Cultural Affairs; and KAOS Network was started by an individual artist, with support from an Artists in Community grant from CAC, who was later able to purchase the property and convert it into a community-centered multi-media maker space.

What these organizations share in common is a deep sense of connection with the local community, strong local support, and the perception of being readily accessible to artists and community members. Their work is rooted in the ethos of reciprocity discussed earlier. While they might not have strong financial balance sheets, these organizations rely heavily on resources that derive from their rootedness in a particular community. A few anecdotes from our conversations may serve as examples:

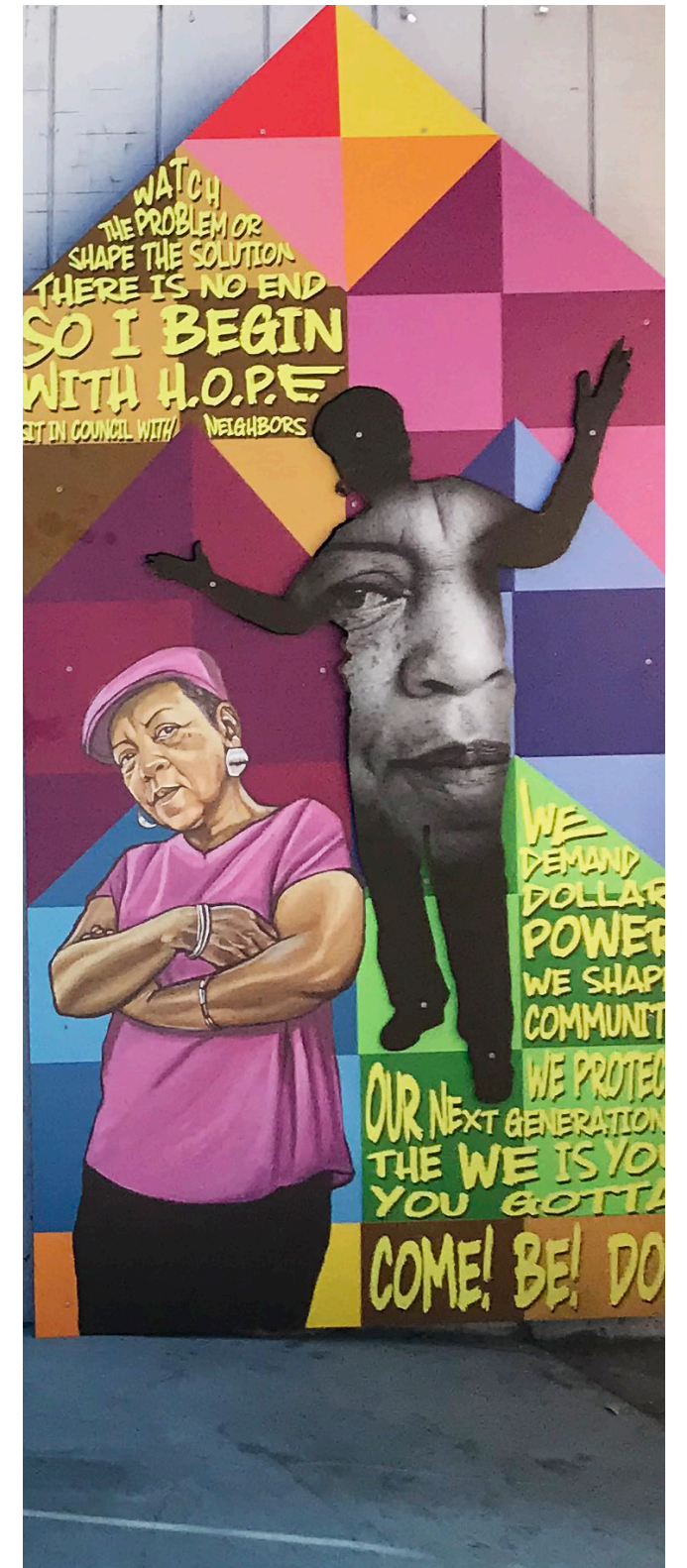
- When the World Stage moved from its original location on Degan Blvd. to a storefront on the other side of the street, community members with no other formal affiliation with the organization volunteered to move the furniture and equipment.



- Watts Towers Arts Center has never been tagged by gangs.
- When the owner of KAOS Networks forgot to lock up his shop one weekend, local youths camped out there to protect it from theft and vandalism until he returned.

These examples suggest a level of community integration beyond conventional volunteering or donations, which may even extend to community members who don't otherwise frequent the organization, but nonetheless know its leaders and value their work in the community.

The artists we spoke to are invested in these cultural hubs and have a sense of ownership of them. Our interviewees described them as assets that the local community and local artists can draw on as needed. If someone wants to produce an event or hold a workshop, these venues are among the places they can turn to in order to make it happen. That's exactly how, during the 1990s, KAOS Network (primarily a film and media production studio) came to be the home of Project Blowed after the legendary weekly Hip Hop open mic at The Good Life Cafe outgrew its space further north on Crenshaw Boulevard. Those community connections created the training ground for artists such as Medusa, Jurassic 5, and Ava DuVernay (who was a rapper before moving into film). Such hubs are resources within the community, and drawing on them is very different from applying to an external source, where one will have to explain the context of one's work, try to justify its legitimacy, and hope for the good graces of a funder or venue owner who may or may not ultimately provide the necessary support.



AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

Rising real estate prices were mentioned by almost all of our interviewees in South LA as a major concern, both in terms of housing and space to create their work. About half of the interviewees currently have a workspace in South LA. Some are looking for space; some have found alternative arrangements, which, while not ideal, are working for them at the moment; and some are able to access space at colleges or universities through their teaching appointments. Only one owns the space he works in.

Those who rent their spaces are grateful to have a home for their creative work, but they live in constant fear of being evicted. One interviewee spent months remodeling a former day care center to turn it into an arts space, only to learn, just weeks before the new venue was scheduled to open, that a potential buyer had contacted the owner. If the building had been sold, the arts organization would have had to leave the building. Luckily, in this instance, the deal didn't go through, but this real-life story illustrates the precarious existence of many arts spaces.

Several of the artists who have their own spaces are only able to afford them because they're paying rent that is substantially below market rate. The landlords' reasons for offering these discounted rents vary. Some prefer to have the space occupied than sitting empty. Others seem to be financially secure enough that they don't need to maximize their profits from all their properties, and they like the artist they're renting to.

Speaking of her landlord, one interviewee shared, *"There are people of privilege who are*

willing to sell [or rent] at a lesser price, because they can." At one point she thought she might have to leave the building, but she had been a good tenant and made an alternative proposal. The owner agreed: *"It wasn't a sacrifice for him, so he said yes."* While artists who benefit from such arrangements are grateful for the discounted rent, it only adds to their sense of insecurity, knowing that if anything changes (e.g., if the owner's financial situation tightens, if the owner's children take over the property, or if the building is sold) they could be evicted to make space for more profitable tenants.

Ironically, there are vacant spaces that artists would be happy to rent in some portions of South LA. According to one interviewee, *"There are a ton of places that say they're for rent, but if you call, it's not available."* This artist's feeling was that the landlords would prefer to rent to major chains like Burger King than to artists or arts organizations. Artists and arts organizations may be perceived as less financially stable and thus less desirable tenants, or there may be concerns that a community oriented, politically active individual or organization may push back on exploitative rental practices and cause a nuisance for the landlord.

Faced with the increasingly challenging economics of living and working in South LA, a few of our interviewees are blurring the boundary between their lives and their art. Their living spaces are becoming part of their artistic work in their communities, and/or they're housing themselves within their artistic work. One houses a significant archive of Black LGBTQ cultural life and art within

his home, another opens her live-work space to community events so fully that she at times leaves her own house so as not to impose on the community groups working there. The most striking example of this practice is Dominique Moody, an assemblage artist who has spent the past decade building a mobile installation that is both a storytelling self-portrait and a fully functional living space built out of reclaimed materials. She describes the origin of this artistic practice as follows:



I want people to be immersed inside of my art, my artistic narrative ... When I found that I could not sustain my studio, I embarked ... on becoming a fully nomadic artist in residence for both urban and rural communities, to find spaces where ... artist residencies don't exist, but the desire for them is there.

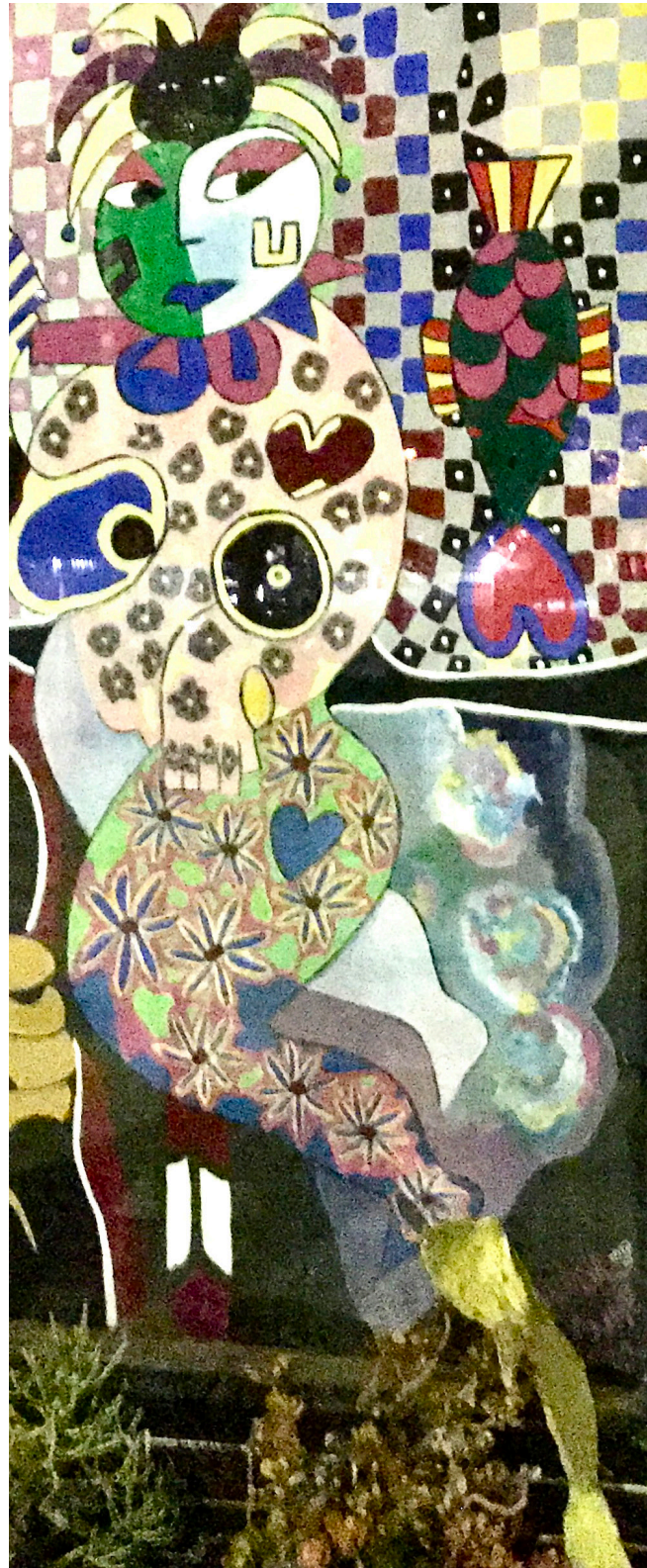
Since then, she has been travelling in the "Nomad" — a mobile art installation, inspirational studio, and tiny home — creating work in the desert, in the fields, and in empty lots, and sharing her home/work in public spaces in LA.

Besides the immediate challenges of accessing space to create art in South LA, inequities associated with real estate ownership pose a pervasive and ongoing structural challenge. For the one artist who owns the space he works in, owning

the building completely changes the way he is able to approach his creative work and his relationship with the surrounding community. One interviewee shared,

So many of the communities, the places that we're working in, are not owned by us. They're owned by white corporations or by white families who no longer have any involvement in the community other than collecting the rent. ... Our problem very often is owning the places where we're recreating the art. So that, to me, is one of the key frictions, not just what's happening in this space, but who owns it, and who controls it.

One interviewee noted that home prices in Leimert Park, the historic center of African American culture in South LA, now exceed one million dollars. The affordability crises must therefore also be seen within a larger context of gentrification.



BUSINESS MODELS

As a result of our focus on artists and creative practices that generally don't appear in IRS and foundation data on the arts and cultural sector, most of the artists we spoke with in South LA operate outside of the nonprofit sector, or pursue at least a portion of their creative practice outside of nonprofits. Nonetheless, some of our interviewees are connected to nonprofits and receive a substantial portion of their revenue through grants. One interviewee, who serves in an unpaid position at a community-oriented arts nonprofit remarked,

The grants we get from CAC [California Arts Council], DCA [LA Department of Cultural Affairs], and so on, are necessary. If we didn't have them, we couldn't do workshops for five dollars, [we couldn't] make things affordable, so that anyone, even a homeless person who really wants to, can be a part of things in Leimert Park.

However, most of the artists we interviewed in South LA have either incorporated for-profit businesses to handle their work affairs, or they operate as individual artists, meaning that their creative work is integrated with their personal finances. Some of those apply for and receive grants through fiscal sponsors, in order to accept charitable contributions without having to obtain 501(c)(3) status for themselves. For artists who are interested in pursuing grants, fiscal sponsors seem readily available, but some interviewees noted that working with them can

be cumbersome and the fees charged (as well as the services provided) vary greatly. One interviewee eventually founded a nonprofit in part to have more control of her work and no longer be dependent on her fiscal sponsor. Others have steered clear of grants entirely fearing that their work would be co-opted and that they would become beholden to their funders.

For those who aren't connected to nonprofits (and even some who are), there is often a degree of distrust of the nonprofit model. Some artists are concerned about the administrative burden that comes with the nonprofit structure, or fear that their creative vision and operational autonomy would be restricted by a board of directors. However, the most significant and widely held concerns about nonprofits among our interviewees lie in their negative perceptions of nonprofits' trustworthiness. In particular, the artists cited instances in which nonprofits have failed to follow through on their commitments to the communities they serve. One interviewee shared, *"Growing up in Watts, I saw so many organizations that came in ... that set up, received funds, and then they left."* Another commented, *"That's part of the reason I don't like nonprofits. What happens when [funding] drops off? Then what do we do? I saw this stop-and-go thing happening, and I think that's even more detrimental to the community ... than not offering them anything."*

To counter this, some of the nonprofits we heard about have made a point of generating sustainable income without relying on grants. For instance, Sims Library of Poetry, which offers free programming, has sought to cover its core operating expenses through a membership model. Memberships cost \$44 per month and are pri-

marily held by community members who want to provide ongoing support for the organization.

Whether connected to a nonprofit or not, all our interviewees derive income from multiple sources. Several teach or take on contract work in the commercial film, music, or publishing industries. Doing commercial work doesn't make you any less of an artist, according to our interviewees. One interviewee emphasized that it's about *"internal balance."*

Many distinguish between creative work they do to generate income and the *"soul work"* they do in their community, either for free or at very low cost. One referred to the Brockman Gallery as a model for this: The commercial gallery, owned and operated by Dale and Alonzo Davis in Leimert Park from 1967 to 1980, also maintained a nonprofit arm, Brockman Productions, that presented educational and community programs. Not all the artists who distinguish between revenue generating and community-based components of their practice maintain a separate nonprofit, and for some both are mission-driven creative practices that they're passionate about.

For individual artists and those who have for-profit businesses, their self-reliance is often a point of pride. One artist explained, *"We've been able to offer our programs without 'funding.' How do we do that? We are artists, we create, we also offer retreats, we have all types of things ... When we go around the world, or whenever we create outside of the community, we're able to gather the resources to give the art to the community for free."* Unlike nonprofits that they've seen disappear when grant funding expires, these artists, being self-reliant, are able to follow

through on their commitments: *“We are there for the duration We continue what we start, even without no funding.”*

Self-financing the community-based work gives the artists a sense of empowerment. One noted, *“That’s also part of the healing process for me: to have your own funds. Because if you’re getting it from an outside source, you don’t feel like you’re strong.”* In the culminating video conference we held with most research participants, South LA artists emphasized the importance of being able to build financial equity through one’s work as an artist.

To be clear, the people we interviewed in South LA are not superstars who have acquired so much wealth that they’re giving back to the community as a form of charity. (There are examples of that in South LA, too, but we didn’t interview any of those people). One interviewee explained, *“I don’t have savings, I don’t have retirement, or health care,”* but she nonetheless considers herself privileged because her work in the film industry provides enough income to allow her to open her studio (where she also lives) to community groups and uplift the people around her. She continued, *“I don’t ever want to be in a position where I’m needy or begging ... I have been in that position, and I may be again in the future.”*

But while I’m not needing anything, ... you know, it’s not even sacrifice. It’s a choice.”

The context in which the artists are working is critical. While several interviewees emphasized their desire to give back to and uplift their communities by making their work available for free or at low cost, they also lamented the fact that they’re often called upon to work for free in other contexts. One noted,

Very often the band gets paid, the rental price gets paid, that guy who printed the programs is paid, but they say, “Could you read a couple of poems for us?” And it doesn’t even occur to that host or that producer to pay the poet because they think we just do this, you know, to get it out and share it with people, and that we should be thanking them for the invitation.

In particular, universities and similar institutions were called out for frequently failing to compensate artists for their contributions.

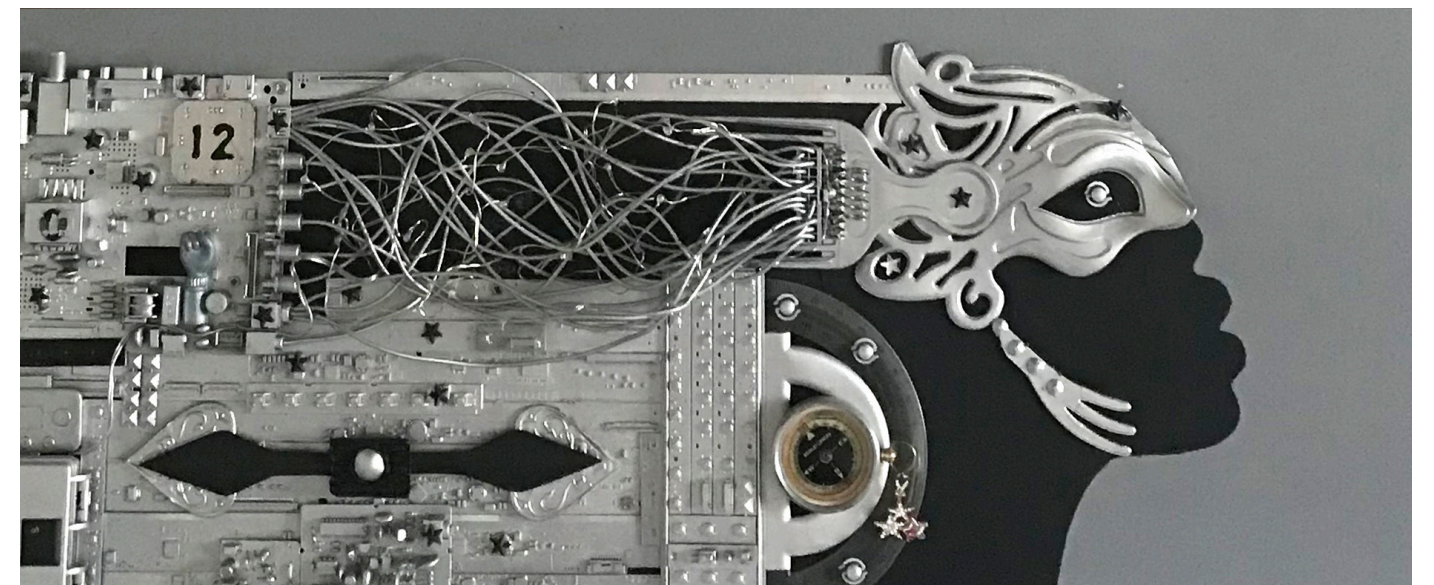
PERSPECTIVES ON GRANT FUNDING

The artists who operate as nonprofits rely on grants as an important (sometimes primary) source of revenue, and even for individual artists and for-profit businesses they can be a vital form of support. Some seasoned artists specifically mentioned the important role that grants from CAC in the 1980s and early 1990s played early on in their careers. However, several of the artists we spoke with in South LA don’t apply for grants, or don’t do so consistently. There are a number of reasons for this, we learned.

Some have either never applied for a grant or stopped applying for grants, simply because it hasn’t been a priority for them. One recalled, *“I think I applied for a grant, oh, it has to be over 30 years ago. ... They actually got in touch, and asked me to reapply, and I just never did. I went*

on to other things.” A mid-career writer and poet said, almost apologetically, *“I always meant to [apply]. I haven’t yet, but I meant to.... You know, I’ve been so busy writing articles, doing poetry gigs, that it’s only been in the last couple of years that I’ve become more aware about possibilities for grants and that type of thing.”*

Some don’t apply for grants because they don’t meet the eligibility requirements (e.g., they often see grant announcements for organizations, but can’t apply for them as individual artists). Several artists also noted that the expectations for project grants are poorly aligned with their creative processes. One interviewee described how alien it feels to propose a project that she’s passionate about, but isn’t supposed to work on until a year from the application date, when the funds will finally arrive. Funders seem to expect that artists have a pipeline of projects that will be developed and completed sequentially, one after the other, on a set calendar. In reality, several of





the artists we spoke with tend to simultaneously work on multiple projects that are in various stages of development. Their projects proceed in fits and starts, feeding off each other and off of collaborators. Some projects evolve iteratively over time, perhaps starting as a poem and then transforming into a dance piece or short film project over the course of several years, or even a decade. The reality of these creative processes can't be captured in the description of a discreet project for a grant application. One interviewee described the challenge as:

Learning how to speak to what I call dominant culture for these grants, [which is] in many ways counter to the way that we think and work. And so you're having to do these mental acrobatics to get the grant. You find yourself contorting in these different ways to get the grant.

For some, grants simply aren't worth the effort and psychological contortions it would take to get them. A filmmaker, writer, and poet described the feeling:

Funders are like, "No, we need to go through this process, then we need to eliminate it down to here, then we need to do this, then we're going to give you one third of it now and give the rest of the money" ... And you're like, "Okay, never mind. I'll just go down to the corner and sell some more poems."

The perception is that it's easier and less scarring to raise funds locally, from people who understand and value one's work. Rather than applying for grants, one interviewee said,

If it's something that I don't have the money to do, I'll just fundraise ... I'll have open studio visits and invite people who are always interested in looking for new work, and who I know also want to support the project. Probably the first fundraiser I ever did was, actually before Kickstarter or GoFundMe, was in 2004. ... I sent letters for sponsorships [to pay for a residency in Senegal]. For a certain amount of money they would receive a sketch or painting, something like that.

A number of artists also described feeling that specialized knowledge and skills are needed to apply for grants successfully. In particular, there is anxiety around the budget portion of the applications that asks applicants to specify, months in advance, how every dollar is going to be spent. There's a fear that, if they receive the grant, they'll need to be accountable for every cent, or possibly face accusations of misappropriating the funds if the project changes and money gets spent slightly differently than in the initial budget.

This may be attributable, ultimately, to a lack of trust between funders and grantees. Interviewees described grant applications that had been days and weeks in the making being rejected due to a missing signature from a fiscal sponsor without

any opportunity to amend the application. Some suspect that funders are specifically looking for reasons like an unchecked box to disqualify applications in order to cut down the volume of applications, rather than seeing funders as partners who are genuinely interested in understanding their work and helping them succeed. Even if funders offer technical assistance with applications, one interviewee noted, *"The artist wants to be an artist. They don't seek training in how to do paperwork. The artist is the resource."*

Some artists found it particularly hurtful when funders hold artists, who are doing their best to complete the applications with very limited resources or support, to unreasonably high expectations of accuracy and precision, and then fail to follow through on their end of the bargain. It was noted that funding agencies — with their program staff, fulltime accountants, legal teams, and requests for accurate budgets and timelines — are occasionally late distributing funds once they've been awarded. In particular, this was noted of recent CAC awards.

These technicalities aside, several artists we spoke to have more fundamental concerns about applying for and accepting grants. Providing important context for some of these reservations, one interviewee explained:

I feel that sometimes, whether consciously or unconsciously, [Black and Brown artists] carefully guard [our work and practices], because, historically, those things have been taken by other people of privilege, who have not listened or really acknowledged what this

art is about, but have used it as a commodity, or co-opted it. ... The reason why a lot of people do not apply is this process of something so sacred being taken and commodified, or taken out of the hands of the people.

Several interviewees object to the process of competitive grantmaking due to the inequities they've observed. In conjunction with the overarching concern that grants go to organizations with the best grant writers, rather than to the ones doing the most dynamic work, we heard that smaller organizations are disadvantaged compared to larger ones that have certain kinds of legitimizing attributes (e.g., large budgets or their own venue). An interviewee recalled serving as a reviewer on grant selection panels and his dismay that the other panelists had never experienced the work of the artists they were judging and were making decisions based on cursory readings of the application materials without any understanding of the cultural background.

Even some artists who rely on grants as a primary source of income are disillusioned by the process. One interviewee commented, *"We get a fair share of grants. They're typically project based, so they get consumed. It's hard to get ahead that way because the money gets eaten up. ... We're always teetering on the edge of disaster."* Another described the constant search for grants as follows: *"It's a hamster wheel. And you're going nowhere, you know? And it is soul crushing."*

These concerns seem to be about grantmaking in general, rather than critiques of specific funders. When asked for details about the challenges of application processes for specific funders, several of the interviewees found it difficult to recall details of a specific funder's application process or even which foundations or agencies they had applied to for grants. Asked about recent experiences with grants, one individual artist responded, *"They all kind of sound the same from the different agencies. ... I applied for some things, but I can't remember which ones now ... One of my close friends helped me with the application and to get it in on time."* This suggests that it may be difficult for a single funder to change perceptions and drastically expand participation in grant programs through incremental changes, since past experiences and general mistrust of the processes as a whole will likely continue to weigh on people's perceptions.

In our interviews, we focused in particular on artists' perceptions and experiences with grants as a way of understanding what barriers artists who operate outside of, or on the margins of, the nonprofit system face in accessing support, and/or why they choose not to access support from foundations and government agencies. This is central to understanding the persistent inequities that exist in the larger arts ecosystem (including the for-profit, nonprofit, and informal arts sectors). While there are certainly many grievances with the grantmaking process — which we have documented extensively here — we want to close this section by reiterating that several of our interviewees routinely apply for and receive grants, and, indeed, could not continue their work without this support. Despite all critiques of

the processes, the resources are needed in the communities. What our interviewees are asking for is innovation in how the resources are made available to artists.

Understanding the perceptions and dynamics within the local arts ecosystem is key to understanding how to effectively infuse additional resources into communities. The artists we spoke to are going to create their work with whatever resources are available to them. Some apply for grants and others don't, but with few exceptions³ the work gets done in one way or another, with or without funding. They aren't waiting to see if their grant requests are approved before doing the work they're committed to. Rather, they use the resources at hand, or, in some cases, move their practice to a community where they find the necessary support. This suggests that, to increase support for local artists, it may be necessary to put additional resources into the hands of the communities, rather than requiring artists to bring those resources in from the outside.

³ We heard of one case in which dance classes were not being offered because a CAC grant was delayed, and the instructors couldn't be paid without that funding.

APPENDIX

PARTIAL LIST OF PAST AND PRESENT CULTURAL HUBS IN SOUTH LOS ANGELES

- A.C. Bilbrew Library's Black Resource Center (LA County Library)
- African Marketplace (1985 — 2009)
- Aquarian Book Shop (1941 — 1992)
- Brockman Gallery (1969 — 1990)
- California African American Museum (1977 — ongoing)
- Cecil Ferguson Art Gallery (1990s — ongoing)
- Cielo Galleries/Studios (ongoing)
- Communicative Arts Academy in Compton (1969 — 1975)
- Crossroads Arts Academy and Theatre (1981 — 1999)
- Eso Won Books (1988 — ongoing)
- 5th Street Dick's Coffee Company (1992 — 2000)
- Fernando Pullum Music Center (ongoing)
- Frances E. Williams Little Theatre (Veteran actress & producer Frances E. Williams turned her garage into a little theatre available to actors and playwrights to mount new pieces, run a play, rehearse, heal. On 5th Ave. between Jefferson Exposition)
- Good Life Café (1989 — 1999)
- Inner City Cultural Center (1967 — ongoing)
- Jazz Mentorship Program (1990 — ongoing)
- KAOS Network (ongoing)
- Leimert Park Artwalk (2010 — ongoing)
- Mafundi Institute (1969 — 1975)
- Mayme Clayton Library and Cultural Center (founded as Western States Black Research Center, 1975 — 2020)
- The Museum of African American Art (1976 — ongoing)
- Nate Holden Performing Arts Center (city-owned)
- Pan African Film and Arts Festival (1992 — ongoing)
- Pan-Afrikan People's Arkestra (1961 — ongoing)
- Paul Robeson Community Wellness Center (1977 — ongoing)
- Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival
- St. Elmo Village (1969 — ongoing)
- Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (1970? — ongoing)
- Spoken Word Art and Music (SWAAM)
- The Underground Museum (2012 — 2022)
- Union of God's Musicians and Artists (U.G.M.A.A.) (started in 1970s?)
- Vibrations, Inglewood (2009-2016)
- Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC), (1965 — ongoing)

- Watts Towers Arts Center (1961 — ongoing; city-owned)
- Watts Towers Day of the Drum
- Watts Village Theatre Company (1996 — ongoing)

- Watts Writers Workshop (1965-73, and recently revived)
- William Grant Still Art Center (city-owned)
- The World Stage (1989 — ongoing)
- The Young Saints

IMAGE CREDITS

Page 2 – Fliers and posters for past events on display at Sims Library of Poetry.

Page 7 – Researchers John Carnwath and Anh Thang Dao-Shah with local poet and Connector Peter J. Harris in front of the mural Homage to John Outterbridge (Alonso Davis, 1980) at the Watts Towers Arts Center.

Page 10 – Water Kills. Acrylic paint on plywood (skateboard deck). Artist unknown. On display at Sims Library of Poetry.

Page 13 – Musicians performing on Degnan Boulevard in Leimert Park. Photograph by Matt Gibson.

Page 15 – Michael Massenburg. Nineteensixtyfive (detail). Collage, drawing, and painting. Courtesy of the artist.

Page 17 – Watts Towers on East 107th Street. Created by Simon Rodia, between 1921 and 1955.

Page 19 – Sims Library of Poetry on West Florence Avenue.

Page 20 – Graduates of the Community Literature Initiative's Poetry Publishing Class celebrate finishing their books at the Sims Library of Poetry, 2022. Photographer unknown. Image used courtesy of the Sims Library of Poetry.

Page 22 – The Joshua White Trio performing at The World Stage in Leimert Park.

Page 24 – Musicians performing at the Billy Higgin's Instrumental Jam Session at The World Stage.

Page 25 – Dominique Moody (in collaboration with other artists). Creating Our Next LA: Hyde Park, 2021. Mixed Media. Commissioned by LA Commons for WE RISE 2021. On display at Hanks Mini Market on Florence Avenue.

Page 27 – Artist Dominique Moody and her mobile art installation, inspirational studio, and tiny home, "The Nomad."

Page 28 – Detail of the KAOS Network storefront at Leimert Park Plaza.

Page 31 – Skira Martinez. Untitled work from the series Nothing New Under The Sun (2017). Assemblage artwork made from discarded computer parts/broken toys and yard sale finds. Courtesy of the artist.

Page 35 – JazzAntiqua dancers in rehearsal at the Nate Holden Performing Arts Center. Photo by George Simian. Courtesy of Jazz Antiqua.

