

## ACTIVATE Action Project Summary

*“the fact is that without any talk we are influenced by the world in which we live and by the synthesis of the experiences of all creators \* the engineer mathematician sculptor physicist chemist architect doctor musician writer dancer teacher baker actor editor the [person] on the job the [person] in the home and painters”*

*-Ray Eames*

### *The Big Picture*

I was motivated to apply to ACTIVATE because of a handful of complex questions about my role as an artist in society.

- What *are* the roles of artists in society?
- How can the arts become more integrated with mainstream cultural values?
- What part has the arts establishment played in alienating itself from mainstream cultural values?
- How can we create more capital for artists while keeping a clear differentiation between creative capital and exploitative economic development?
- What role do artists play in the process of gentrification in cities that are experiencing rapid economic growth and development such as Los Angeles? Is this process imminent in El Segundo, my community of residence? If so, what responsibility do I have as an artist towards this complex process of change?

These are big challenges and I obviously haven't solved them. I have, however, started to engage a thinking and doing process, which is the more important thing and for me what ACTIVATE has been all about. Looking back on these questions now, I am prepared to start with a general position on at least the first issue. I firmly believe that art does not only exist for its own sake but in order to facilitate independent thought, problem solving skills and to equip citizens to participate in a democratically run society.

### *Small Steps*

I came into this program with relatively little experience in the realm of civic engagement. As a result, I started thinking about my action project as the accumulation of all the steps I have taken to become more civically engaged over the past nine months. These include:

- Connecting with other ACTIVATE Cultural Policy Fellows to understand their challenges, questions, solutions and actions, also to ask and give advice and moral support
- Developing an awareness of and confidence in my own leadership skills and ability to verbally support my position
- Reaching out to local arts leaders in El Segundo including the education staff at the El Segundo Museum of Art, local gallerierist and organizer of the new and successful El Segundo Arts Walk, members of the City Council and several creative business owners
- Researching a list of cultural assets in El Segundo
- Researching models of community engagement led by artists and art institutions: *Civic Action* at the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, NY; *High Desert Test Sites* and Andrea Zittel's *Institute of Creative Living* in Joshua Tree, CA; *Streetopia*, sponsored by The Luggage Store Gallery in San Francisco, CA; *The India Report* by Charles and Ray Eames; the work of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, CA; artist Mark Bradford's *Art + Practice* project in

Leimert Park, Los Angeles, CA; The Center for Urban Pedagogy, Brooklyn, NY; Black Mountain College, Asheville, NC.

- Creation of performance project *Citizen Caryatids* with collaborator Christina Shurts, goal is to mount a series of guerrilla performances engineered to explore the role of the artist as citizen acting in public space from a feminist perspective

In taking these first steps, I became aware of a specific need here in El Segundo that will drive my subsequent action steps. Nearby in Playa Vista (aka Silicon Beach) 2,000 new residents have settled in and journalists forecast that the area will sell out by 2018. El Segundo city leaders are working to attract the Silicon Beach overflow and there is already a plan in place to develop my immediate neighborhood, Smokey Hollow, into a creative media company hub.

As of now, the City of El Segundo has no cultural plan. Given these imminent changes, residents (both new and long-term) are certainly in a position to benefit from the identification of our cultural needs and from the development of an organized cultural strategy. We have also just elected three new City Council members who have each voiced their support for the creative community as a necessary part of this process of economic growth.

Going forward, I will continue to develop my network/coalition of like minded individuals with the similar goals for the city, and other small cities that are in a similar position. I will also focus my research on the process of cultural planning. Eventually, I would like to introduce the the topic of cultural planning at a city council meeting.

*Thanks*

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to all of those who made participation in this program possible. I send a BIG thank you to the hard work and generosity of Cristina Pacheco and the rest of the Arts for LA team- you made the running of ACTIVATE seem effortless but I know it was not. Thank you to all the speakers, meeting hosts and to my fellow participants for your advice and support. Thank you also to Lucia Dewey Atwood of the Eames Foundation for allowing me to take time off of work to attend each session. Thanks to my friend and *Citizen Caryatids* collaborator Christina Shurts for partnering with me. Lastly, thank you to Mr. Ali Azimi for keeping me and my ideas sharp.