

Creative Construct: Building for Culture and Creativity

Note-taking guide for session rapporteurs

METADATA

Session title: Interview: Toronto Artscape +20: Lessons and Outlook

Presenter: Billie Bridgman, John Lorinc

Day: Thurs. May 1 **Time:** 1:00-3:30

NOTES

1. Short overview/summary of presentation

A discussion of the history and development of Artscape, the Toronto-based cultural organization over the past 20 years, and a presentation of the current status and projects of the organization. The gentrification cycle, the need for integration of artists and arts to everyday culture, and the models of community spaces that can contribute to this process were presented.

2. Key points and significant themes of presentation

Gentrification

Artscape is an arms-length corporation that strives to bring live-work space for artists to the city.

This discussion was about what happened, why, and possible future solutions. As a unique entity formed in the 1980s, Artscape responded to a Toronto Arts Council report entitled: "No Vacancy".

This report documented the gentrification cycle, where artists pave the way for public movement into an area, and the growth of development in previously undesirable locations.

At the time, artists were described as soldiers. The connotations of this are that they are only temporary inhabitants, and see only the first level of impact of their presence. They live outside the functioning society that they inhabit. This excluded space is where we (as society) put our artists

There is a mentality, "build it and they will come". The goal of previous spaces where artists came to reside as tenants and be part of a community was held within the property line. All members of an organization worked to create more space for artists, and the sense of community worked well within the space, but not much changed for the tenants, other than that they had an anchor. Other expected/desired community benefits were NOT happening. The artist buildings were ghettos within the surrounding community. Not much interaction with the community happened, and when it did in some cases, the artists impacted the area but their own lives did not change or improve.

Corporations and their interaction with the smaller business level - not much was happening 20 years ago. Artists only wanted money from the businesses – as a donor to a charity. No lasting relationships were struck, and the mentality of each remained distinct. There was a sense of distrust.

There is now a realization that sponsorships are not building common ground, just exchange of money and recognition. The perception of the artists' role as powerless outsiders remains.

Integration of the Arts and Artists

A growing trend among artists is to look at themselves as a resource. The next generation offers their creative services to arts and non-arts purposes. i.e.: fashion

They work to build bridges, and create smaller organizations and partnerships on the individual level.

Artscape wants to make "hubs" out of buildings. To connect business with the artists, harness creativity, and eventually integrate artists into communities. Many artists are still outsiders, or feel as though they are, are somewhat unconnected and remain poor. The value of culture is disassociated from compensation and respect.

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By building artist-friendly spaces, that a few arts groups and artists could occupy, Artscape saved a few artists a lot of money, but were acting only as an intermediary between artists and landlords.

Artscape fell into the role of landlord- the tenants continued to act as underdogs. This was just the beginning of the Richard Florida and Richard Landry discussion - the identification of the need to define a new direction.

Today, Artscape thinks more about the building's location and place, and presence in the community. Through uses and users they try to be creative city builders. An important question to ask is: are artist-only buildings perpetuating a ghettoization?

Arts Barns

This project is a step in a new direction – a mix of community, social service, organizations, artists and families. It will have a new management that consists of a community board. How will it be managed in the long term is somewhat unknown, including how it will be paid for. The end result is a space that will not necessarily focus on artists.

Here is an opportunity to connect a source of creativity - art – to other kinds of creative thinking. During earlier projects we did not understand the importance of creative core thinkers - scientists, artists, and the need to acknowledge and connect them to do R & D for commercial industrial, design, new ways of thinking and living. Experimentation is essential - pushes commercial development, and is not a slow process anymore. The creative core of art drives innovation like a supply chain, except that most suppliers are rewarded at some point in the process.

There has been one thing left out of creative city discussion - the current situation of the artist. This link has not been made economically or practically. There is a change needed on both sides - artists must meet industry halfway, to change how we as artists view ourselves we must not behave as outsiders. If we insist that we must stay outside - special needs community, then we need to change mentality of “you owe us” to “you need us”.

To be creative is not about being a squeaky wheel, but revealing the power of the wheel and offering its use.

Artscape not about bricks, but about space-making, urban regeneration, economic impact, societal regeneration - finding the ways we live together.

The landlord and property manager role could be limiting, so the focus is on making the space, and letting the users take the spaces where they will.

Artscape is working towards acknowledgment that culture/art should take a place at the centre of our lives.

Coming development project

Sense that would it better for artists to own their own homes/space - the more artists firmly planted in the market the better.

A future role of Artscape is as a developer of low market rate living spaces for sale that artists can afford without grants, fundraising, and which isn't social housing. This cooperative effort will be made by the city, developer, and community.

Developers want to do this to get more density, but also for the energy that artists can bring to the building – marketing. This kind of use of artists for marketing will be good for artists. The artists will occupy the lower levels, for lower costs, and the higher levels will be made available to be sold at higher costs. Developer gains saleable space in the deal. Keeping these spaces will be difficult, but individual artist ownership is seen a good model. When artists are mixed in it will change the sense of artist as outsider. There remains a question of how much will it take to make a change.

Artists should be acknowledged as creative resources. Artists drive a huge economic sector, yet are confined to the funding from grants, which hold the connotation of a hand out.

Self-expression and the personal experience of art, hearing, teaching, learning, sharing, revealing can help in finding common ground. We've defined art, subdivided it, yet it should be about what speaks to us - art for everyone's sake.

Next set of locations: large urban centres - ethnic/cultural/complicated mix of communities in the outlying regions, not in the downtown areas.

i.e.: Burnaby in Vancouver

3. Notable examples and links to websites

www.torontoartscape.on.ca

4. Interesting questions and/or comments from the audience

Q: how are you able to make private developments affordable without government funding?

A: The model we are working on is in the Queen street west area. Developers came in quickly to leverage the rep of the community. The community was very adamant that artists not be pushed out. Artscape can in to get some leverage, and brought the developer together with community reps and arrived at a possible deal, and everyone got something. The building's lower floors are less valuable, so the developer got rid of less valuable space and put that space on the top. The ground floor and gallery remain available for the artists, along with some lower floors.

There will be a separate condo organization for artists, and no costs for land for the artists. The developer will not collect "soft costs" for the building. Artscape can afford to carry some for rental and sell some at below market rate.

Q: Is there any guarantee this will work?

A: Nothing is ever guaranteed.

Q: Is there any possibility that there will be no artistic activity there in 20 years?

A: The developer was/is excited about this, and wants to do the same thing in another area.

Q: Are you concerned that Artscape/artists are being used? (Downtown developers will use this as a marketing tool)

A: Of course we are being used, we are also using them. It is a partnership.

Q: Artscape - also does programming, education etc. How does that fit into your work?

A: We are the only org doing this work in Canada. There are 3 dimensions to our overall goals. The core is space making, working more on arts district, neighbourhood development and creative city building. All of this work, at a building, city region scale. The work in one area informs the other.

Q: What happens when the community does not have a sense of the priority of a culture project, or maybe doesn't want it?

A: It is a negotiation. We won't develop in a neighbourhood that really doesn't want us. Would we ram our way into a community if they didn't want it? No. The process takes a long time, Art Barns took over 8 years, and was very fractious at times. There were a lot of other people vying for the space to be used differently.

Experience has shown two types of opposition:

1. Don't want it.
2. Legitimate concern - have to work through the challenges.

Q: As you look to the future, how are you thinking about your role as an agent of heritage - finding ways to reuse old buildings?

A: Cultural uses are often good uses for old buildings, and urban spaces often have old buildings, so they are already there. Newly built space is something we also entertain. We are trying to be as opportunistic as we can be. Getting city buildings was traditionally the easiest way to get space without building.

Note taker: Allison Collins