

SANCTUARIES



PRIMER

Community Development and the Arts

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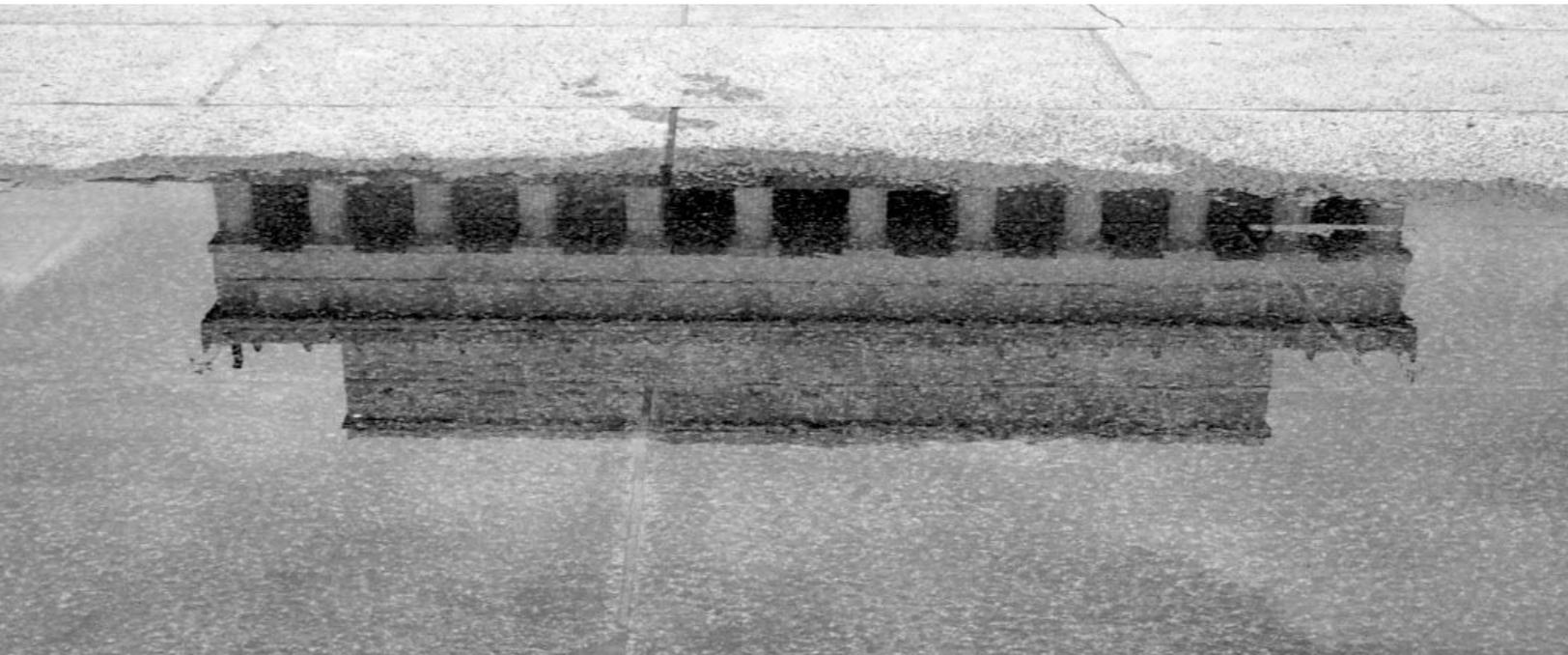
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historical context

Many people mistakenly believe that we live in a post-racial America - a nation free of racial prejudice and discrimination. During Barack Obama's presidency, people - particularly those of societally privileged identities - pointed to a Black man's presidency as proof of the end of racism. The myth of [meritocracy](#) - the false notion that people can gain capital based exclusively on their abilities and talents - is prevalent in our country and fails to take into account historically ingrained barriers that work against people of particular races, genders, and other intersecting social identities.

Societal barriers in this country are historically embedded and can be traced to years of enslavement, disenfranchisement, and marginalization of Black people - the product of an unjustly designed national structure ([Coates, 2014](#)). One of these unjust but deliberate cogs of America's design is government-sponsored housing segregation.

In 1910, Baltimore city government adopted residential segregation legislation restricting African American housing purchases to particular blocks. This ordinance was a reaction to a Black Yale Law School graduate attempting to buy a home in a previously all-white neighborhood ([Rothstein, 2015](#)). Similar patterns of government-issued racial segregation have persisted since. The reverberations of [redlining](#) - the Federal Housing Administration's practice of refusing to insure mortgages for Black families looking to purchase homes in white neighborhoods because they were considered "poor credit risks" - echo in racial and socioeconomic disparities today ([Rothstein, 2015](#)).

The history behind housing segregation encompasses government-sponsored measures beyond redlining. In the 1930s, The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) also subsidized the mass production of suburbs under the condition that no homes be sold or resold to African Americans. Meanwhile, the FHA was subsidizing white family move-ins to these suburbs ([Rothstein, 2017](#)). The FHA justified their requirement by claiming that [property values](#) of white homes would decline if Black people bought homes in or near these suburbs. However, this claim was based purely on racism, and researchers cite that property values actually rose when African Americans bought houses in such areas ([Rothstein, 2017](#)).

In the 1950s and 60s, government-sanctioned “urban renewal,” otherwise known as “slum clearance,” took place. African American neighborhoods near central cities were destroyed in order to create housing for middle income white people and make space for hospitals and universities, while the Black residents were displaced further from downtown - another housing policy geared explicitly towards segregating metropolitan areas ([Rothstein, 2017](#)).

The effects of these unjust policies ripple to next generations. Restricted to low property value neighborhoods, most African Americans received no [tax deduction](#) for their [mortgage](#), while most middle class white families were gaining wealth from their [home equity](#). This disparity continues to leave Black families socioeconomically behind ([Rothstein, 2017](#)). In one study, scholars found that 80% of African American children living in poor neighborhoods today come from families who lived in similarly poor neighborhoods for at least the previous two generations. About half of African American families have lived in America’s poorest neighborhoods over multiple generations, in stark comparison to the 7% of white families for whom this is the case ([Sharkey, 2016](#)).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one sociologist found that highly segregated areas correlate with a lack of [social mobility](#) ([Chetty, 2016](#)). Scholars say that our nation’s economic growth no longer trickles down to benefit the poor because of anti-[unionization](#) laws and a stagnant minimum wage, exacerbating barriers to social mobility for Black folks ([Danziger, 2016](#)). All of this exemplifies the way years of unjust governmental treatment of Black Americans - including government-sponsored housing policies endorsing segregation - has resulted in the highly segregated and socioeconomically disparate metropolitan areas we see today.

Black Americans living in poor neighborhoods as a product of this unjust history are vulnerable in a number of ways. Black women, who are targets of both historically reinforced racism and

sexism, are the most likely to be seen in eviction courts, while Black men are the most likely demographic to be found in prisons. Scholar Matthew Desmond says, “In majority Black neighborhoods, women are getting locked out, and men are getting locked up” ([Desmond, 2016](#)).

The government - on federal and local levels - has instituted and continues to institute racialized laws and policies crafted to ensure that many Black Americans live segregated - and thus often impoverished - lives ([Rothstein, 2015](#)). Barack Obama's administration advocated for policies that called for desegregation, particularly in suburban housing. However, Ben Carson, the secretary of housing and urban development under the Trump administration, has called such advocating "social engineering" and is working to undo such change (while failing to acknowledge that government-sponsored housing segregation is social engineering itself) ([Rothstein, 2017](#)).

It is imperative that we understand and acknowledge America's history of unjust and deliberate segregating policy of in order to work towards creating more equitable and strong communities.



community development

[Community development](#) is a broad term used to describe the process of community members taking action and creating solutions to collective problems.

Community development is more specifically defined by the [International Association for Community Development](#):

“a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes **participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality through social justice**, through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings.”

A variety of community development entities exist. These include:

- [Community Development Financial Institutions](#) - “provide credit and financial services to people and communities underserved by mainstream commercial banks and lenders.”
- [Community Land Trusts](#) - “nonprofit, community-based organizations designed to ensure community stewardship of land. Community land trusts can be used for many types of development (including commercial and retail), but are primarily used to ensure long-term housing affordability.”
- [Cooperatives](#) - “Cooperatives are businesses governed on the principle of one member, one vote. There are several common types of co-ops (as well as hybrids—which combine more than one type), including cooperatives owned and operated by the people who work their and/or the people buying the cooperative’s goods or services.”

Community Development Corporations are another variety of community development entity.

[Community Wealth](#) defines [Community Development Corporations](#) eloquently:

“Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are nonprofit, community-based organizations **focused on revitalizing the areas in which they are located, typically low-income, underserved neighborhoods that have experienced significant disinvestment.** While they are most commonly celebrated for developing affordable housing, they are usually involved in a range of initiatives critical critical to community health such as economic, development, sanitation, streetscaping, and neighborhood planning projects, and oftentimes even provide education and social services to neighborhood residents.”

[Community Wealth](#) explains that CDCs play a critical role in strengthening communities for some key reasons. Firstly, CDCs grow capital by developing residential and commercial community properties such as affordable housing and businesses. CDCs are also quasi grassroots organizations in that at least one third of most CDC boards are comprised of community residents, contributing to amplifying the often marginalized voices of local residents. Finally, CDCs involve and prioritize community members by involving residents in neighborhood organizing to improve community conditions.



arts-based community development

Arts-based community development (ABCD) is defined by William Cleveland, Director of the Center for the Study of Art and Community, as “arts-centered activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health, and/or productivity within a community” ([Cleveland, 2002](#)).

It includes activities that:

- **Educate** and **inform** us about ourselves and the world
- **Inspire** and **mobilize** individuals and/or groups
- **Nurture** and **heal** people or communities
- **Build** and **improve** community capacity and/or infrastructure

Cleveland has mapped the field of arts-based community development according to these goals:

An Ecology of Arts-Based Community Development



(Cleveland, 2002)

civic engagement

One expression of ABCD is arts-based civic engagement, which is defined as “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern” ([Stern and Seifert, 2009](#)). In their paper “Civic Engagement and the Arts: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement,” Mark Stern and Susan Seifert outline different theories of action:

- **Didactic theories of action** “focus on the ability of the arts and culture to instruct or persuade the population.” A contemporary example of a didactic approach is the role of arts in social movements.
- **Discursive theories of action** “focus on the arts to provide settings in which people can discuss issues, form connections, and take action. Discursive theories are most closely associated with the concepts of social capital and the public sphere.”
- **Ecological theories of action** “focus on the unintentional consequences of cultural engagement. Ecological theories view all cultural participation as a form of civic engagement and assert that the arts generate a variety of spillover effects that increase social capital and community capacity.”

It’s important to take note, especially when considering didactic theories of action, that the arts have not always played a politically progressive role in civic engagement. The mass pageant of the early 20th century, for example, harmfully reinforced stereotypes of immigrants. Initially depicting immigrants in native costume, the organizers then portrayed a cultural “advancement” as pageant participants transitioned to American clothing towards the end of the show, erasing immigrant culture and heritage ([Cohen-Cruz, 2002](#)). Incidents like this one underscore the importance of thinking critically about the message the artistic project is working to convey.

Performance artist and AIDS activist Richard Elovich says, “[In] activist art... we begin with clarity - what exactly we want to say - and then determine how to say it” ([Cohen-Cruz, 2002](#)).

creative placemaking

Creative placemaking is another expression of ABCD. Admittedly, it can be a somewhat [fuzzy concept](#), and a number of definitions for the term exist.

The [National Endowment for the Arts](#) has defined the term as follows:

“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, nonprofit and community sectors **strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood**, town, tribe, city or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking **animates** public and private spaces, **rejuvenates** structures and streetscapes, **improves** local business viability and public safety, and **brings diverse people together** to celebrate, inspire and be inspired.”

[Wikipedia](#) describes placemaking as “both a process and a philosophy,” while [Springboard for the Arts](#) has their own definition:

“the act of people coming together **to change overlooked and undervalued public and shared spaces into welcoming places where community gathers**, supports one another, and thrives. Places can be **animated** and **enhanced** by elements that encourage human interaction - from temporary activities such as performances and chalked poetry to permanent installations such as landscaping and unique art” ([Springboard, 2014](#))

Most leaders in the field agree that creative placemaking is more than [yarn bombing](#) or pop-up art, however. Expert Anne Gadwa Nicodemus explains that real creative placemaking projects need to be sustained, strategic, and involve partners like the government, arts-sector, business leaders, and/or community development organizations ([Nicodemus, 2014](#)). Nicodemus also emphasizes the importance of involving and working closely with artists in creative placemaking. She explains that the arts have the power to break barriers between social identities. She writes that artists hold the power to “breathe new life into a neighborhood,” increasing foot traffic from arts and cultural events to the benefit of businesses and property values ([Nicodemus, 2014](#)).

One risk of creative placemaking is that its potential outcome of increased property values can contribute to [gentrification](#), reinforcing segregated neighborhoods and further disenfranchising previous residents of the developing neighborhood, who are often low-income and people of color ([Nicodemus, 2014](#)). Creative placemaking is toeing a tricky line in terms of strengthening and building communities without gentrifying neighborhoods.

Still, creative placemaking is progressive in that it strays from privatized neighborhood changemaking by involving community members in processes, resisting the top-down form of change often correlated with gentrification ([Kahne, 2015](#)).

Because the definition of creative placemaking is not as concrete as other terms that intertwine with policy and often require grants, measuring the outcomes and impacts of creative placemaking can be tricky.

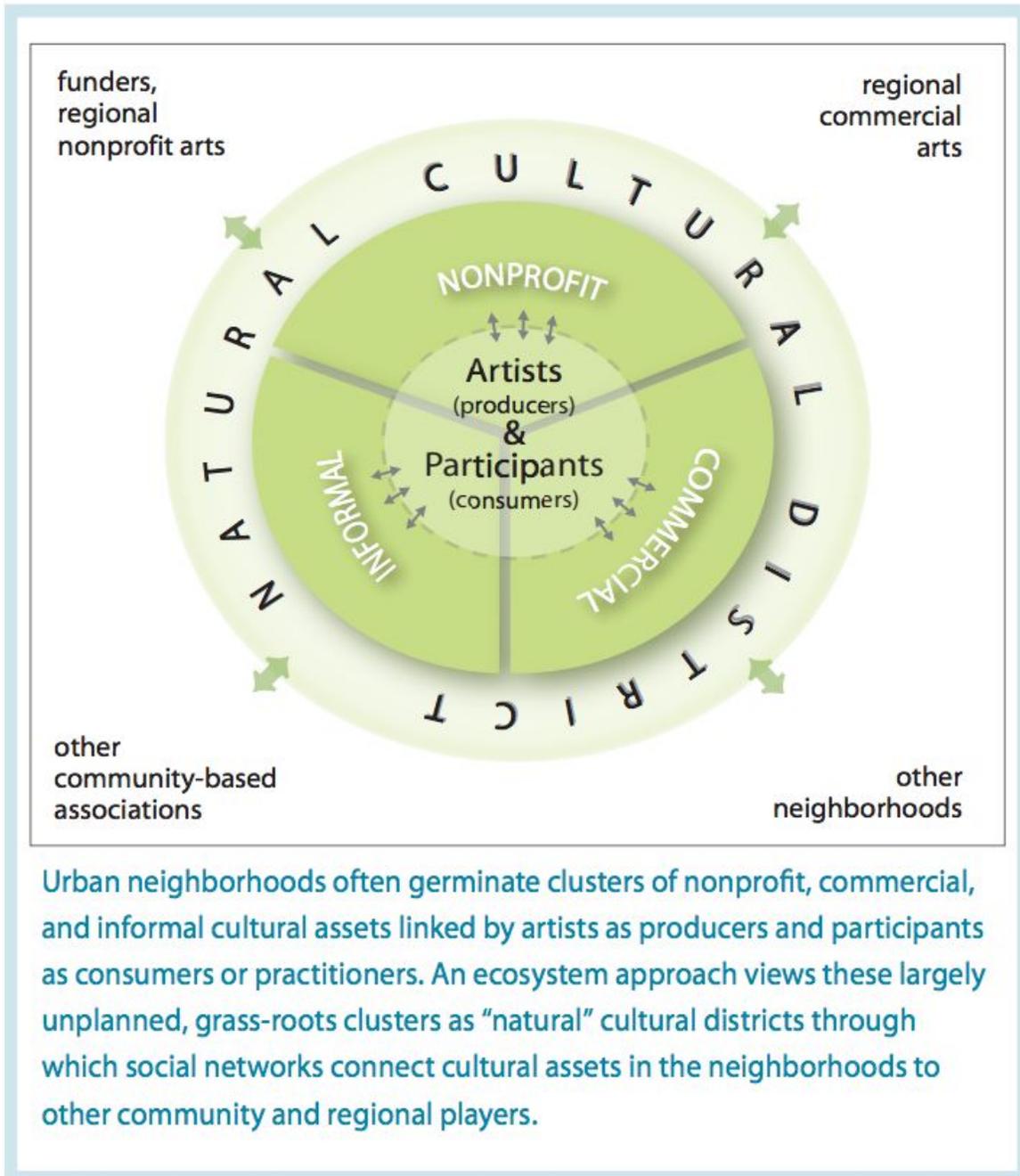
Scholar Mark Stern reminds us to look beyond the economic impact of the arts and to focus on other potential areas of impact. For example, he encourages researchers to consider the “de-distributional impact” of creative placemaking - are community resources being redistributed to college-educated “creatives” as a result of creative placemaking at the expense of the less prosperous residents of the city? He also urges those evaluating the impact of creative placemaking to consider “substitution effects” of investing in community artistic projects - where would the money spent on the project have been spent in the absence of this project? These concepts are important ones to consider when assessing outcomes of creative placemaking ([Stern, 2014](#)).



best practices

Several community development organizations and leaders agree that it is imperative to utilize existing neighborhood resources when working to develop a community. This means tapping into local artists, businesses, nonprofits, and other community assets.

Mark Stern and Susan Seifert outline the value of natural cultural districts and the ways they can be further cultivated. Stern and Seifert define a natural cultural district as “a geographical area in which a variety of cultural assets are clustered” ([Stern and Seifert, 2007](#)).



(Stern and Seifert, 2007)

[Springboard for the Arts](#) explains why community development should engage and prioritize local artists. According to Springboard, working with local artists...

- “Taps into an existing asset in your community”
- “Builds lasting relationships based on action and engagement”
- “Brings creativity, innovation, and unusual solutions to challenges
- “Reflects the culture and people of a place”

Springboard also emphasizes the cruciality of fairly compensating artists - who are societally undervalued - for their work. They also suggest that community development initiatives define the term artist broadly, as there are a variety of mediums of art that hold the power to strengthen a community ([Springboard, 2014](#)).

Springboard encourages community development organizations to find additional stakeholders for their arts-based initiatives to further unify and fuel projects. These stakeholders can include the city and government, educational institutions, cultural organizations, businesses, parks, and more ([Springboard, 2014](#)).

What are the advantages of partnering with local artists and neighborhood stakeholders to spearhead these initiatives and addressing community challenges? Springboard says that primary impacts of this approach can include...

- Changing the community or neighborhood's narrative, which is especially valuable when marginalized voices are being brought to the forefront through the artistic work
- Building social capital for the community among a diverse group of people
- Increasing the prosperity and visibility of small businesses in the neighborhood

These best practices are crucial to thoughtfully engaging in community development initiatives. Ensuring that the voices and perspectives of historically marginalized and disenfranchised people are leading these initiatives is imperative to resisting the historically unjust policies this country has enforced. Creative placemaking and arts-based community development initiatives, when prioritizing local residents and tapping into pre-existing community assets, hold the power to strengthen communities and spur progressive cultural shifts.

Some Suggestions for Artists Stepping into Community Development Spaces

From *Common Sense and Common Ground* by William Cleveland

- **Introductions** - Start at the bottom and make your way up when making introductions - connect and build trust with fellow workers
- **Listen** - Listen to the stories you hear as you enter the organization's space - this is their institutional memory. You may be able to pick up on some themes and patterns in the organization's dynamics and history
- **Generate trust** - Many organizations are not used to working closely with artists and don't have a strong concept of what artists do. Building trust is imperative to artist credibility and can happen with respect and validation
- **Face reality** - A new artistic project means that more work is being taken on by organizational team members. Communicate with the people who will be working on the project the most and convey your awareness of their hard work and a willingness to make their job easier when applicable
- **Think Small, Slow, Less** - It often takes longer than expected to get things done, so it is important to be patient while maintaining a creative problem-solving lens. As you learn how the organizational system works, things will naturally pick up speed, but it can be to your advantage to start out slow in the beginning



resources

Works Cited

- [The Case for Reparations](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- [From Ferguson to Baltimore: The Fruits of Government-Sponsored Segregation](#) by Richard Rothstein
- [A “Forgotten History” of How the US Government Segregated America](#) by Terry Gross featuring Richard Rothstein
- [Neighborhoods and Multi-Generational Effects](#) by the Stanford Center on poverty and Inequality featuring Patrick Sharkey
- [Current Trends in Social Mobility](#) by the Stanford Center on poverty and Inequality featuring Raj Chetty
- [US Poverty in Perspective](#) by the Stanford Center on poverty and Inequality featuring Sheldon Danziger
- [Unstable Housing](#) by the Stanford Center on poverty and Inequality featuring Matthew Desmond

- [About Us](#) by the International Association for Community Development
- [Strategies and Models](#) by Community Wealth
- [Fuzzy Vibrancy: Creative Placemaking as Ascendant US Cultural Policy](#) by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus
- [Creative Placemaking](#) by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa under the National Endowment for the Arts
- [Irrigate: A Toolkit for Mobilizing Local Artists to Solve Challenges](#) in Your Community by Springboard for the Arts
- [Creative Placemaking 101 for Community Developers](#) by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus
- [Does Placemaking Cause Gentrification? It's Complicated](#) by Juliet Kahne
- [Measuring the Outcomes of Creative Placemaking](#) by Mark Stern
- [Mapping the Field: Arts-Based Community Development](#) by William Cleveland
- [Civic Engagement and the Arts: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement](#) by Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert
- [An Introduction to Community Art and Activism](#) by Jan Cohen-Cruz
- [Cultivating “Natural” Cultural Districts](#) by Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert
- [Common Sense and Common Ground](#) by William Cleveland

Further Resources

- [Common Sense and Common Ground](#) by William Cleveland - tips for artists entering community development spaces
- [How to do Creative Placemaking](#) by the National Endowment for the Arts - a detailed resource on the many facets of community development
- [The New Urban Practice Toolbox](#) by Living Cities - toolkits on Cultivating and Connecting Leaders, Advancing Racial Equity and Inclusion, Engaging Community, Harnessing Technology, and more

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The Sanctuaries activates artists of different social and artistic backgrounds to build power, shift culture, and heal spirits for the wellness of the people. More at [*thesanctuaries.org*](https://thesanctuaries.org)