



SMU Meadows Prize Report:
Building a Thriving Artistic Community



THE PROCESS

Excited to receive Southern Methodist University's prestigious Meadows Prize, Creative Time proposed a yearlong study of the Dallas art community, looking at its strengths and helping to identify potential areas for growth. As part of this process, Creative Time made regular trips to Dallas to meet with artists, curators, collectors, gallery owners, visual and performing arts organization leaders, school administrators, philanthropists, writers, community organizers, and city officials. The goal was to begin an inclusive dialog about where Dallas could focus energies to nurture its artistic life, a conversation that would hopefully continue long after Creative Time's meetings ended and lead to new initiatives, policies, and opportunities for artists.

Our approach was simple: to listen. We met with individuals and groups throughout the area – from North, South, East, and West Dallas to city neighbors such as Arlington and Fort Worth. Along the way, we took note of impressions, common issues, unique perspectives, and ideas—both big and small. Each meeting contributed to our understanding of the health and vitality of contemporary art-making in the region, and also helped to illustrate how Dallas' geographic, social, and demographic makeup has affected the arts.

WHAT WE HEARD

From the get-go, a few things became clear. Dallas rightly prides itself as a place of enormous ingenuity and ambition, and it has the resources to achieve its dreams. Dallas thinks big and is open to trying new things. Over and over again, we heard that people wanted Dallas to be a “world class” art city. In many ways, it already is. In fact, Dallas is uniquely well positioned to grow its local artist population and become a leading force in the larger contemporary

art world. Dallas has great artists, extraordinary museums and collections, terrific Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs, curious audiences, generous philanthropists, collectors, and much more. Importantly, affordable live/work spaces are plentiful and there is a strong sense of community. In short, Dallas has a lot going for it.

We also heard that there was great potential for Dallas to grow as a place to nurture, present, and support contemporary art. After building signature homes for the city's museums and theaters, Dallas citizens can take important steps to advance the city's commitment to the arts, attract greater international attention, and engage broad and diverse audiences. For example, although there is affordable live/work space, there are very few small and mid-sized alternative spaces supporting the production of new work. While there are amazing institutions organizing exhibitions, there is limited arts coverage in the local press. Although there are many artists living and working in Dallas, the planning of the city fragments them across a large geographical area, undermining their sense of community and potential for collaboration. And although there are terrific institutions for the public to visit, Dallas could benefit from greater opportunities for art to be created within its diverse neighborhoods.

Our report primarily includes observations and proposed solutions from those living and working in the Dallas art community, interspersed with a few thoughts of our own. All conversations Creative Time participated in as part of our research were conducted in confidence, and no specific quotes are included in this document from these confidential discussions. This allowed us to have frank and candid conversations about the community's issues, goals, and wishes from a range of sources. As a result, this report looks at Dallas' strengths as an arts center and suggests next steps for individual and collective action to grow opportunities for artistic production.



FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

We believe there are certain key elements that are necessary for any art community to thrive. These key factors are, in no ranked order:

1. A sustainable artist community and opportunities for live/work space
2. Cultural institutions with international reach, innovative programs, and historically relevant collections
3. Great patrons who support the creation, presentation, and acquisition of art
4. Mid-sized and small art spaces that support the creation of new and experimental work by local and international artists
5. Skilled and visionary arts leaders in institutions big and small
6. Excellent contemporary art galleries with international reach
7. Residency programs for national and international artists to create in Dallas
8. Master of Fine Arts programs to train and attract artists
9. Arts education in Dallas public schools
10. Public art to engage broad audiences and activate public spaces
11. Engaged audiences

12. Experienced art writers featured daily in primary news media
13. Civic championing of the arts through policies and urban planning

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are intended to generate dialog. In no way could this brief report be comprehensive. Instead, it aims to encourage your feedback and inspire your individual and collective commitments to change and further conversation.

1. A sustainable artist community and opportunities for live/work space

In Dallas, artists support and collaborate with each other, know about each other's practices, and attend each other's openings. The abundance of affordable space is something that should attract artists from all over the country to live and work. However, the geography of Dallas is such that most artists work separately and are spread out throughout the city. Many key elements of a successful artist community exist, but in order for the community to be sustainable for generations to come, artists need to take the lead in shaping their framework for living, working, and supporting each other. Artists need to build their own community and exercise agency in coming together with their colleagues. For example:

- Rent studio buildings together. Shamrock Hotel Studios in Dallas, which provides studio and communal space to artists, both long- and short-term, is one model. More buildings can be used in this way to provide communities of artists with new studio opportunities.



- Purchase property collectively. This option provides the long-term stability of owning your own workspace and helps to develop a resident artist community within a particular neighborhood.
- Get actively involved in the communities around your studios. This allows artists to become visible participants in their communities and connect to new audiences.
- Share meals. Everyone loves to eat, so make informal dinners and host parties regularly. Collaborations and new professional opportunities result when artists invite other artists over, even just two or three times a year.
- Take agency. Create your own new programs that address your needs. Work together to take over spaces and create group shows to highlight each other's work. Propose that institutions host events that interest you. Open your studios, start alternative and informal art spaces, and make public interventions.

2. Cultural institutions with international reach, innovative programs, and historically relevant collections

Dallas excels in the quality of its institutions and the collections they build. Institutions in Dallas are doing great things—from hosting exhibitions and events that attract large audiences, to acquiring some of the most important works of our time. Dallas institutions can work both individually and collectively to achieve goals, and many institutions have had successful collaborations with each other by co-hosting events and cross-promoting activities. All institutions can regularly evaluate and grow their programs and audiences in a variety of ways. For example:

- Promote international reach. Continue to build historically significant collections and develop exhibitions that bring global voices, attention, and audience to the region.
- Involve the local artist community. Include local artists in your exhibition program, hire artists to work at the institution, invite local artists to exhibition previews, and host artist happy hours and professional development workshops.
- Commission new work and support artistic experimentation.
- Collaborate across disciplines. Think about the cultural community as a cohesive whole, not one compartmentalized by practice. Performance spaces can host visual artists and performers can engage in exhibitions at museums or nonprofits. A great example of visual and performing arts cross-over is in the Dallas Museum of Art's recent exhibition *Performance/Art*, which was presented in celebration of Dallas' new AT&T Performing Arts Center.
- Initiate big annual or biannual events. Festivals, biennials, and art fairs bring in huge audiences from in and outside the region. Institutions can combine forces to organize such programs with an international reach, bringing huge visibility to the entire area.
- Spread the word about what you do well. Often the full scope of an institution's activities isn't widely known. Tell your audience your success stories and highlight areas of growth to get people excited about your role in the community.

3. Great patrons who support the creation, presentation, and acquisition of art



Institutions all over the world envy Dallas. Its arts patronage and generous collection gifts provide financial support for new buildings, collections, programs, and more. Dallas collectors discuss their purchases with one another, coordinating their gifts to local institutions to build comprehensive civic collections. Patrons in Dallas can also support the production of new art, not just existing work, in the following ways:

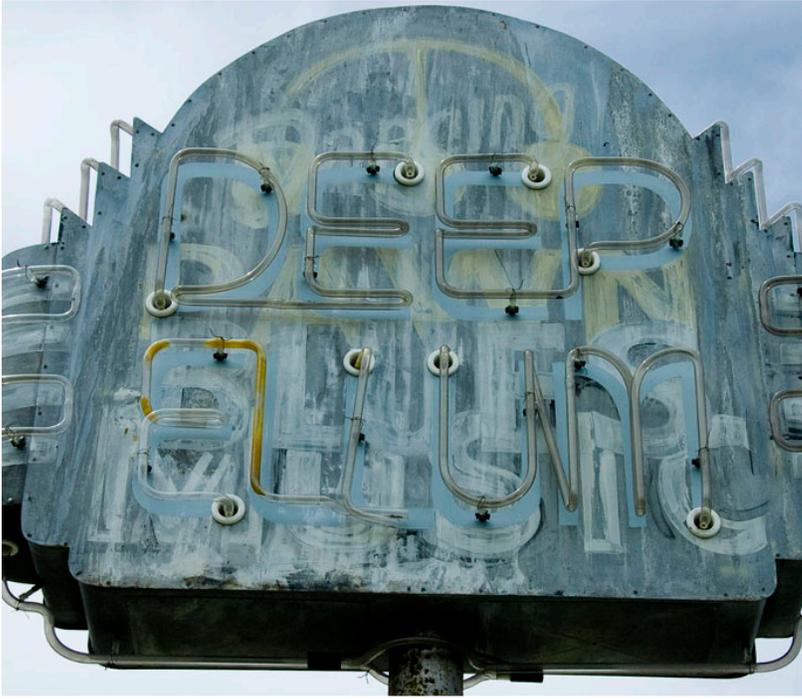
- Think big and small. Small and medium-sized organizations need your support, too. These organizations are the stepping-stones for artists between the studio and the museum, and are where careers are launched. Support initiatives that advance the capacity and caliber of these organizations and spread the word about their importance.
- Support new commissions and experimental work.
- Support institutional innovation to ensure that Dallas organizations stay relevant, ambitious, and connected with broader audiences.
- Support opportunities for local artists to advance their work through travel grants, residencies, and prizes.
- Support programs and initiatives that encourage curators and artists from other places to come visit artists and institutions in Dallas, and Dallas curators and artists to travel outside of the region.
- Buy local. If you like an artist's work don't just purchase from NY or LA galleries, also purchase from local galleries.
- Mentor new generations of patrons and collectors. Collectors should play a role in the nurturing of new collectors. Guide

young and prospective collectors through studio visits, gallery tours, and museum events. Take art trips with friends, acquaintances, and family members.

4. Mid-sized and small art spaces that support the creation of new and experimental work by local and international artists

Dallas has a number of high profile, large institutions known nationally for their programming. However, it seriously lacks mid-sized and small organizations that present new work by emerging and mid-career artists. Mid-sized and small nonprofits are key to a successful art community, as they foster artist careers, artistic dialog, and experimental practices. Curators, artists, arts administrators, and boards should work to promote the growth of these organizations and stress their importance as the foundation of a sustainable art community in the following ways:

- Hire experienced and skilled directors with vision and strong ties to artist communities.
- Hire curators who are artist-centered, smart, knowledgeable about contemporary art practice, skilled communicators, curious, and engaged with audiences.
- Think strategically and innovatively. Make sure missions are clear and relevant. Invest in thoughtful strategic planning and think of new ways to fulfill your institution's mission. Develop a clear programmatic vision, set ambitious marketing and fundraising goals, and execute a plan.
- Nonprofit boards, stay out of programming. Remember, the job of a board is to protect and defend the mission, provide



legal and fiscal oversight and support, and nurture the vision of institutional leadership.

5. Skilled and visionary arts leaders in institutions big and small

For organizations to be great they need great leaders, and Dallas has some of the most accomplished and visionary leaders in the field. That said, Dallas organizations should always strive to have the best people in place to carry out their mission. For example:

- Hire right. Boards should allocate the time and resources to fill leadership positions well, conducting both national and international searches for candidates. They should look for leaders with the vision and drive to take their institutions to new and exciting places—from the directorship to curatorial, education, development, and marketing positions.
- Invest in training. Boards should invest in employee training, research trips, and leadership forums. As an institution grows, so too must the skills of the staff.
- Reward vision and leadership. Boards should reward visionary thinking, responsible strategic planning initiatives, effectively managed staff and resources, and programmatic excellence. Give credit where credit is due.
- Attract and retain the best. To attract and keep talented leaders, Dallas organizations should provide regular growth opportunities, respectful and competitive compensation, and enough autonomy for a visionary leader to have an impact on a particular organization and the larger artistic community.

6. Excellent contemporary art galleries with international reach

For Dallas artists to sell their work locally and production to thrive, they need great galleries. There are already a number of galleries in Dallas, as well as a contemporary gallery association that advocates for commercial growth. However, in this economy, galleries need to be proactive and creative about developing audience and cultivating collectors. Steps they can take to accomplish this include:

- Collaborate. Dallas galleries should continue to coordinate their openings. Work together in planning gallery walks and advertising collectively for shared events. Collector's tours, opening nights, and receptions get people into your space and the spaces around you.
- Take Dallas artists national and international. Participate in art fairs and keep cultivating relationships with collectors from both in and out of the region.
- Grow audiences. Galleries as well as museums can act as a hub for discourse and should pursue inventive partnerships with universities, alternative spaces, and cultural institutions to encourage collecting in the Dallas community. This can be done through events like talks, book launches, film screenings, and museum member tours.
- Gallerists, give collectors space. Collectors feel pressured every time they walk into a gallery. Foster relationships with collectors over the long term rather than focusing on a one-time sale. When collectors feel comfortable, they will return.



7. Residency programs for national and international artists to create in Dallas

Residency programs are key for any arts community to attract new artists, promote dialog about artistic production, and provide local artists with opportunities to engage with their international peers. There are residencies in Dallas, including CentralTrak and La Reunion. However, residency programs are too few in number in Dallas and are currently not reaching as broad a national and international community as other Texas-based residencies like Art Pace in San Antonio and the Core artist-in-residence program in Houston. The Dallas art community needs to develop, support, and promote residencies. For example:

- Expand reach. Create and support residency programs that foster production by bringing artists to the city with fresh perspectives.
- Set standards. Include regional, national, and international artists. Set policies for selection, and think about what new residents can bring to the Dallas art community.
- Create a residency framework that allows artists to live in and engage with the city. Dallas is not a walking city, so make sure that artists have the resources to get around and meet new people. Isolation in the studio does not allow for discourse with peers. Provide artist housing, effective transportation options, and organized opportunities to interact with other artists, curators, and students in the area. If artists get to know the city and its people, they may stay on to become permanent residents.
- Get audiences into your space. Host dinners, talks, and exhibitions that link residents and visitors. This makes the program a hub of artistic production for the entire community.

8. Master of Fine Arts programs to train and attract artists

Art schools are essential to a thriving artistic community, and the Dallas area has several established MFA programs. MFA programs employ working artists and act as a launching pad for conversation about artistic practice. They connect generations of artists at all professional levels through lectures, programs, and studio visits. MFA programs also bring in artists from other parts of the world to work, lecture, and present, which helps infuse the local scene with new ideas and energy while fostering connections and opportunities. Dallas' MFA programs could do more to engage the broader community. For example:

- Attract new residents to Dallas. MFA programs can bring new people and perspectives to the city by attracting national and international faculty and students.
- Bring in new voices from around the region and expand your program. Utilize the amazing brainpower in the city to expand course offerings, including new programs in areas like curating, social justice, and art criticism. Invite experts from other fields, including new technology, urban planning, architecture, public policy, and science to create new and robust curricula.
- Balance the traditional with the new. The best MFA programs have a diversity of courses that reflect the larger ecology of how artists are making work. The foundations are essential, but should be taught in concert with programs that explore new modes of production.
- Get off campus. Bring your programs to other neighborhoods and connect with new audiences. Require that students go to shows and openings off campus, visit local artists' studios, attend lectures at museums, and intern at local institutions.



9. Arts education in Dallas public schools

Despite the fact that K-12 arts education budgets have been slashed nationwide in the past few decades, youth who have access to art education learn more, are better at problem solving, and are less likely to get in trouble. Fortunately, Dallas is home to acclaimed arts education programs. In particular, Big Thought is a national leader in connecting art programs with diverse communities and under-served students across the city. Many of Dallas' leading institutions also host educational programs for students of all ages. Like all cities in the United States, Dallas would benefit enormously from more quality arts programs in its schools. Educators can grow these programs in the following ways:

- Think big. Advocate for arts education in all of Dallas' public schools, not just a select few, securing public and private funding to serve every K-12 student in Dallas.
- Get local artists involved. Artists must be working in the schools, in after-school programs, and at community centers.
- Set up partnerships between schools and arts institutions. Expand on existing programs and develop new initiatives that broaden the exposure to and engagement with the arts for all K-12 students in Dallas, including strategies that bring students into the institutions and workers into the schools. This can be accomplished through internships that place students in institutions, curricula shaped around exhibitions, and classroom lectures from local artists and curators.

10. Public art to engage broad audiences and activate public spaces

Art doesn't happen just in a studio, gallery or museum—it can also connect with people where they live, play and work. By commissioning artists to engage in public space, art and life intersect. When working in public, artists often collaborate with professionals outside the field of art—from engineers and architects to educators and community leaders. Public art, both temporary and permanent, promotes community dialog, provides new opportunities for artists to grow their practice, and acts as an incubator for a variety of programs and events that bring people together. Artists, arts organizations, and the city of Dallas can promote public art in the following ways:

- Think outside the box. Organizations should explore opportunities to present work in unexpected, unlikely, culturally rich, and diverse places. Bring events, temporary projects, and artist commissions outside and think dynamically about new partnerships with civically and privately owned public sites.
- Hold public projects to the same standards as your institutions. Though public art commissions exist in Dallas, they are not executed with the curatorial rigor of the city's institutions. Start supporting the professional curation of projects in public space.
- Don't wait for an invitation or open call. Artists should launch their own interventions in public space, working in surprising ways that generate interest around projects and challenge notions of public versus private space.



- Work locally. Collaborate with community groups and members of individual neighborhoods throughout Dallas to broaden the locations of public art commissioning and engage new audiences.
- Rewrite master plans. The city can continually re-evaluate its public art master planning, creating new models for civic commissions. It should look at successful programs nationally to update its selection process and commissioning protocols. Master plans should be living and evolving documents, always striving to be responsive to artistic practice and the professional practices of the time.
- Maintain public art commissions. Public art programs need to take care of the work in their collections. If a piece is commissioned, create a maintenance plan and secure funding to preserve the work. If the work cannot be adequately cared for, develop new policies for de-commissioning and seek new funding possibilities for conservation, such as preservation grants and public/private partnerships.

11. Engaged audiences

Dallas is an event-oriented city, and people come out in large numbers to support single events. There are several ways for Dallas audiences to harness this energy. For example:

- Attend events. The best way to show your support for artists or organizations is to engage in their events. Check out the diversity of arts programming in Dallas.
- Spread the word. If you attended an event or exhibition you feel strongly about, continue that dialog. Blog about it, post it on Facebook, tweet, tell others to attend, and come back

with family and friends. Word of mouth is incredibly valuable to institutions of all sizes.

- Advocate on behalf of the arts in Dallas in your schools, local governments, neighborhoods, and places of work.
- Support local institutions by giving to annual appeals, becoming a member, volunteering, or buying tickets to an event.

12. Experienced art writers featured daily in primary news media

Dallas has a large group of talented arts writers living in and around the metro area. As in most major cities across the United States, Dallas publications have cut the amount of art criticism or reduced the number of staff dedicated to cultural writing. More writing creates a greater visibility for the arts as a discipline. It enriches our shared cultural experience and creates platforms for audiences to learn about new work and discuss it in a public forum. Dallas needs to foster critical dialog on the arts through print and online arts writing. For example:

- Media agencies need to create more writing jobs. Hiring more arts writers across genres, including daily, monthly, online, and TV, will bolster audiences’ attention to arts programming and drive dialog about new work. Polls have shown that the overwhelming majority of Americans say they value culture in their communities. You should, too.
- Publications need to investigate and pursue potential grants and funding models that would support staff positions in arts writing, including collaborating with other local, national, and international media organizations to share writers.



- Expand the discourse. Newspapers, universities, and museums should examine ways of partnering—pushing artistic dialog across many platforms in the classroom, museum lecture hall, online, and in print. This can include arts journalists contributing essays to museum publications, university faculty writing regular columns in newspapers and online magazines, curators hosting online chats, and arts writers moderating public programs for arts groups.
- Use your social media tools to spread the word about the arts. Post updates about cultural issues on Facebook, tweet about local exhibitions, and upload Flickr feeds on exciting art in the city.

13. Civic championing of the arts through policies and urban planning

Healthy communities are those in which culture is considered a major factor in the success of a city, and civic leaders play a huge role in defining language about culture in Dallas. Culture needs to be part of a holistic plan for the city, from the creation of social and economic policies to urban planning. Urban planning until recently has been inconsistent and sporadic in Dallas and this is clear in the fragmentation of communities throughout the area, including the cultural community. Urban planning should be part of a larger dialog about linking existing and historic communities to cultural resources throughout the city. City officials and urban planners can spearhead civic initiatives in the arts throughout Dallas in the following ways:

- Make culture a key priority on a civic level. Integrate art into all areas of policy by supporting public art projects, developing civic granting programs for the arts, and initiating new economic policies that make Dallas a good place for artists to live and work.

- Promote new ideas in urban planning. Everyone in Dallas is affected by the shaping of public space, and the cultural community should engage with and champion innovative urban planning. Support young and dynamic architects and civic leaders in developing responsible plans for Dallas and its communities. Urban planners can participate in local MFA programs, sit on panels, serve as lecturers at arts institutions, and collaborate with artists in the area.
- Value and champion cultural production. Cultural workers and the programs they develop contribute to the building and identity of a city. Civic agencies can support artists, arts administrators, and scholars by addressing their work with constituents, the press and governmental colleagues around the country.

NEXT STEPS

Artists, curators, gallerists, collectors, educators, patrons, writers, civic leaders, students, and audiences all play a part in shaping how the art community in Dallas functions. Everyone who engages in the cultural landscape of Dallas needs to actively contribute to its success, and take action to ensure that the arts thrive locally, nationally, and internationally. By launching new partnerships and initiatives, creating new organizations and exhibiting models, supporting artistic experimentation and the commissioning of new work, and setting up more platforms for artistic dialog in our schools, newspapers, and public spaces, Dallas will be an incubator for the creation of new art and ideas.

Creative Time's goal for these observations is to spark a conversation that will continue long after our Meadows residency has come to a close. These action points and recommendations are open to interpretation, and can be acted on now and throughout



the coming years. We advise that SMU and the wonderful institutions of Dallas lead the way in guiding this discussion. These areas identified for growth can be considered a basic blueprint for larger, more in-depth plans, both for the city and individuals who want to take action.

In the spring, SMU, through Creative Time's advice, will organize a summit on social practice in the visual arts. Like this report, this should not be seen as the final word but instead a part of a larger and continued dialog. The participating artists will provide their unique perspectives on art's role in the community and their practice outside of the museum. Events like this push the dialog of art locally and internationally. Our hope is that programming of this kind will become a regular presence in the city. This event and the recommendations above are the first of many steps that will have a lasting impact on the arts in Dallas.

Upon the public launch of this report, a conversation about Creative Time's study and the Dallas art community will be opened up to audiences online with D Magazine's FrontRow. We encourage you to read the report, consider its recommendations, and post your reactions on the website.

Visit frontrow.dmagazine.com/creativetime

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