Notes From Workshop #29:
Catalysts For Creating New – And Strengthening Existing – Social Networks: Arts In Public Places As Tools For Individual And Community Healing

November 30, 2016
FROM THE WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENT:
• How – and at what scale – can art in public places heal communities?
• What – and where – are the opportunities for implementing such art?
• What are some of necessary characteristics of “collection points” – that bring together the arts and the public?
• How can such initiatives be sustained?
These questions, and others, were the focus of this workshop, taking place during a period in which healing is critical. We examined this subject from multiple perspectives and contexts, with opening input from the worlds of music, light art and technology, and public health. Helping to establish this framework were: Courtney Grey, Founder, Kilombo Novo Indigenous Healing Arts; Rebecca Strauss, Music Director, Riverview Chamber Players (http://www.riverviewchamberplayers.com; Bevan Weissman, Co-Founder, New American Public Art (http://www.newamericanpublicart.com).
Participants brainstormed new initiatives in the arena of arts in public spaces, with some leading questions:
• How would you – informed by your environment, profession, community, personal perspective – apply them to create your own “catalysts?”
• What are your definitions or illustrations of “healing” – at whatever scale?
• Where can those definitions or illustrations take places?
• Who participates?
From the workshop:
Thanks to Darrell Ann Gane-McCalla, Jackie Gonzales, Max Stearns, Marina Sutton

Opening Remarks:
Rebecca Strauss
• Harmony & Hope: 5/13/16 “Responding to Violence with Music”
  ○ concert for victims of homicide - mostly youth and children!
  ○ this concert brought people to Arlington Street Church that never go to that part of town
  ○ concert bridged gap in demographics and race
  ○ wants to create summer concerts in the Roxbury community
  ○ future concert at First Church of Roxbury
• trying to help people claim public space, lot of people in various demographics afraid to cross

• Certain neighborhood divides
  ○ healing by bringing people together!
  ○ art-making as an act of healing!
  ○ creating resilience for people!
  ○ “third space” a sociological term!

Courtney Gray
• In Boston, Clara Wainwright: communal quilt-making while talking about community issues!
• In Philadelphia: making mosaics on walls of empty lots; using the rubble to beautify
• Unsightly local space; community working together and taking possession of the space

Bevan Weissman
• Our Self project in Camden, NJ: using digital media; soundbite stories collected in community
• Giving the digital media a physical presence in the public realm by building a moveable sculptural object that can be engaged with by viewers/listeners!
• No one vandalized the piece; shows a respect for the art and the stories
General discussion

- How do you qualify and quantify the impact of public art?
- How do you fund public art? How do you argue spending all that money when there are many more practical things that need to be funded?
- Art as a “catalyst,” as a point of departure: don’t have to solve all the problems
- People leave their mark on a space or an art piece
- What kinds of initiatives can generate healing at whatever level?
  - Intertwined healing of individuals, families, neighborhood, community: all need to be healthy
  - In what ways are the words “resilience” and “healing” parallel? In what ways are they different?
  - Challenge: how to demonstrate value to the community, financially and every other way
- Consider the healing impact of the space itself in which an event (e.g., Riverview Chamber Players’ “Harmony and Hope”) or other initiative (e.g., New American Public Art’s “Our Self”) is taking place or is installed
  - Arts can blur demographic lines
  - Art (visual, performance) should be everywhere, part of daily life
  - Mainstream Boston vs. “mini-Bostons”: latter unable to reclaim space in former
  - Art should not be tailored to certain type of healing
- Reclaim/reimagine spaces – third spaces – that can create healing while also creating new or strengthening existing social networks
  - Art can allow people to feel ownership over their space
- Partnerships/collaborations critical in conceiving of/designing healing initiatives
  - Incorporate the community: “My voice is there; I’m part of what’s been created.”
  - For true community engagement, relinquish control, give ownership to community players
  - Lots of different players need to be involved to create healing spaces
  - “Our Self,” project from New American Public Art: “the voices protected it: the community kept it safe.”
  - The artist creates context – space, structure – for contributions by/from the community
- Building a portal to an oasis
  - People crossing boundaries, going to places they wouldn’t normally go
  - Kinds of oases? Gardens?
- Follow-up workshop: Designing the “oasis”: process...product...results, including longer-term impact