Notes From Workshop #22:
ArtsCommons In The Community

NOVEMBER 24, 2015

From Workshop Announcement:

Beginning last November, and over the course of three Lab workshops (and beyond), several of the Lab’s “scientists” (aka designers...) and others have been focusing on giving shape to an idea called the ArtsCommons.

What’s the big idea? In brief...
• an outdoor, portable, flexible, free-standing, and multipurpose “(art)maker’s space” designed to support performances, installations, and exhibits, and to catalyze community interaction.

What are the results so far?
• a total re-imagining and repurposing of 20’ steel shipping containers, aimed at generating new opportunities/new possibilities for artists to create new works and for communities to engage with those works.

Building off these physical designs, the focus now is on programming and partnerships and the curating of both:
• What – and who – can/should/might be served by the ArtsCommons?
• Which art(s)? What kinds of engagement?

With this workshop, we want to offer artists, community leaders, organizations, and institutions the opportunity to speculate on...
• What sorts of art initiatives – whether individual or multi-disciplinary – are prompted by the ArtsCommons’ physical characteristics/configuration?
• In what ways can civic engagement be made part of the ArtsCommons’ art equation?
• In what ways can the ArtsCommons’ physical space serve as a social space?

Note: Major thanks to Ben Bruce and Greg MacGlashing for the physical concepts and design, and to Eagle Leasing for its enormously generous offer to provide steel containers that will constitute the ArtsCommons, and to the many individuals and organizations, including the Rose Kennedy Greenway, who have been collaborating with us on this project. And, finally, to the enormous, extraordinary group of workshop participants who’ve been helping us to answer the Who/What/Where/How of the ArtsCommons!

This workshop saw a tremendous turnout from some of Boston’s brightest (and most generous) architects, engineers, artists, educators, and organizers. After a brief review of the origins of this project (dating back to November 2014), the workshop kicked off with a presentation by Ben Bruce and Greg MacGlashing of the core
elements of their design, emphasizing the ArtsCommon’s function as an art space as opposed to a building—a “black box” that will provide opportunities for art installations and performances as well as for civic engagement. To this end Ben and Greg’s drawings carefully identified the components of this space, including the canopy, walls, exterior, and through-space.

The next steps involve not only identifying the ArtsCommons’ programmatic components, but also dealing with such practical issues as the containers’ use over the long-term; basic maintenance; provision for such as electricity and sanitation’ security; etc. Perhaps one of the most critical challenges entails the identification and cooperation of potential local partners willing to provide, or at least identify, a site or multiple sites for the ArtsCommons.

Following, then, Ben and Greg’s presentation of the design concepts, as well as a brief Q&A, participants broke into smaller groups: while making use of scale models (i.e. cardboard boxes and paper figures) to help trigger ideas, participants brainstormed responses to myriad questions focused on: Curation (what?); Location (where?); Infrastructure (how?); Users (who?); Criteria (why?).

The notes below comprise a compilation of those responses. Collectively, they seeded the ground for a December 15 follow-up workshop, whose chief goal will be to drill down into specifics on each of these major questions.

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Rashmi Ramaswamy

- Some key assumptions:
  - Art as an entry point into neighborhoods
    - As a way for expression and presentation of culture
    - Thematic components are overlaid by each neighborhood
  - Recreation
  - Facilitation
  - Innovation
  - Language
    - Travel from one neighborhood to another allows for continuation of art-making and discussion, leading to civic engagement (and/or as the result of civic engagement)
    - An exchange of art and culture at each location: “Give and Take”
  - What does the ArtsCommons offer?
    - For seniors, a place to hang out and socialize
    - For youth (12-15 year-olds), judgment/expectation-free space
    - Rehearsal space
    - Scheduling/check out the Box
    - Free co-working space
    - Community sing alongs
Exhibitions (products)
A Twitter feed!

First step:
Deposit the untransformed container in a neighborhood (no programming)
Invite or give permission to deposit art and culture on the outside so that the container becomes a vehicle for culture before anything else happens
Inexpensive way to build interest, and then follow up with the programming

Liz LaManche
“Community needs to generate its own priorities for programming! There is much local talent and much need for space”

Curation
Community sing-alongs
Community exchanges: Performers from one neighborhood go to another to promote the goal of people moving between neighborhoods
Open rehearsal space for all artists
Exhibitions from community workshops
“Graffiti walls”
“Slow motion” internet, a physical Pinterest board with a question to ask of the community: When container moves to another neighborhood this gives people a glimpse of creativity from another part of the city

Infrastructure
Judgment-free zone
Space for middle school groups, or as safe space
Hang-out space to engage in activity (physical or creative) without adult supervision
Multi-lingual space with lots of seating, room to socialize, low cost, and combat isolation
Include mechanism for checking out/scheduling use of space
Wi-Fi power source: daytime use to hang out
Flexible space, usable by all media

Location
Grove Hall, Dorchester
Washing & Erie Streets, Dorchester
Boston Center for the Arts Plaza
Ben Franklin Institute, corner of Tremont and Berkeley
JP
Pond
Emerald Necklace
Franklin Park
Forest Hills
Julie Ann Otis
- What could you do with this box that you couldn’t already do in open public spaces?
- Where are the spaces where this would not be an intrusion but a gift?
- Opportunity to recognize communities rather than build communities
- Possible sites: Foxx Park Tea Party, Assembly Square, beneath bridge in Chelsea

Matt Rouser (and “Team Awesome”)
- Projects
  - Interactivity is key
  - 3-dimensional and immersive
  - Works well with storytelling angle
    - Participatory acoustics (visual/audible)
    - JP, Rox, Eastie, or Rosie for a day
    - Get LEGO to dump a million bricks
    - Short films festival
    - Food component
    - Music: Berklee [cf. Maria F., Mike A.]
- Partners
  - CDCs can play a key role in getting youth involved
  - Maker spaces
  - Local foods (e.g., Union Square, Aeronaut Brewery, Exodus Bagels)
  - Schools and teachers
  - Porchfest: JP, Somerville
- Places
  - Eggleston Square (connect with Urbano Project)
  - Places of real vibrancy and visibility
  - Hidden out-of-the-way spots as a destination
  - Possible concerns with safety

Tim Barnett
- Does the AC become a temporary shelter at night/during downtime? Is that positive or negative?
- What happens during the night?
- Do the panels shift from place to place?
  - Use detachable panels to create a chronology of graffiti
  - Rotate the panels from one neighborhood to serve as gallery; replace with fresh panels
- How does this flourish during the winter?
  - Convert to a public sauna: Rome had it right!
- Curation: What?
Graffiti as non-vandalistic

Location: Where?
  o Provide an outlet for creative and otherwise devious acts

Eric Rigo

Community engagement over public display
  o From neighborhood to... Copley Square?
  o From Allston to North End to JP, and back

Possible events:
  o Yoga classes
  o Art classes
  o Lectures
  o Public chalkboards
  o Galleries
  o Community meetings
  o Food trucks
  o Games (e.g. ping pong)
  o Close up at night/turn into coffee shop/bar
  o Movies
  o Retail vendors
  o Crafts

Group #1

Virtual reality, such as projection onto proposed spaces
• African dance: Dance Complex, Central Square Cambridge
• Bring out local theatre productions

Group #2

• How to get to know a community
• Couple of suggested neighborhoods: Hyde Park, Davis Square
• Coincide with, and support, events already happening
• Identity and branding of AC containers
• “Where will it be next week?”
• Construction of AC: Throw an art party
  o “A kit of parts”
• Tie-in with parklets [e.g., Roslindale; engage BTD, NUM?]?
• Schools with large open spaces:
  o MIT, Wentworth
• Design should reflect some of the characteristics of an accordion (expanding, contracting)
John Greene
- Multiple locations
- Live-stream the activity to opposite sites
- How can other communities’ activities influence yours?
  - Where
    - Behind TD Garden: green space under Storrow Drive overpass (i.e., space that is lacking a sense of place)
    - “I’m not from an urban community, but commute to work in one. How do I feel about this? How am I involved?”
  - Why
    - Something is lacking that is wanted
  - Physical design
    - Different experience depending on whether the container’s long side or short side is open
      - Long side open provides a stage
      - Short sides open provide opportunities for passage through
  - Group #3
    - Questions/implementation steps
      - Who manages?
      - What is APP/Lab’s role in management?
      - Length of “season”
      - Who does outreach to community leaders?
      - Fundraising via local businesses?
      - Identifying events that are already underway

Peter Cataldo
- “Mosaic of Boston”
- How do you inspire people to engage in art?
- How does the container age/weather?
- Food, beverages, and bathrooms
- Local area/tourist area and urban/suburban
- Technology
  - Communication
  - Social media

Mary Sweeney
- Data collection
- Interactive musical instruments
- School performances
- Boston Arts Academy as collaborator (via dance, visual arts, theatre, chorus)
- Partnerships with local restaurants
- Food competition (creative, bizarre foods)
- African drumming class w/dancing
- Safety is a major criterion for site selection: a safe area, highly visible
- Revolving ownership of container
- Culturally diverse, including every neighborhood
- Link with Porchfest(s)