



# CultureWork

A Periodic Broadside \*  
for Arts and Culture Workers

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Institute for Community Arts Studies  
Arts & Administration Program, University of Oregon

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## Community Arts Councils: Historical Perspective Part Three

Maryo Ewell

**M**y purpose is to tell you about community arts councils, from the ideas that generated them to the present. I believe that story-telling enables people to

evaluate how far they have come, to attribute significance to what has happened, and to enable people to then define a course for the future. In **Part I** I concentrated on the gestation and birth of community arts councils. My emphasis was on such councils as a hybrid of community movements with an arts emphasis and arts movements with a community emphasis. My discussion included giving credit to persons associated with this gestation and birth as well as on specific early arts councils that helped shape our present day understanding and appreciation of what arts councils can accomplish. In **Part II** I concentrated on the Community Arts Council in its youth. This prolonged and turbulent period in the movement was characterized by the notion of locally driven groups forming arts councils in response to gaps in the arts scene. This formation was accomplished in the midst of social and fiscal revolutions that first promoted growth and later encouraged maturity in the face of numerous and conflicting societal trends.

Part III will focus on the adulthood and maturity of the community arts council movement. I will also speculate on our rebirth. In Part III you will also find a list of sources associated with all three parts.

### **Adulthood (1990 – 1999)**

By 1990, the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (NALAA) estimated 3,000 local arts agencies. Of these, about one third were staffed. As of 1999, Americans for the Arts estimates some 3,500.

Now is a crucial time to step back and reflect. The effective practitioner is the reflective practitioner – one who plans, acts, reflects, and re-plans based on that reflection. Like the 50-year-old person, those of us associated with local arts agencies are in a wonderful position, finally, to synthesize all of our experience and decide what we will do with that experience.

What have been some of our results? Most noticeably, local arts agencies are all pervasive - “a chicken is in every pot,” says Bill Moskin (personal communication). As an institution, local arts agencies are committed to breadth – all the arts/all the people. This is in sharp contrast to previous movements and other community arts institutions generally devoting themselves to depth – making a difference for a single art form or for a single group of people. Local arts agencies, because of their broad view and programs, have indeed met many community needs and the needs of artists and arts organizations. Cultural participation is probably broader than it might have been without them. Cultural planning has “put arts and culture on the radar screen of mayors and city planners.” (Dreeszen, personal communication). Local arts agencies have affected people’s attitudes, and polls are showing high acceptance of the arts.

More results: Americans are getting messages – about arts education for instance – that they would not otherwise receive. Audiences are probably larger and more diverse than they might have been. It is likely that private and corporate philanthropy is being affected by local arts agencies. It is probable that their grassroots voice has made a difference in the survival of the National Endowment for the Arts and in increasing state appropriations for the arts. It is certain that their effectiveness has resulted in increasing local public funds for the arts: “Arts councils...provide a voice and mechanism for the smaller groups to be appreciated by/supported by the private sectors.” (Gibans, personal communication). Across America, you can see the tangible work of local arts agencies as well, in many beautiful cultural facilities and works of public art, and in livelier cities and towns. Cultural understanding, perhaps racial tension has been lessened in places. Those of us associated with local arts agencies can be proud of our achievements.

It is tempting to hope that we are on the right path and we simply need to do more of the same, to finish the job we have begun. As over-extended people, we tend to see next steps in terms of streamlining, improving what is there, becoming more efficient - so that we can find a way to add more. We seek the better way to deliver technical assistance. The ultimate strategy to get the resources. The perfect board-development workshop that will mobilize people to do tasks better.

Yet more and more we hear that there is a “paradigm shift in the offing.” There are many conversations we need to engage in as we approach this new century. Here are a few:

- Most of us, I think, would agree that we are trying to do more than expand arts activity and audiences. Most would say that we are trying to affect behaviors and attitudes. But would we all agree on what behaviors and what attitudes? Just towards the arts? Or are we also talking about attitudes towards our communities? Towards one another? Towards the future? Are we trying to stimulate arts in our community, for our community, by our community, of our community? Once you go here you open many dialogues, many of them, perhaps, unsettling and uncomfortable. What's our responsibility to open that dialogue?
- Have we really changed thinking? Or have we primarily offered programs in the hopes that they change thinking? Remembering Harry Chapin's passionate exhortation to us at the first National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies' convention, are we “the dance band on the Titanic?”
- We need to be at peace with what community arts are. Some of the

questions involved are: Is community art one end of the spectrum with “fine art” on the other end? Or is community art an art form in itself? Similarly, are “process” and “product” ends of a spectrum or are they somehow melded? In short, how do we properly talk about, and evaluate, “community art?”

- Similarly, are we seeing our communities as settings in which the arts thrive (which would be measured, then, by “more arts” and “more people,” or are we ultimately after “more arts so that our communities thrive” (which would be measured in terms of increasing community “health”)? If this is a spectrum, given the very broad mission statements of most community arts councils, do we know where we choose to stand on this spectrum? Or is it a spectrum at all: is this a false distinction?
- Many community arts councils articulate a concern that working on social action issues may be diluting their core mission: “we’re an arts group, not a community action group.” Is this still true? How can this be discussed? How do we correctly evaluate our work? In short, what is our “core mission” in the years ahead?
- Collaboration with arts and non-arts groups has proven an effective strategy for getting things done. Could collaboration be more than a strategy – is it conceivably a way of reconceptualizing a community as a whole? But if so, where is our identity?
- Does the “third sector” – non-profits – need to be re-framed? This question encompasses everything from governance models (maybe a well-done board development retreat isn’t the “wellness pill” that we all seek) to budget development (why is “administrative overhead” such a bogeyman?) to “product development” (why don’t we invest money in research / development and staff development? When we are asked to be “more like a business,” why does this only apply to responsible short-term management and not to these long-term investments?) Do we need to speak in our own voice, rather than in the voice of one looking to please grant panels or act like what a good non-profit “ought” to look like? Where, in short, is the correct language by which we describe ourselves, evaluate ourselves, and ask that others use to evaluate us? And having decided that – how do we ensure that those terms really are used in evaluating us?
- Similarly: it has been said that as the economy becomes more global, there is a commensurate hunger for the local, the authentic, the grounded. I believe that too. But the local, the authentic is often not packageable, not

replicable, not controllable, context-specific, and often involves small numbers. In short, it is not efficient. In a society in which the efficient is rewarded, how do we make our case?

- Have we put such emphasis on becoming credible as institutions that we're reaching the point where "institutionalization" is interfering with "getting the job done?"
- How do we truly affect the long run? This includes everything from re-thinking fundraising (emphasizing endowments for instance) to re-thinking the terms in which we define "success."
- How do we move from finger-in-the-dike solutions to real systemic solutions to commonly agreed-upon problems? Maybe landing a part-time art teacher isn't the solution. Maybe changing the way a community conceives of educating children is the solution. How on earth can we, understaffed, underfunded, and often battling for our very existence, make any real difference? And if we apply significant people and financial resources to long-run strategies, how can we also continue to provide the wealth of programmatic activity that our funders and members expect?
- Should our movement shift from delivering programs to a primary emphasis on community policy-making? How on earth do we train and re-train ourselves to do so?
- How do we truly understand "diversity?" "Diversity" means more than people who may look different collectively doing "business as usual;" it implies willingness to listen, to be vulnerable, to change, to consider with courage that "business as usual" may be irrelevant, to truly redistribute power. Can we embrace this?
- Where are the new leaders going to come from? Why on earth would a young person want to enter this world – what is the "hook?"
- The nation seems to be re-thinking what American community and democracy is all about. Where are we in this discussion?
- Does this kind of thinking imply more programs "layering" on an already-overburdened group of volunteers and staffs? Or do we need to "reset the

counter to zero” and conceive of ourselves in a new way?

No doubt, there are many, many more questions. I feel hopeful, actually, and excited by questions such as these. I see in America today a hunger for grounding, healing, wholeness. I see a desire for the local, the “authentic,” the sense of community and family, the sense of specialness, of meaning, growing as the Internet grows.

## **Maturity (2000 - )**

The people who comprise the community arts council movement are people of all political persuasions and cultural groups. What I believe we have in common, though, is a common belief in the value and specialness and potential of each individual, a common awe at new ways of seeing, a joy in the achievement of others, a humanistic belief - so passionate that it verges on the “religious.” We acknowledge the goodness of humankind, a sense of justice, a love of home and home-place, a belief that working together is a good, a belief that synthesizing approaches is not only pragmatic but also delightful, a belief in service, a belief that all people have a right to create and to participate in their society. We believe in joy in life and bond in this shared philosophy. That's our first starting point, acknowledging this.

We can act from this grounding. But now we need to re-articulate how to do so. Ann Davis says: “The importance of the arts council movement in American culture, I believe, will be tied to the ability of leadership to question existing assumptions, examine contractions and obstacles, and invent something new – and sometimes moving forward may mean returning to something old [italics are Davis's]” (Davis, personal communication).

If, indeed, ideas and social concerns move in cycles, we would do well, at 50, to revisit the ideas that led to our creation – those big ideas alluded to our period of “gestation” (Ewell, 1999). How do those “old” ideas fit with the world before us? With the experiences of our last 50 years? I believe what the “old” ideas have in common is a sense of wholeness: the wholeness of individual experience and opportunity. Fearless leadership.

## **Rebirth**

At the beginning of the century, we ask the most basic question once again: what does it mean to be human? How do we live together well? As we look to the future, we begin by looking back. As we reach 50 and reflect on its meaning, we can truly say as Bob Dylan sings “I was so much older then / I'm younger than that

now.”

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First, I am deeply indebted to the following 20-50 year veterans of the community arts council movement who responded to my request for insights that helped inform this paper:

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Rockefeller Archives, Tarrytown, New York, records and correspondence on funding for Cornell University (Alexander Drummond), University of Montana (Baker Brownell), University of North Carolina (Frederick Koch), University of Wisconsin (Robert Gard).

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# **Why is the Mona Lisa Smiling?**

**Students create an internationally recognized web resource using 15 year old computers**

**Steve Feld**

**V**iewing the site as of December 1999 it is hard to believe that we used Tandy 1000 computers, originally installed at the John F. Kennedy High School in the Bronx in 1983, to build this resource.

The Tandy uses 5 1/4" double density disks which are becoming hard to find. The

motherboard contains 8088 chips which predate the 286 computers. In those days any computer lab was considered a luxury.

We anticipated a new lab in the Autumn 1998, but my students and I were eager to log on to the Internet to participate in the ThinkQuest contest. We could not wait for new machines so we jumped right in with our antique computers. These machines do not have a mouse, Windows or even a hard drive.

We were able to create graphics with a DOS based drawing program called PC Crayon. The keyboard controlled cursor gave us the required precision we needed to create the web images. A shareware program called Iconvert was used to convert the resulting drawing format, into an Internet compatible GIF format.

The morphing sequence was created with RMorf, a Public Domain program which costs one dollar.

Our Principal Gino Silvestri had a phone line installed in our classroom. Through the kind donation of a Compaq 386 from the KRC Corporation we were online.

We use Professional Write, a text processor to write the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) to create the web pages. My student team leader Khoa Chau was familiar with java applets which he used to create the online quiz.

Since we wanted our site to be accessible with all browsers, including Netscape version 1.0, (since that is the Browser we must use), we needed to learn how to use Perl Scripts to insure participation in our quiz taking activity to those using older browsers.

My students researched the work of da Vinci and discovered that he wrote music. We digitized the music and present it on our site with wav and midi formats. Our site is accessible to the hearing impaired. Hand signing animations provide links to hard of hearing resource links.

We did not wait to get the most up to date equipment and were able to create a worthwhile educational experience for all students. Together, we learned how to integrate multimedia, graphics and animation through a rigorous and intensive deadline driven most ambitious project.

Was it worth the effort? Our interactive guestbook was signed on August 28, 1997 from a visitor from Mongolia. Since that time, our guestbook has been signed each and every day what has become a most welcome and rewarding continuous chain of support from educators and students representing over 60 countries and 46

states across America.

Our site has become part of the Getty Museum of Art in January 1998 in their opening Digital Experience. We became SemiFinalists in the GII US Education Awards and MidLink Magazine continues to feature our site. Global SchoolNet Foundation has selected our site for their Teachers Choice for the Month of March. Our Mona Lisa Lesson Plan was picked up by Encarta and is now part of their Lesson Plan Collection. Global School House has published an article about our site in The Well Connected Educator on June 2. We were published in the Weekly Reader Galaxy in October 1998.

We continue to evolve with our Contributions from the Field. Rina da Firenze author of Mystery of the Mona Lisa provided new information which allowed my students to conduct their Scientific Investigation.

Teachers enrolled in my Internet training workshop contributed educational curriculum resource links with their newly created pages. The workshop was funded by the Bronx Superintendency.

Through our da Vinci dissemination we presented workshops at the Make It Work Conference, supported by AT&T in partnership with the New York City Board of Education at the Grand Hyatt, and at the School Tech Exposition at the New York City Hilton Hotel, where my students presented Why is the Mona Lisa Smiling? in the Classroom of the Future exhibit.

Why is the Mona Lisa Smiling is an internationally recognized evolving student centered, student partnered (Borlange Sweden and the Bronx, New York) web site visited by over one half million in the past 3 years, originally 20 pages, the site has grown through visitor contributions, search engine leads and primary source researcher links. Not only has the development of the site enriched the participating whole school communities but also enhanced and expanded the interactive proactive web engaged circle of citizens, librarians, music lovers, artists and philanthropists.

Our cross cultural ascension...

<<http://library.advanced.org/13681/data/museum/promote.htm#getty>>

The driving teaching methodology for the evolving web site authorship is the student inquiry driven approach.

The web site itself offers a genuine real life dynamic ground for students to pose

hypothesis and research questions which they can then follow through on, utilizing web resources.

Hence the student team members, who under my guidance had secured our place in the Getty Museum in January 1998 pointed out that given the origin of Leonardo, the Vatican Museum was a natural place for our project to be presented. But how to secure our link? The students used a search engine to find the Vatican Museum's Web Manager's address to satisfy their own inquiry. As a outcome of their own success in meeting their inquiry goal the students identified an article on the web which detailed the planned construction of a [bridge in Oslo Norway](#) based on Leonardo's bridge design. According to the description, the bridge would look like an archer's bow. "How could this be?", my students wondered. One of our online contributors, sent in a postcard of the bridge, which was digitized. A link to this article was effected when the [Codex Comes to Kennedy](#), student created a design in his scientific journal based on the Mona Lisa Bridge. Here the web site served as a center and nexus for community arts cultural inquiry, reflection and creativity.

Cultural web product centered research also inspired participant inner city high school students to read and research Leonardo print materials. One of them identified Michael Gelb's How to Think Like Leonardo on Amazon.com. Within the work, Michael Gelb included background material on Leonardo's drawings of a horse model. This model was never realized in Leonardo's lifetime, but ironically the horse model was in production by the time the student read the work. (April 1999). The site team wrote to Mr. Gelb to secure permission to use the [text of his article](#) on the site. Once the text was up the producers of the Leonardo da Vinci Horse Inc. provided a link to our project on their resource page, a very selective resource. Not only was the site team given the link, but were also invited to the celebration of the completion of the horse (June 1999) which in turn prompted them to reflectively [commemorate the event](#). The Japanese artist Nina Akamu who actually realized the bronze is pictured in our gallery.

It should be noted that all of these site evolutions were student driven inquiry centered and authentically evolving from a dynamic student created web product.

None of the above were in any way top-down teacher directed mandated or pre-conceived curriculum project. \ The student peer reflection, satisfaction and rewards in maintaining and expanding the site were largely derived from adult community and distance peer feedback and discussion rather than instructor dispensed project grades. Students were functioning as actual contributors to the web.

From the museum link inclusion to the horse, the cultural arts development of our site has been continually informed by our visitors who emailed coach Steve Feld. One of them Lynda Catherine Sunjik said she was a student of Renaissance music. She noted that listening to [Leonardo's music](#) on this site (a discovery of ours) prompted her to write to us. She inquired about Gafurius, a contemporary of Leonardo's. She wondered if they were friends. As correspondence with her continued, the identity of Leonardo's Portrait of an [Unknown Musician](#) was revealed. Franchino Gafurius was the musician whose identity has been hidden for over 500 years!!

Sometimes inclusion in revered significant cultural resource comes in and of itself, unsolicited by our team, just as a consequence of the growing stature and visibility of the site. On November 2, 1998, Giuliano Gaia, the Webmaster of the Milan Science Museum, sent the team a most welcome email. "Hi, We have linked to your interesting site in our Leonardo section at the National Museum of Science and Technology of Milan."

Sometimes site development comes from web based television technology graphic arts partnerships. The team, identified to Ovation TV and Steve Mencher had contacted them as a result of their exposure from the Incredible Art Department site as the featured Site of the Week. He sent preview broadcast video tapes of a program titled Museum on the Mountain. The Bronx High School students got an opportunity to create artwork showcasing their ideas for the Miho Museum but also initiated a [dialogue](#) with Japanese peer counterparts on cross cultural attitudes about schooling and values. As a corollary to this project they also created a [Shangri-La Gallery](#) and a cultural [Tour of New York City](#).

When Ovation TV ArtsZone asked the students to create [Arthur C. Clarke](#) inspired graphic arts they included and articulated in text and images, connections between the 15th Century futurist and flight visionary Leonardo and the 20th Century Mars Millennium author and media voice Arthur C. Clarke. Indeed one student even symbolically placed Arthur's eyeglasses on Leonardo's Mona Lisa.

As we review the rich continually burgeoning development of our project, it is obvious that through the inherent inquiry driven and interactive capacities of the web authorship, Leonardo's Mona Lisa mystery has touched the Millennium with its futurist past visionary linked perspective. It is astonishing and exciting to brace ourselves for continued web authorship advances and adventures.

Come share this cyberspace ongoing open navigation with us.

<http://library.advanced.org/13681/data/davin2.shtml>

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**Maryo Ewell** is Associate Director of the Colorado Council on the Arts. Prior to joining the CCA Council in 1982, she was Director of Community Programs at the Illinois Arts Council, and before that, she worked for two community arts councils in Connecticut. In fact, she has been hooked on community arts since her first summer job in Wisconsin in 1967. In 1995 she was honored by Americans for the Arts with their highest award in grassroots community arts development, the Selina Roberts Ottum award. She has a M.A. in Planning from CU-Denver; a M.A. in Organizational Behavior from Yale; and a B.A. in Social Psychology from Bryn Mawr College.

**Steve Feld** is the Computer Graphics Instructor at John F. Kennedy High School and can be reached by email at [sjfeld@erols.com](mailto:sjfeld@erols.com)

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## Back Issues:

- May, 1997. Volume 1, No. 1: A Tool for Analysis of Web Sites' Accessibility to Users with Disabilities. Douglas Blandy, Ph.D.
- July, 1997. Volume 1, No. 2: The Arts Management Employment Interview. Deborah Snider
- November, 1997. Volume 1, No. 3: The Invisible Careers for Latinos: Public History and Museum Studies. Miguel Juarez
- February, 1998. Volume 2, No. 1: Art Crimes: Building a Digital Museum/Graffiti Battle Crown. Susan Farrell
- April, 1998. Volume 2, No. 2: The Florida Farmworkers Project. Kristin Congdon.
- June, 1998. Vol. 2, No. 3: The Arts as Commodity, Stan Madeja; The Non-Profit and Commercial Arts: Understanding Future Options, David B. Pankratz
- September, 1998 Vol. 2 No.4: What Is Community Cultural Development and How Do We Practice It? Bill Flood
- January, 1999 Vol. 3 No.1: The Rise and Fall of the California Confederation of the Arts: 1976 - 1997. Anne W. Smith
- April, 1999 Vol. 3 No. 2: Paul Olum Mobile Hemi-Bust, Michael Randles; Outlaw Murals, Laura Feldman
- July, 1999. Vol. 3, No. 3: Economic and Leisure Factors Impacting Participation in the Arts by Middle Aged Adults, Gaylene Carpenter, Ed.D.; WESTAF Launches

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- September, 1999. Vol. 3, No. 4: Art Teacher Censorship of Student Produced Art in Georgia's Public High Schools. Bruce Bowman
  - January, 2000. Vol. 4, No. 1: Community Arts Councils: Historical Perspective (Part I.) Maryo Ewell. *Family-Focused Programming Between the Arts and Social Services.* Barbara Harris
  - April, 2000. Vol. 4, No. 2: Community Arts Councils: Historical Perspective (Part II.) Maryo Ewell; *Thinking Ahead: Disaster Preparedness for Museums.* Yvonne Lever
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**CultureWork** is an electronic publication of the University of Oregon Institute for Community Arts Studies. Its mission is to provide timely workplace-oriented information on culture, the arts, education, and community. For links to other sites of interest, see the ICAS Forum.

**CultureWork** seeks submissions of concise (500-1500 words) critiques and advisories on community arts and the preparation of community arts workers. Graphics that express the spirit of community arts are welcome, to be published with attribution. Manuscripts should be sent in plain text format (i.e., **not** MS Word .doc format), via email, on Macintosh or Intel high-density 3.5 inch floppies or zip disks. Use American Psychological Association guidelines for style and citations. Send submissions to Maria Finison at <[mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu](mailto:mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu)> or via snailmail: care of Arts & Administration Program, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene Oregon 97403. If accepted for publication, authors may be asked to make revisions.

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Editor: Richard Bear. Advisor: Dr. Douglas Blandy.  
Comments to: [mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu](mailto:mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu)

