

OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACE: TEMPORARY

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Definition

New York has a long history of using public open space for a variety of temporary arts uses, from dance and musical performances to large scale festivals to public banners and murals. Accessible open spaces provide opportunities for individuals and groups to express themselves and their cultures. But their use is restricted by an array of bureaucratic hurdles, navigating a labyrinthine permit and approvals process that includes Parks, Transportation and other public agencies. A collaborative approach and inclusive spirit, along with persistence in overcoming setbacks, is key to success.

Key components

- Accessible open space empowers individuals to use arts, culture, and media to tell their story.
- Whether it is a group involved in advocating for social change or a gathering of new immigrants who want to express and share a culture they've left behind, public space is often the most egalitarian setting for personal expression because it allows artists to tell their own stories in ways that might not be permitted or welcomed within four walls.
- Regardless of the scale of their events, organizers face a city permits process that can be especially daunting for grassroots groups lacking the knowledge, the staff or the connections to navigate the system.
- Although it embodies widely appreciated ideals of freedom of expression and artistic spontaneity, art in public places is often limited by realities of government oversight and bureaucratic necessities as noted above.
- By using imaginative and innovative approaches, performing and visual arts can help revitalize communities on several levels. By focusing on the diversity of cultures within a community, they can re-instill pride of place in disenfranchised communities, build bridges among communities and ignite cross-cultural interest among new residents and visitors alike.

Key Learnings

- When programmed or produced by a larger cultural institution, community engagement—including an open exchange of ideas—is essential. Sustained dialogue and relationship-building creates a trust for the producing organization and gives the community the sense that they are stakeholders.
- Selecting artists familiar with and comfortable in the community, and who are willing to spend time and engage with local residents, helps them create works that speak to the community and gives the residents a sense of ownership.
- Community organizers, artists and agency officials should convene to minimize or eliminate barriers to community

building and open space by streamlining or simplifying procedures for permits, etc..

- Given the infrastructure issues of a park, street or plaza, planning and implementing an event or artwork requires extensive collaboration between a number of stakeholders, including artists, community members, local business and government agencies.
- The best of these collaborations encourage dialogue between all these stakeholders.

Case Study Example

The **Corona Initiative of the Queens Museum of Art (QMA)** is an arts-based community outreach initiative that is an outgrowth of QMA's commitment to adapt to the shifting cultural currents of its environs. Historically a working and middle class area of black and white families, New Queens has emerged over the past twenty years. It includes South and East Asian and Latino immigrants from many countries, including Ecuador, Columbia, Mexico and China. To better engage the community, QMA has responded with changes in leadership and staff—including a community organizer—to address new demographics, races, language and cultures. The Corona neighborhood became a focus because of its underdeveloped physical infrastructure and the distinct challenges presented by its largely low income international population. Phase one involved traditional community outreach: a trolley that ran through the community, festivals, a cookbook and coalition building around issues such as health and housing. Phase two included Corona Plaza, the "Center of Everywhere," where the initiative commissioned a number of artists to make interactive, site specific work. Phase three included Corona Studio, yearlong artist projects as well as initiating a Social Practice based MFA program within the Fine Arts Department of Queens College, (SPQ), the first of its kind on the East Coast. Phase four, Corona Urban Studio, will connect artist residency and SPQ to transform the urban space, physically rebuilding Corona Plaza, with \$3 million of funding from the NYC Department of Transportation. <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/10/01/its-the-cart-thats-art-as-cold-as-ice>

Additional Examples and Reference Points

- **Bushwick Art Park**, Brooklyn, NYC (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/yichenlinsf/5697338223>)
- **El Puente**, Brooklyn, NYC (<http://elpuente.us/greenlight.html>)
- **Downtown Art**, East Village, NYC (<http://www.youngartistsnyc.org/?p=165>)
- **QXA**, Queens, NYC (<http://queensartexpress.com/>)
- **The Line**, NYC (<http://theline2012.wordpress.com/>)