

TRUSTING WHAT WE DON'T KNOW:



"Temescal Flows," Artist Alan Leon, 2011. Photo Courtesy of Dan Burger

*Lessons from an Experiment in Art,
Environment and Philanthropy in California's East Bay*

Maribel L. Alvarez, Ph.D.



"Temescal Flows." Artist Alan Leon. 2011. Photo Courtesy of Dan Burger

Dear Reader,

The Open Circle Foundation has been both a joy and an education for me.

I have not made this journey alone and I want to thank our current and past board members for their insights and willingness to step out of the normal box for grantmaking.

In addition, I want to thank the East Bay Community Foundation for providing me with a philanthropic vehicle that worked seamlessly with my intentions in supporting the arts. The staff of EBCF who served on the board over the years brought an important level of expertise to our work. My interactions with all levels of EBCF staff made me feel like a member of a team, not just a "donor."

I'm especially indebted to Dr. Maribel L. Alvarez, who quickly understood what we had been trying to accomplish and what made our approach "different," and then crafted a beautiful and insightful account of our work.

I hope that this monograph inspires you to set your own course in supporting the arts.

All the best,

Dorothy Claire Weicker

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AUTHOR BIO: *Dr. Maribel Alvarez*

Dr. Maribel Alvarez is an anthropologist, folklorist, curator, and community arts expert who has documented the practice of more than a dozen of the country's leading alternative artistic organizations from Maine to Hawaii to El Paso and Los Angeles. She holds a dual appointment as Associate Research Professor in the School of Anthropology and Associate Research Social Scientist at the Southwest Center, University of Arizona. Maribel is a Trustee of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. She teaches courses on methods of cultural analysis with particular emphasis on food, objects, oral narratives and visual cultures of the U.S.-Mexico border. She has written and lectured widely about poetry and food, intangible heritage, nonprofits and cultural policy, the theory of arts participation, artisans and patrimony in Mexico, and popular culture and stereotypes. In 2009, she was a Fulbright Fellow conducting research in rural Mexico. Through an executive-on-loan arrangement between the University and the nonprofit organization, she serves as the Executive Program Director of the Southwest Folklife Alliance. Maribel was the co-founder and Executive Director for seven years of MACLA/*Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana*, a contemporary, alternative urban arts center in San Jose, California once described during her tenure as a "lab for intelligent cultural interventions." For ten years, she has served as core faculty in the annual Leadership Institute presented by the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC). When she is not raising money, supervising a fantastic staff team of twenty+ people, meeting with students, producing programs, coaching and consulting with foundations and nonprofits around the country, or raising her two young daughters with her life partner Patricia, she tries to set time aside to complete three simultaneous books manuscripts she has been working on for some time. Maribel was born in Cuba and came to the U.S. at the age of seven; she lived in Arecibo, Puerto Rico for eleven years before moving to California in 1980 where she became active in the Chicano arts community and multicultural arts movement of that decade.



"Art to Action on Codornices Creek." Artist Zach Pine with Children of the Ursula Sherman Village. 2009.

“ You see the bushes which are
On your path
Some will have to be cut
Others will require that
you make a comb out
of your ten fingers...
Everything is time space and
molasses
So many windows moist from
thought and dance... ”

— VICTOR HERNÁNDEZ CRUZ
BI-LINGUAL WHOLES, 1982



"Fishermen at Work" by Jerrika Shi. 2014. Courtesy of River of Words.

INTRODUCTION: *Rethinking the Bottom Line*

When Art and Intention mix, marvelous results can be expected: mechanical shops lined up along an ugly boulevard can transform into baroque gates giving access to a world of beautiful craftsmanship; a laundromat that up to now only served as the gathering place for displaced magicians of the verbal arts can suddenly shift into a new landscape of cheerful expectations. If you take artists seriously, as intellectual forces to be reckoned with, a new consciousness takes over.

And yet, at the heart of this ideal a great American dilemma rears its troubled head: our aspirations for Art and Social Change swing in a perpetual pendulum between creativity and capacity. That is, caught in a pointless tug of war between what Art can [potentially] do for us and what can [actually] be done. Our paradox derives from knowing too much about what we cannot change, all the while working for “change” remains the artist’s highest call. On the one hand, our aspirations for justice evoke the dreamy power of artistic solutions. On the other hand, intractable conditions of cultural production outside of our control are always doing their thing, despite our best intentions. The philanthropic subsidy of creative endeavors has become a permanent fixture of how artists get by. Working artists whisper to each other words like *sustainability* and *capacity-building* while tethering on the edge of their next part-time gig.

In the mythical land we generally designate as “the Art World,” every grant ever made to an artist, art ensemble or nonprofit organization is awarded in the name of the yearning that seeks to resolve this dilemma. The quest for consequential actions that would last more than a project timeline is often disguised in the jargon of evaluation metrics, but we know that what truly matters is more than a bottom line: it is the primal desire of philanthropy to know that it can be relevant.

Without the promise of change, grantmaking would be nothing but an instrumental trade-off aimed to keep things in the order they should be (somewhere between unmet needs and surplus value). If this were the case, each actor in the transaction would be confined to the coldness of their predictable roles as giver and taker and nothing beyond that could be imagined.

We believe this is not the whole story.

Experience (a closet filled with anecdotes of good outcomes) has taught us that things far more interesting and challenging than a mere calculus among interested wagers take place each time a patron and an artist come together through a gift or a grant. Yet, aside from the occasional grand pronouncements or the rare well-publicized biographies of select idiosyncratic barons of American industrialism (the Carnegies, Fords or Rockefellers), little has been written about the *microphysics of human exchange that are activated with each philanthropic gift*.

To be sure, students of philanthropy are certain to find a stack of data, opinions and studies concerning the psychology of gift-giving and the core characteristics, such as voluntarism, altruism and reciprocity that make it stand out as a social practice.ⁱ Even the classic “corporate donation,” the textbook example of the *quid pro quo* business transaction, has been recently reconsidered as containing more “gifting” dynamics than previously thought.ⁱⁱ Nonetheless, despite the

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abundance of expert knowledge, insights are especially lacking when the subject turns to philanthropic efforts at the scale of neighborhoods and in the field generally known as “community arts.”

In-depth accounts about the dynamics of investment in the “low” end of philanthropy – approximately the \$1 million mark— are hard to come by, partly because the professionalization of the fundraising field has made the large gift the crown jewel of philanthropy. Even though for the average person \$1 million represents a lot of money, the competition for donations and the intense efforts put into obtaining them have made the “smaller” donors less salient in the overall giving strategies of art institutions. A quick search for media announcements about philanthropic gifts to universities, museums and health care centers confirms this trend. Only the “biggies” are reported and celebrated.

At stake in these trends is a potential retreat from the principles that undergird a generalized culture of generosity.

In a democratic society, the growing tendency to favor strategic hyper-efficiency in wealth management can be detrimental. As gifting becomes confined to the super-rich, the craft of philanthropy gravitates away from bothering with anything that the system considers “small potatoes.”ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, smaller donors and their gifting practices can teach us a great deal about the mechanics by which funders can become co-learning partners with grantees.^{iv} Researchers have determined that the emotional investments of donors in the projects they give to contributes in the long run to more funding and greater levels of awareness, attitudinal change and even social policy redirections. In essence, donor involvement and practices of giving that make room for dialogic cross-learning between givers and takers go a long way towards igniting a reimagined ethics of social generosity.

This essay documents the intentions and textures of grantmaking as practiced by the Open Circle Foundation, a philanthropic project housed at the East Bay Community Foundation (EBCF) in Oakland, California since 2000. Set up as a \$1 million fund intended to be spent down over the approximate time span of a decade, or, as it actually turned out, fifteen years, Open Circle has invested in local projects and artists dedicated to exploring the interaction between art and the environment. Open Circle’s expansive definition of “environment” has included both the natural and built urban landscapes of the major cities of Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond and San Pablo as well as smaller municipalities and neighborhoods in a designated region of Northern California.

“By environment we mean where people live,” said Diane Sanchez, who served as Program Officer for Open Circle from 2003 through her retirement in 2014, when Nicole Kyauk assumed that role.

This essay aims to capture the technologies of engagement and participation that have distinguished the Open Circle approach to art funding by highlighting some of the artists and projects funded over the last fifteen years. The philanthropic practices enacted by Open Circle could be instructive to other funding entities seeking to balance the pressures between wanting to make a lasting impact with a finite pool of resources. Specifically, this case study provides useful insights into the possibilities of crafting giving initiatives that consider the competing agendas of:

- *spreading funds widely*
- *offering multi-year funding for singularly successful programs*
- *providing both seed funds for incipient ideas as well as more substantive funding for mature art endeavors*

The Open Circle grantmaking process modeled a co-learning approach. The practices of this small foundation can help inspire a whole new cohort of emerging philanthropists who, with relatively modest fortunes, can come to see charitable giving as a tool for fostering radical imagination and shared accountability in intimate, localized settings.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING: *The Grantee's Point of View*

A friend of a friend mentioned to Mirah Moriarty the existence of a small, largely unknown pool of money at a foundation in Oakland. Moriarty's physical body was present at the loud, cheery reception (the sixth or seventh civic event she attended that month), but her mind was where it often went when she and partner Rodrigo Esteva were dreaming up a new project: *the need to find resources.*

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Moriarty and Esteva, each half of the duo Dance Monks, didn't think of resources only in terms of money. Their dance practice relied on friends, ordinary spaces and objects strategically located in parks and natural settings as much as it did on money to carry through their vision. That evening, though, money was of particular concern, so Moriarty dutifully annotated the name of the reference her friend offered, "Open Circle at EBCF," while continuing hydrating amidst the crowded room. Later that evening, she opened her laptop and looked up the funding site. A triangulation she had often found difficult to articulate to other funders was expressed in plain language in the foundation's guidelines: *artmaking, community and environment.*

Familiar with previous grant initiatives aimed at the transformation of the area's urban core, grant opportunities as of late in the East Bay were increasingly emphasizing the litany of problems associated with inner city life. Art was often invoked as a tool; but the artist herself frequently faded in the background of measurable metrics. Like Moriarty and Esteva, many artists in the East Bay were eager to think about "placemaking" through larger imaginative frames that were friendly, or at least open, to environmental works. Problems such as fast food consumption by youth of color living in "food deserts" in urban neighborhoods were being acutely felt in the barrios; artists responding to these challenges were refusing to think in silos. Most saw a continuum that ran from land and soil artworks to home, school, personal eating habits and the socioeconomic policies that favor sugary drinks at corner mom-and-pop stores.

In a cover letter accompanying Dance Monks' first grant proposal to Open Circle in 2007, Moriarty recalled the satisfaction of reading the foundation's guidelines and finding, for the first time, a kindred resonance in the philanthropic language she was reading. Open Circle's interests were tightly interwoven with the issues of people, earth and creativity that had occupied hers and Esteva's life for the past several years.

In early December 2014, as we shared a lunch of greens and salmon in the company of other Open Circle grantees, Esteva, too, enthusiastically recalled the first time he and Moriarty came in contact with Open Circle – and the difference that finding a philanthropic partner that believed in their emerging ideas would make in their careers. But the recollection was suddenly interrupted by a new thought: he turned his face towards the kitchen and yelled, "Did we tell you about the tree stumps we found in Strawberry Creek while rehearsing last week?"

Esteva was hoping to catch the ear of Diane Sanchez, the Open Circle program officer who had followed their work for close to a decade. Sanchez stepped into the dining room wiping her hands on the apron tied around her waist; she exhibited an unusual intimate knowledge of Dance Monks' work process. While the rest of us missed the significance of the tree stumps in Esteva's digression, Sanchez seemed amused and complicit.

It was more than serendipity that brought Dance Monks and Open Circle together. In fact, as their relationship as funder/grantee developed it became clear that each, in their own ways, were pushing the same envelopes and had been doing so for some time before the chance for partnership ever came up.

Evidence of the influence of one another in each other's work began to show up in small increments. Open Circle grants, for example, became increasingly more open to innovative dance proposals. Over time, Open Circle cultivated a portfolio of transformational dance projects – many of them at the early incubation stages. These projects were often characterized by fostering site-specific movements that utilized oral histories, included video as well as live performances, and engaged children and community casting with the same ease with which they employed professional dancers.

In return, Dance Monks gifted Open Circle with one of the most enduring ideas in the foundation's lifecycle: the interpretation of *conservation* as the purposeful action of *handing down of stories*. As a core principle of what Open Circle was interested in funding, that interpretation of conservation opened many doors to grants and partnerships that may have otherwise been determined incompatible.

Dance Monks is one of several dozen grantees in Open Circle's portfolio that seems to have been almost *invented* on purpose to match the giving aspirations of the fund. But of course, they were not. Therein lies the calibrated success of Open Circle's intention to *listen* to the community. Like most foundations, the initial impetus and focus developed in the mind of the donor. But the theme quickly found relevance in the surrounding community of artists. As a general practice, Sanchez told me, Open Circle board members acquired the habit of scoping out who was doing work that could be exciting and compatible. The foundation's decision to be responsive to what can be called a *being there* approach to community needs resembles the ethnographic methods employed by anthropologists.

Like the seminal story about Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski realizing, while he conducted research in Micronesia, that anthropology would only be truly relevant to human knowledge if he got *off the veranda* and pitched instead a tent among the people he wished to know – eating what they eat, getting up and going to sleep when they do, helping fetch water and wood for meal preparations – so did a practice one can tentatively call *open-source philanthropy* began to emerge at Open Circle.

Each grant cycle began with a fresh look at “who is doing great work.” The measure of what was considered “great” was always localized; in other words, it favored *the vernacular aesthetics that made sense to the community that employed them*. The foundation didn't issue fancy RFPs insisting on the embrace of new vocabulary it had itself helped coin (a practice increasingly common in arts funding). Most importantly, it welcomed repeated requests from previous grantees; always allowing for the possibility that the first grant may have just touched the surface or served as a lab for testing new approaches. Artists like Dance Monks responded to these giving protocols with a sentiment I can only describe as akin to joy – instead of turning into the familiar burdensome ritual of exhaustion and resentment, grant submittal deadlines became opportunities for reflective praxis, part and parcel of the artmaking process itself.

As part of the education and evaluation process the Board collectively or individually visited studios, attended performances and artists came to the foundation where discussions were held about their work and goals as a whole, rather than just in relation to a particular project.

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To describe the act of grantmaking in these terms is not to fall into a romantic and naïve view of the local, the small and the instrumental. Even through the presence of friendly protocols, Open Circle had to confront the realities of limited funds and an excess of requests. Choices had to be made, not always pleasantly. But little doubt remains that through the foundation's dialogic approach to grantmaking, the generalized terms of engagement between funder/grantee were cast in a new light that neither side of the equation had quite experienced before.

In the first few years of the foundation's operations, potential grantees were identified by word of mouth; it took a while before a website was in place and formal application processes were designed. This was not done out of negligence or inefficiency; rather, a thoughtful sense of *timing* was behind the rudimentary grantmaking. Diane Sanchez explained the Board's interpretation of timing as a combination of opportunity and credibility. She said:

We had good opportunities to invest money in projects at moments when it made a difference, either early on in the process or towards the end to wrap something up. But to have good timing you need to be flexible and be patient as a funder, and you need to trust the artist; trust that they will deliver even possibly something you won't understand.

Delivering an obscure or esoteric product was never an issue with Dance Monks; the most challenging part of their work seemed to be, according to the critics, the sheer arrest of emotion that their unpredictable movements suddenly provoke. "Mesmerized and sensitized" is how one reviewer described the audience at a Dance Monks performance.

For three years, Open Circle provided funding to produce Dance Monks' *GREEN* project, a residency, workshop and performance with children that explored their need to physically and imaginatively reconnect to nature through embodied experience. The Dance Monks website features on the main page a moving reference to this project. The image of a child from urban Oakland standing at the ocean front, breathing deeply, her small lungs inhaling the saltine air while the hands fold over the heart, listening to quiet palpitations as she closes her eyes haunts the imagination. The image I just described is posted on Dance Monks' website as an example of their "teaching" work, but the aesthetic power that it evokes could as easily been representative of their professional performance work. The blurring of lines between garden-variety "arts education" projects and high-impact, edgy, punctual artistic work has found fertile soil in Open Circle's grantmaking terrain as well. Sanchez said:

It has always been our hope, modest as it may be, that the way we behaved with artists in the East Bay all these years would message others of different ways of giving money to support artists so artists can be their own aesthetic selves when seeking support.

Primarily interested in supporting artists whose work seeks to enhance the broad scope of "the human experience" by casting light onto issues of equality, justice, access, dignity, beauty and freedom of expression, the line-up of grantees of Open Circle reflect a wide spectrum of disciplines, art-making strategies and ethnic and cultural diversity. Located in a section of Northern California already well known as a hub for innovation in urban arts and social activism, it comes as no surprise that the grantmaking portfolio to date reflects many complex, aesthetically-rich and mature bodies of work that



Rodrigo Esteva.
Dance Monks. 2008.

have either emerged directly through Open Circle funded-projects or have been greatly enhanced by investments from Open Circle at strategic moments in the life cycle of the projects. A fair share of grants aimed at exposure to community-based art experiences, without major expectations for producing structural shifts or aesthetic leaps, have complimented the giving portfolio along the way. This balance between aesthetic merit and inclusivity has proven repeatedly to be a tight rope to walk for many art funders.

The average Open Circle grant in any given annual cycle ranged from \$2,000 to \$5,000 and covered a range of sites anywhere from a school garden project to studio residencies at major institutions such as Kala Art Institute. Targeted investments in public art in the range of \$30,000 to \$100,000 were also considered during the same time period. However, what most stands out from a review of grantmaking over the past decade and a half is the consistent trend to increase the grant amounts over time, to repeat grantees. Small experimental projects by a single individual that were funded initially at \$2,000 grew in trust, relationship and capacity over the years, up to grant levels in some cases of \$10,000 and \$20,000. “As we started to focus our investments more to the artists themselves,” said Sanchez, “the more that our conviction grew that substantive support was justified and necessary.”

WHAT WOULD YOU DO *with a Million Dollars?*

A single-stroke search for the word “philanthropy” in Google yields more than twenty-seven million references in less than twenty seconds. Yet, despite everything we know, some aspects of the philanthropic enterprise remain elusive. What exactly is the nature of the transaction that takes place when a person with wealth passes on a “gift” of money to another person who, lacking financial means, possesses nonetheless the abilities to create something extraordinary which is deemed desirable by the patron and others in the community at large?

Are we to understand what takes place between the parties fundamentally as an instance of the theory of enlightened self-interest? Capitalism, as a system of beliefs and protocols, regulates the philanthropic relationship as one essentially rooted in the idea of benevolence – that is, on the notion that those who have been *blessed* with wealth have a moral obligation to feel compassion towards those of lesser means. Absent in this logic, of course, are the historical forces that *create* wealth and *amass* it into individual or family hands (as opposed to its communal sharing) often at a social price extracted, forcefully in many instances, from those whose only option is to sell their labor. The American ideology of philanthropy supersedes the materialist interpretation of wealth with a credo centered around the notion of “leveling the playing field.” Or, as expressed in the famous words of Andrew Carnegie, “the best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise.”

In contrast to this largely predominant point of view, in the early 1980s (an era particularly remembered for its intense episodes of public greed and material excess) a popular book by Harvard professor Lewis Hyde entitled *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* sought to spread the idea that a work of art is always, inherently and essentially, gifted. The dominant treatment of art as commodity, Hyde argued, distorts the true measure of value in art making. Works of art, he said, “exist simultaneously in two ‘economics,’ a market economy and a gift economy. Only one of these is essential, however: a work of art can survive without the market, but where there is no gift there is no art.”

Hyde’s work touched a sensitive nerve in American art making and art philanthropy; thousands read his work and praise poured in from every sector. The itch that provoked such a feverish embrace of Hyde’s thesis had something to do with the development of a parallel phenomenon during the same period. In a move towards “professionalization” of the nonprofit

cultural arts field, a growing tendency among foundations emerged to ask nonprofit grantees and individual artists to “rationalize” their operations, increase efficiency and “act more businesslike.” A new cottage industry had quickly emerged by the 1980s consisting of consultants who advised art organizations on the use of tools such as strategic planning, cost-benefit analysis, return on investments, and program evaluation. Increasingly since then, many artists feel that they must bleed their life stories and heartaches in justifying every dollar they receive to support their work. Others feel that unless their work is “social” in an instrumental sense (i.e. attempting to remedy a social ill) little value can be justified for pure aesthetic expressions.

The exigencies of philanthropy have changed over time. When Rockefeller first set aside a \$100 million fund in 1903 to support broad-based projects across sectors from health to art to education, he declared as his only measure of impact “the betterment of mankind.” Today, logic models and sophisticated evaluation criteria are the norm. Public accountability of nonprofits and artists has increased. No longer satisfied with simply gifting, in general there has been a noticeable change in the field of philanthropy away from a blanket “do-no-harm” stance to a more onerous “prove yourself worthy” mandate directed at artists and art organizations.

Open Circle came into being during this era of *quid pro quo* philanthropy; quickly, it sought to distance itself from the norm. Established through a gift of \$1 million from Dorothy Weicker, the small foundation benefited from a flexibility that was proportional to its scale. How Ms. Weicker acquired the money which she eventually decided to turn into a fund to support artists’ work is an instructive tale of intuition’s triumph over science.

In the early 1970s, Ms. Weicker was living in the British Isles attending the University of Edinburgh as a student in Philosophy. In the spring of 1975, she found herself in London conducting research that required the use of the British Museum Library. One day, she happened casually upon an exhibition titled *Contemporary Spanish Realists*. One painter in



“Hombre y Mujer” by Antonio Lopez Garcia. 2001.

the show drew her attention: Antonio Lopez Garcia. Considered today by many renowned art critics as “the leading representative” of the Spanish contemporary realism and figuration movement, Lopez Garcia had been active in European painting circles since the 1950s. He stands out as having been an early influence in American hyperrealism – a genre of painting and sculpture that confounds the viewer by resembling a high-resolution photograph. Lopez Garcia’s approach to painting and sculpture is marked by a unique characteristic: the artist methodically reworks, retouches and corrects his works, sometimes over the span of many years, aiming to capture the essence of the object or landscape depicted. In this sense, his works are never finished – as natural elements of air, light, moisture and other environmental conditions modify the wood, plaster or oils over time the artist takes advantage of this to elaborate on his original creations.

After seeing Lopez Garcia’s work in the London gallery, Dorothy pursued the artist at his studio. It was there that she saw for the first time a pair of sculptures of human figures that the artist was, if you will, experimenting with in his idiosyncratic style: shaping the bodies but leaving many details to be worked out over time.

Dorothy loved the work, as if by a spell or perhaps an epiphany.

As the youngest child of wealthy parents, she had access to funds in a family trust. She purchased *Hombre y Mujer* for \$100,000. Uncertain what she would do with the sculptures and still trying to sort her life's direction, Dorothy left the life-size sculptures in the possession of Antonio, as "works in progress" that he would eventually, presumably, "complete." Twenty-five years passed before the works saw the light of day, included in exhibitions in Japan, the U.S. and several European countries. Dorothy said:

Every time I went to Madrid I would stop by Antonio's studio and see the sculptures; the male figure changed dramatically over the years from what I first saw in London.

In fact, by the time Dorothy purchased the work in 1975, *Hombre y Mujer* had been ten years in evolution.

The male figure became an obsession with Antonio. He changed it radically – adding approximately four inches in the trunk area after I already owned the work. The man became significantly noble in bearing. The whole artistic/sculptural technology of madera polychromada dates back to the Renaissance and beyond. The work is really quite extraordinary in technique, psychology and execution. In a very real and metaphorical sense, Antonio put himself into the man (fifty years work on that piece), and I did not press or impose any agendas or requests. Essentially I observed and listened. I never had any doubt that I was in the presence of a unique artist.

As she speaks, it is clear that Dorothy delights in the ambiguity and open-endedness of these scenarios: a young American woman turned art patron engaged with a maverick Spanish male master – the absentee owner of an unfinished work of art that over the course of several decades would become recognized not only as a masterful example of European Realism but also as an essential work of Spanish patrimony.

"What interested me about Antonio and the pair of intriguing sculptures was never the exchange of the objects," Dorothy says, "but rather the building over time of a trusting relationship."

In 2000, Dorothy felt it was finally time to establish ownership of the works. However, as Lopez Garcia's reputation had grown and his work had become subject to study as part of Spain's visual arts legacy, *Hombre y Mujer* were designated as "national treasures" and not authorized to be exported for foreign ownership. This unexpected situation, which could have easily turned into an international art scandal over rights of ownership, was instead received by Dorothy as a beautiful opportunity out of which she would craft something special that would extend, not diminish, her devotion and commitment to the artistic creative process. "The solution came to me intuitively," she said.

The arrangements that followed were a tale of fateful circumstances. Through the assistance of her friend Maria Cruz Bilbao, it was agreed that the sculptures would be purchased from Dorothy by a Spanish petroleum company. The deal seemed all but certain one day and then doubtful the next: nothing unusual in this kind of transaction where both corporate and government actors have to satisfy their prime directives. Through the skilled negotiations of Ms. Bilbao, the sale was finally executed with the condition that the work of art would be donated to the *Museo Reina Sofia* in Madrid, thus ensuring their permanent location and ownership by the people of Spain.

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“We survived complicated legal maneuvers and had to wait a long time for all the details of the transfer to square off,” said Dorothy, “but I felt myself being led by an inner directive.”

After the artist and Ms. Bilbao were paid the government-required respective commissions for the re-sale, Dorothy received payment in an amount a little above \$1 million for the work sold. “It was a story that made itself,” she said. “This was unquestionably the best possible outcome.”

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Plans for the disposition of her newly acquired million dollars came to Dorothy as certainly and as quietly as the decision to purchase the sculptures once did. Only one condition would regulate her gift: *the money would be used to support artists directly.*

“All I knew was that I wanted this to be a very interesting, creative giving process,” says Dorothy.

As part of her plans, Dorothy had discussions with Michael Howe, then President & CEO of the East Bay Community Foundation in 2000. With the assistance of the East Bay Community Foundation, Dorothy proceeded to create a supporting organization, which in essence is a foundation within a foundation. This structure allowed her to develop by-laws and form a Board of Trustees to assist in the grant-making decisions and the direction of the foundation.

Dorothy explains, she “needed more than [herself]” to carry through in her giving what she most valued in her relationship with Antonio, the spirit of collaboration and partnership.

“So much philanthropy is pre-scripted,” she says. “I thought let’s have four or five of us be on equal terms, their vote counting as much as mine.”

From the start, Dorothy’s vision was to create a grantmaking program that would “spend down” the balance of the original gift. Her mindset contemplated setting a goal and making an impact with a limited amount of funds. Spending down the capital on inspiring grassroots works until it was all gone seemed to Dorothy an approach more consistent with the philosophical underpinning of her own life and her relationship to Antonio.

“There are things in life you can’t control so much,” she told me.

Dorothy thought it would take approximately ten years for grants to cut into the total corpus of money she had set aside. In fact, investment practices at the East Bay Community Foundation extended the term to fifteen years. A series of coincidental moments of good fortune helped the fund’s longevity as well. For example, shortly before the 2008 recession hit the stock market, the Board had decided to move all the fund’s investments to a cash-basis. The fund avoided a potential significant loss.

Dorothy’s spend-down approach departed from the common practice by donor designated funds and small family foundations to create endowments in perpetuity. Nonetheless, as a managed fund under the investment guidelines of the East Bay Community Foundation’s pool of donors, Dorothy’s original \$1 million gift started to generate (on average) about five percent annually – or approximately \$60,000. In 2007 for example, seven years into the project, the balance on the fund was still at \$1 million plus change. In this scenario, it became possible to make annual grants from the dividends of the return on investment funds only – much in the same fashion as a traditional endowment would function. However, eventually as the Board found artists and projects they wanted to support at higher financial levels, they began spending the cash in the corpus of the gift directly.

Regardless of whether one has the means to donate a million dollars or a hundred, researchers of the giving process tell us that every “giver” undergoes a similar thought-process. Eight mechanisms have been identified as the most important forces driving charitable giving:

- ✦ awareness of need
- ✦ solicitation
- ✦ costs and benefits
- ✦ altruism
- ✦ reputation
- ✦ psychological benefits
- ✦ values
- ✦ efficacy

During the first three years of existence, Open Circle’s Board consisted of members of Dorothy’s family and close friends. In 2004, Dorothy had an epiphany: “I came to recognize that the spirit and intent of Open Circle concerned my vision and as such it was I who must direct the future of the investment.” That year, the fund was transformed and individuals outside of the Weicker family – artists and community activists – were invited to be on the Board to help shape its grantmaking. Dorothy described the new entity as a “civic-oriented organization.”

Perhaps one obvious insight in Dorothy’s story is reflected in the name she gave to the foundation: Open Circle. The seed for Open Circle was planted circa 1985 in the garden of Dorothy’s Berkeley home. A dozen friends gathered to muse and brainstorm on the idea behind the name. The words “Open Circle” were all they had to go on. The name had made itself known to Gina Covina, along with a certain expansive inclusive energy in which nature as well as culture participated. The gathered friends were thinking “nonprofit foundation” for the structure, but content did not present itself that day, or that year, or that decade. Not until Dorothy launched her adventurous and creative experiment in philanthropy did the name resurface. Open Circle Foundation was the fruiting result of the seed planted so many years before. As symbolized by a geometric open circle, an ethic of deep collaboration was central to all the foundation’s grants and initiatives. Dorothy, as well as Diane Sanchez and the rest of the trustees, insisted on applying meaning to the word “collaboration” beyond platitudes.

“What collaboration means for us,” said Dorothy, is that “we are willing, as a foundation, to let people and artists bring things to us, teach us where the most interesting and important things are happening in the community and disavow us of our assumptions.”

ART IS MORE PROCESS *Than Object*

“Why is it that the notion of environmental awareness does not regularly resonate with people of color?” asked Roy Chan as we shared a plate of *tapas* at a downtown Oakland restaurant. He answers himself before I am able to speculate a response to a question that many have asked before. “The ‘sustainability’ conversation among urban planners, activists and conservation experts really didn’t pay attention to Culture,” he says.

In Chinatown, he explains, “everybody walks, people take public transportation, people use public space very creatively; take sidewalks, for instance; they become sites for social interaction. The new idea of ‘transit oriented development’ (TOD) is not really new to immigrant communities; the goals of TOD have been fulfilled for decades by these communities. How clueless the urban planners of today are about this culturally-rich pattern of urban settlement; a privilege of power is to assume that you are the first one with that idea.”

Roy is an architect and urban planner who led a major community-driven public revitalization effort at Madison Park – a key open space in Chinatown Oakland and also a key site eyed for possible redevelopment by the Lake Merritt

Why is it that the notion of environmental awareness does not regularly resonate with people of color ? ... (Because) The ‘sustainability’ conversation among urban planners, activists and conservation experts really didn’t pay attention to Culture.



Tai Chi exercises at Madison Park. Oakland Asian Cultural Center. 2011.

BART station planning process. His work through the Oakland Asian Cultural Center (OACC) received support from Open Circle in the early stages of his effort to capture cultural narratives among users of the park. Through a series of chat sessions, first the Bubble Tea Chats and then the Tai Chi Chats, Roy and OACC volunteers facilitated place-based storytelling and began engaging the community in sharing ideas, and gaining a unified voice, for the area's development future.

The cultural narratives were used to construct a series of mobile exhibits, a video and 3-D maps that affirmed the cultural activities already richly present at the park. At 7a.m. every morning, art unfolded organically at Madison Park. Several hundred residents gathered there each day to do various martial arts and cultural dances. It turned out that over a dozen groups were using the park each day, but city and transportation planners were in the dark about this important piece of planning data. By the time the bustling of the morning got underway at Madison Park, most of the Qigong, Tai Chi and fan dancing practitioners had already come and gone.

As plates of *tapas* keep arriving at the table with their exotic aromas, Roy goes deeper into the stories he unearthed through the process of the chats. "There were originally four Chinatowns in Oakland, but a history of displacement has been slowly narrowing the historical memory of these places," he says.

The struggle over the sense of ownership of Chinatown touches off a deep conversation about what it means to conserve "open space" when what is considered "open" today may harbor the stories of people's ancestors. In the 1980s, Roy recalls accompanying his father to watch hundreds of Chinese seniors gather in place for the fan dance, to practice Tai Chi, or exchange tasty dumplings. At the time, he didn't grasp the full significance of that experience. Now that he is a father himself, he marvels at how many important things can go missing unless one pays attention to their surroundings. Not any kind of attention, but the kind that lingers over details easy to miss. For example, a clue to what would happen in the park each day took place by 6a.m., before the first participants arrived: an old lady would bring a broom and start sweeping the park.

The Open Circle Foundation grants that supported the planning and organizing efforts are very dear to Roy's heart; mostly, because they came early in this process. "It gave us time to do a deep dive into the community; get the stories properly translated." Roy recognizes the dangers that are present when organizers attempt to "speak on behalf" of a community cause without having done all the homework. "There's always so much informally happening in these communities; the only thing that gives you credibility is telling the story."

For Roy, the unfolding of the Madison Park project yielded a personal bittersweet outcome. His father passed away before Roy could share with him his journey of cultural recovery of Chinatown's memory. But through the work he did at Madison Park he got the chance to meet many of his father's old friends. Many of them shared with Roy stories about his Dad that he didn't know. In the end Roy got to know his own father better through the long distance and upheaval of cultural advocacy and placemaking, than if he had lived with him quietly for a long time.

Another way in which people of color are affected by the “environment” is on account of the images that circulate freely, or in contrast, are sorely missing, from

the everyday representations that narrate life as we know it. This kind of extreme status quo – expressed and – punctuated as either the excess of a stereotype or the *suppression* of an alternative point of view – exercises a kind of symbolic violence in the lives of poor, minoritized people day after day. It is this sort of vacuum that motivates the painter Brett Cook to claim the classic arts of portraiture to re-inscribe the lives of Black and Brown folks into the visual environments of cities and towns. This is true of all people, but the young seem to bear the brunt of the stigma in this day and age.

“It is stunning to take measure of the lack of productive images of youth in our culture,” Brett tells me as we chat by phone about his work one recent afternoon.

For Brett, re-populating the inventory of possibilities about what Black youth can “grow up” to be is a form of radical engagement to the extent that so many young Black lives are cut short of full productivity, either through violence, prison or poverty. He has traveled all over the country and internationally painting large scale portraits of community leaders pictured as adolescents; these portraits, up to ten feet high, become temporary installations in parks, street corners, libraries, schools and galleries. In Oakland in 2010 through 2012, as part of the Youth Speaks-run festival *Life is Living*, he staged the project *Reflections of Healing*, with support from Open Circle.

One of the iconic images in that series was a portrait of Bobby Hutton, the youngest person to join the Black Panther party in the 1960s. Hutton, who was killed by police in what later was determined was a frame job, was from the same neighborhood in Oakland where Brett found himself working. The local deFremery park is referred to as Bobby Hutton park by many in the neighborhood, and it is the least cared-for park in the entire city – debris, overgrown grass, lack of facilities, a kind of throw-away space for what society largely considers throw-away lives. Brett’s work set out to change the underlining assumptions about who Bobby Hutton was as well as the thousands of Black youth who, like him, moved through that community without any chance to express their full potential as complex, full, rich and multi-dimensional human beings.

“Building the reality where inclusivity really does exist,” Brett tells me, is a kind of sacred calling for him as an artist. His own political awareness has shifted over the years, growing ever more convinced about the urgency of this task but at the same time becoming more mature and realistic about the temporal frame in which such work would take place. “I know now that the change that is needed won’t be fully realized in my lifetime,” he says. “Things will change, but people will still get shot in that same spot tomorrow; I need to see what I do in terms of a longer term practice of change and to me that means using these artistic engines to make people relate.”

Many of the ideas that began to circulate in 2014 through the *Black Lives Matter* movement were tested and amplified by Brett and other artists in Oakland years before the mainstream media shone the light on the most recent killings of

It is stunning to take the measure of the lack of productive images of youth in our culture.



Black youth in America. In the same fashion, events like the *Life is Living* festival have brought a new broadly-defined ecological perspective to conventional community organizing. “It’s like a green festival in the hood,” Brett explains. The difference from “politics as usual” in these efforts, says Brett, is the focus on relationships: what happens after the festival; what happens after “the Revolution.”

“Reflections of Healing.” Brett Cook. 2012.

WHAT DOES THE ARTIST *need*?

"I don't have lots of experience with other foundations; I don't usually seek a lot of funding for my projects," says Zach Pine when we meet at an artist's collective in Berkeley. "Open Circle's process was straightforward and transparent. I appreciated the simplicity. They supported me in creating a project that was in itself simple. I hate the idea of having to manufacture something complex just so it seems important."

Pine is a medical researcher by trade, employed at the University of California, Berkeley. He calls the art he makes "social sculpture" but perhaps a more accurate description would be "landscape magician." When I asked him to describe his work during our meeting, he laughed and said: "you are sitting on it." The bench in the courtyard of the co-op where we were conducting the interview was a large stone that Pine had selected and positioned with just enough precision and skill so that it never occurred to me that it was anything but a back patio bench. He pointed out other rock formations in the backyard that he was responsible for arranging. Some were obviously artistic, positioned to evoke an aesthetic sense of order. Others were integrated into their functionality and easy to miss as art, until one looked closely. Zach finally confessed that he had designed the whole backyard – he told me how he had "rescued" a pile of rocks from a neighborhood home undergoing remodeling. He was amused by my discoveries of small details in the setting that he had intentionally chosen as our meeting place.

In the incorporating bylaws of Open Circle the usual language one would expect about art and society is expressed crisply: "the arts constitute a vital force in people's lives." But the Board inserted a small qualifier in their iteration of this statement that clarifies one of Open Circle's fundamental values. The arts, they noted, must also be an "accessible" force in the lives of communities – accessible, that is, to those whose voices are often the last ones we hear or not at all.

The work that Pine led at Codornices Creek in the City of Berkeley was originally conceived by the staff of the children and families shelter as a basic "get in touch with Nature" tour. Housed for most of their lives in urban environments, some with extremely limited green spaces, the idea that inner city kids can benefit from Nature Walks is very appealing. Pine explained:

The group I was given to work with was very diverse. Except for one parent who grew up on a farm, the majority had not had much of a history of interaction with the natural world. I sensed in that an opportunity; not only would I have the chance to connect people and nature, I was also very interested in exploring the idea of collective power. What could we do together in the creek that one person alone could not manage?

As the work funded by Open Circle progressed, a complex psychological profile of the families began to be reflected in the project. First, the fear. Pine said:

I had not anticipated how much fear some of the families would express about the creek. Some worried about drowning; others asked about snakes; even mosquitoes were a source of concern. It dawned on me one day: these vulnerable children and their parents didn't know what could be gained by the proposed experience; all they knew was what could be lost.

Aspirations followed fears. Many of the creations the families chose to make were houses – enclosures of all sorts: forts, tents, domiciles for birds and rocks. It was moving to see this manifestation as most of them were homeless residing temporarily in the shelter.

Open Circle's process was straightforward and transparent. I appreciated the simplicity. They supported me in creating a project that was in itself simple. I hate the idea of having to manufacture something complex just so it seems important.

The Codornices Creek project went on for three years; most of the families moved on, but some who found housing in the nearby areas continued to participate. What could have easily turned into a stuffy naturalist tour developed into a project where people grabbed hold of freedom of expression as their birthright. Once the creek was laid open as a canvas for all to imprint their own meanings, families and artist were able to claim the project as their own. For Pine, it was important

to learn about the history of the creek in relation to his day job as a scientist: the University was founded in its present location largely on account of the easy access to water and farmland. Pine said:

Open Circle understood right away that the medium we were working with were the people themselves. It was a joint learning process and we also shared the joy of every little discovery or connection. I guess I could be called a socially-engaged artist in the sense that my own aspiration for the project was always process-oriented; regardless of what sculptures the families erected at the creek, I was always more interested in the social sculpture taking place. Open Circle tuned in to this goal from the very start.



*“Exploring Codornices Creek.”
Artist Zach Pine. 2009*

There was something to be said about the scale of the Codornices Creek project. “I didn’t want a Big Project,” Pine tells me. “I much prefer to work at the level of families and creeks.”

Diane Sanchez and I sit at a café in Oakland a few hours before my visit with Zach Pine. We discussed the economics of art making, recognizing that artists and art organizations get their work done in an “ecosystem in which art funders and other art supporters play important financial and influencing roles.”^{vi} It occurred to me that as I interview artists that have received funding from Open Circle a recurring theme, common to most evaluation systems, would emerge: *how is the work sustainable?* Another way of posing the same question is to ask: *how are the artists surviving?* Or, perhaps, more to the point of interest of an enabler like Open Circle, *what does the artist need, period?*

The question is not new for Sanchez or the Open Circle Board. She tells me: “the fund supports and believes in the artist’s voice.” We sip our teas and agree that “survival” is a question that mainly frames the impact of art in financial terms. Sanchez continues:

Although that is key for artists like everyone else that is not what underpins our work at the end of the day. I think we are more about enabling artists to create without bending their work to fit a mold or squeezing it into something unnatural to the work in order to receive funding. Our grant will not solve all financial woes but we hope all our grants allows for open creation, reflecting the artists’ passion.

RADICAL *Beauty*

In the terms of contemporary public discourse, anytime a grant project inserts the words *social change* in its description a host of assumptions immediately come up. *Activism* is a word that carries baggage and many have even vehemently opposed its association with Art. Without rehashing disputes that date back to the Renaissance, Open Circle made the decision early on in its forming that it would implode the false dichotomy that segregates “good” art from “activist” art. Ms. Weicker assembled a Board that could feel comfortable supporting aesthetically rigorous work and individual artists of professional caliber as well as funding works that totally re-imagined the prevalent aesthetics.

At Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, one of the premier printmaking studios in the world, Executive Director Archana Horsting walks me through the spaces of her institution, but I am treated to so much more than a “tour.” At each stop she describes the use of the space in terms of a value of Kala’s mission. She is not performing some kind of stiff ritual for site visitors; I can tell this is how she thinks everyday.

In some ways, talking to Archana reminds me of my conversations with Dorothy and Diane: in their speech there is such a profound respect for the art of being an artist – a sense of respect for those who fashion for themselves occupations that concern the resolute and radical production of beauty as a universal right of human beings.

At the Atelier, Archana says one of the driving questions at the foundation of Kala was: “how do we want to be treated as artists?” As an example, she points to the empty rooms with walls painted in white that will be assigned to each resident artist. “Rarely do artists get a large white space to experiment,” she says. Archana proceeds to explain how Kala has figured out a working model in which artists are both granted as much freedom (and isolation) as they need to produce art in studio settings and at the same time work in the community as much as they want. Archana believes that it is this unique commitment that made Kala attractive to Open Circle early on. The fund has supported the Institute’s classes and community residencies for five years in a row.

“Printmaking is as democratic of a medium of art as you can imagine – having uses in political education and organizing historically,” says Archana, “but at the same time you can make prints as refined an art form as you are willing to imagine.”

A similar juxtaposition of ideas about art and community rises to the surface when I visit the studios of two other artists who also received funding from Open Circle: Favianna Rodriguez and Kim Anno.



*Student Artwork.
Kala Art Institute. 2009.*



*“Men and Women in Water Cities.”
Artist Kim Anno. 2013.*

Kim Anno is a painter, photographer, and video artist. Open Circle supported *Men and Women In Water Cities*, a work in progress that utilizes volunteer actors from different schools around the world to convey the conditions and challenges of life in port cities in a post-sea level rise society.

As a studio artist, primarily, Kim’s paintings and photographs demonstrate a highly sophisticated sensibility. Elements such as texture and scale are manipulated carefully to create effects that alter reality and point to realms of imagination where contradictions jump to the surface. Water, for instance, as an endangered natural resource, appears as an object of speculation for businessmen and a backdrop of leisure for elite women. While the points are not subtle, the artistic execution is meticulous. There is also a process of community participation in many of the photographs; young people are invited as models, actors in manufactured scenes. Kim is not a *community artist* in the way that the term is usually interpreted as making the street, the sidewalk, and the community center the primary sites of artistic creation. Kim has, instead, a body of work that concerns her personally, without implying that it has no relevance in the public spheres in which it interacts (through shows, galleries, academic institutions, catalogues, film festivals, etc.).

Yet, when I visit Kim at her studio she is interested in talking about the dangers of a version of environmentalism that falls in love with what she described as “the tyranny of the picturesque.” She is interested, she tells me, in “*things surreal, monstrous*,” in places like Las Vegas where all the efforts are towards distancing ourselves from the natural environment. “I am intrigued by nature that is unscenic,” she tells me.

Suddenly, the points of connection with all the other grantees of Open Circle become much clearer, although the medium Kim favors seems farther removed from the preferred modes of engagement of the rest of the Open Circle’s portfolio. And then it dawns on me that perhaps what Open Circle has chosen to do in crafting its work the way it has, inclusive of the studio painters like Anno, is to make us think about culture as a widespread terrain where many creative efforts happen simultaneously. While “the best for the most” continues to be a crying rally point for many art funders, it is entirely possible now to imagine multiple variants on what is to be considered “best” and whom should be visibly included in the “most.”

Favianna Rodríguez's work follows, documents, critiques, and reinterprets the larger discursive immigration narratives that are shaping the lives of people around the globe, especially in the U.S. Open Circle funding supported Culture/Strike, a mobile art exhibit where artists collectively create cultural products that challenge hate, anti-immigrant sentiment, and exclusion, and instead promote values of fairness, dignity, equality, and justice.

Favianna's work is, deliberately, far from anything resembling the "precious" artifacts of museums and collection galleries. In fact, her work is less "work of art" than what she calls "cultural strategy." Her interest consists essentially in the conundrum of how to move ideas in the greater cultural terrain of our times. Her image of a butterfly to represent her core idea that "migration is beautiful," considers the butterfly as icon, code, symbol, meme and logo – all at the same time.



Poster commissioned by National Educators Association. Artist Favianna Rodríguez. 2012.

"Politics is a reactionary field of action; often, too little, too late. The artists that I work with, we are proposing a different way: lift the grand idea first, change the conversation."

Her voice goes up in pitch as she adds: "for example, how come the President and everybody else talk all the time about "border security," border this and border that; what about talking about No Border at all?"

Ambrose Bierce, the author of the classic and clever *Devil's Dictionary* once described a "border" as "an imaginary line between two nations, separating the imaginary rights of one from the imaginary rights of another."

It is precisely in the deployment of a reanimated "civic imagination" that the border and migration figure as critical issues, too, of an environmental (human) agenda. Open Circle sensed this and invited Favianna to the table.

Favianna's butterfly project replicates the Open Circle approach to philanthropy: it asks first, what are the ideas that we are trying to shift; and secondly, lets the forms flow. In this context, artistic merit is judged as much on the value of a work of art that has "its ear on the ground," as on the execution of a finished product. One is no less important because the other mandate is present; it simply makes room for a consideration of what may otherwise remain in the shadows (even if the "shadowy" world must be illuminated with something as non-studious as sheer propaganda).

TRUST AS A *Revolutionary Practice*

It is somewhat of a disturbing contradiction and a beautiful dance at the same time: the tension between patching holes in people's lives, treating symptoms in a piecemeal approach or healing the whole person by dismantling the structural forces that make them ill in the first place. I get educated on the nuances of this tightrope when I sit for a visit with the young staff and resident artists at RYSE Center in the city of Richmond.

"Turning government contracts into organizing work, that is the challenge and the beauty of what we do," says the charismatic and smart Executive Director at RYSE, Kimberly Aceves, a nationally recognized innovator in youth development. "Part of the challenge consists, at the most basic level, in trying to shift the climate and the lens through which this community views young people, in general."

Part of the challenge consists, at the most basic level, in trying to shift the climate and the lens through which this community views young people, in general.

Her staff has joined us at the meeting; they exude an energy that I can physically feel entering through the pores of my skin. It is hard to remain unmoved by what I am witnessing. They converse moving up and down an escalator of philosophical ideas, humor and practical no-nonsense “lessons” about getting things done. They quickly learn in the meeting that I am a college professor and rather than retreat in intimidation at my age or credentials, they lunge forward into a frenzy of questions, laughter, bantering and political analysis. I feel myself relaxing into their informality, adapting my speech to their youthful aesthetics as evidenced in their vernacular, their body movements, the hoodies and sneakers that they wear. Tavae Samuelu, a recent U.C. Berkeley graduate in Ethnic Studies who serves as RYSE’s Development Associate, says:

The idea of young people as deficit-ridden is so deep, so embedded in the language of politicians, social workers and law enforcement. In most of the grants we receive, funders want to see individual behavior change; we see our work extending beyond the direct services the young people receive; our ultimate goal is to shift the consciousness, for youth themselves to be in positions of leadership.

Joining us this afternoon is the poet, storyteller and writer Josh Healey, who has received a grant from Open Circle to do a residency at RYSE. Healey is an accomplished artist who has received national and international recognition for his work in film and performance utilizing spoken word and hip-hop aesthetics around themes of social justice. His fit with the RYSE ethos is clearly in evidence this morning: he speaks their language, articulating as one more member of the team and at the same time carefully staking his role as an artist-teacher-advisor.

“We hire adult-allies,” says Ms. Aceves, pointing to Josh. The group bursts into laughter and jokes about Josh not being so young anymore quickly follow.

Josh tells me about a theory that he and the crew at RYSE have been playing with, exploring, through their work together.

Sometimes anger is the rational response to an irrational situation, he tells me. The resiliency and brilliance that some of our youth demonstrate, to survive the systems they live in, challenge the conditions of the culture of greed and violence they see every single day. My job as an artist is to help them craft those stories of people acting ‘rational’ based on ‘irrational’ circumstances, and do the storytelling in such a way so that other people who don’t have those experiences can hear it.

Our conversation is flowing so rapidly and engrossing me so much that I almost forget to ask about their experience as grantees of Open Circle. Before I am able to bring up the topic, Josh comes around to it. His commentary about the foundation is short but profound:

Open Circle gets the connection between environmental justice and racial politics. Not many people out there do. There are different models of youth engagement functioning at any given time in a community; most are not movement-oriented. They are proprietary programmers: this is what we do and this is our neighborhood. Open Circle just let us be, and as unders they echoed our values of humility: we want to be better all the time at what we do, so we listen a lot.

Another artistic project that pushed the envelope of art activism and artistic rigor under the Open Circle portfolio was NAKA – Navarrete & Kajiyama Dance Theater.

Debby Kajiyama, along with NAKA Theater co-founder Jose Navarrete, creates interdisciplinary performance works for the stage, street corners, and site-specific environments. Their work incorporates movement, theater, art installation, multimedia, and live music, and has been influenced by ritual, cultural studies, and their political and environmental concerns.



**RYSE Center Building Mural.
Artist Robert Trujillo. 2009.**

Open Circle has supported two works: *BAILOUT!*, a site-specific, multi-disciplinary performance work that considered how we would cope in the face of catastrophic environmental disasters and most recently *The Anastasio Project* which examines racial equity and violence for immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

In 2013, NAKA hosted an event in Oakland that, for all intent and purposes, one could argue fell outside the scope of their “artistic” mission.

The *Racial Equity Workshop* brought together ten artists for a two-day training on cultural organizing around issues of racial profiling. Jose Navarrete says:

I feel it is fantastic that we can apply for a grant for an “environmental” work that accepts racial profiling in the streets of Oakland as a good fit under that label. We use our own bodies as dancers to make visible the racialized bodies all over our community; we want to intervene in the space where these bodies are being violently cast in prejudice and disrupt that process. The challenge as artists is how to focus people’s attention on this issue. Working on “issues” is so hard sometimes from the artistic point of view.

Kajiyama and Navarrete’s first contact with Open Circle dramatized the fantasy of every artist: to be called spontaneously one day to be offered money in support of their work. Ann Schnake, one of the Board members, had seen their work and brought them to the Board for consideration. When the full Board saw their work they were impressed not only by the subject matter, but by the dance vocabulary itself. Not only are they both incredibly athletic and emotive in their physicality, they also have a great command of the metaphors they are trying to evoke and represent. This is no easy feat for modern dancers, where too much eagerness can make the artistic performance overwrought.

The unsolicited support had an extraordinary impact on Debby and Jose’s work. As Jose recalls it, his emotions surface: “It gave me a feeling of sovereignty, instead of scratching every corner to get the money. It somehow, instantly, added a sense of value to what we do. It was a huge thing for us at the time.”

The consensus among the artists I talked to is that fifteen years ago when Open Circle started funding art related to the environment proposals, most projects were what one artist called “Sierra Club-type clunky ideas.” The embrace of cultural work broadly defined as “community transformation” under the heading of “Environment” has helped expand the conversation on environmental issues that directly loop back to quality of life in the communities. Jose Navarrete says:

Artists here in the Bay Area had paid attention to environmental themes through visual arts mostly, and perhaps some musical projects. Those works tended not to be very interactive. It is different for dance. More and more dancers are now doing environmental-oriented work and involving youth and movement – and the youth movement — makes them so much more open to receive the issues we are attempting to address.

“The impact can be felt in the artistic realm as well,” adds Debby Kajiyama. “The concept of dance training has changed a lot; yes, it is about the skills of the physical body, but it also about how we are relating to others...to other bodies that surround us.”

A review of minutes from grant docket discussions from 2007 to 2012 reveals that the Open Circle trustees made decisions about funding that expanded definitions as the field they were hoping to impact was also maturing. It was also, to some extent, catalyzed by the support that Open Circle itself was offering. A fairly consistent set of concerns in grant deliberations included:

I feel it is fantastic that we can apply for a grant for an ‘environmental’ work that accepts racial profiling in the streets of Oakland as a good fit under that label.

- ✦ *Was the project multi-dimensional?* (Projects that touched off several coordinates of social sites and actors were favored over those that were self-contained and introspective)
- ✦ *Was the engagement of the public grounded and organic?* (Projects that were able to clarify distinctions between various registers of participation, from audiences exposed to something new to people participating as co-creators in artmaking were favored over those that proposed outreach efforts for the sake of enlarging demographics in already conceived and produced programs)
- ✦ *Was the linkage to nature and environment fresh and original?* (Projects that were able to activate natural sites within the city – gardens, parks, creeks – to create and invent new social and cultural environments of dialogue were favored over projects that simply referenced Nature as background or site.)



"The Anastasio Project." Artists Jose Navarrete and Debby Kajiyama. 2014.

After my visit to RYSE I talked to Diane Sanchez a few days later. When I shared my extraordinary experience talking to the young leaders there, she reminds me of the learning curve that organizations like RYSE and artists like Josh represented at times to the Open Circle board. She says:

We got educated by the artists. We weren't just sitting there, busy judging the artists. In a sense, we functioned as an anti-establishment panel, a place where artists could throw strange ideas and see what reactions they got without any fear of negative retribution to their work. I wish I could say we were smart and brave and picked the right people all the time to make the right connections, but we weren't. We just picked artists and that proved to be the only safety net we ever needed. Even if some of the grants didn't have all the yardstick measures one is supposed to ask for, I always trusted the process and sincerity of our work.

Organic is such an abused word – perhaps even corny – yet there is something about the idea of embedding one's practice so deeply in a community, the way Open Circle structured and interpreted their philanthropic mandate, that such a description seems appropriate. And yet, for all the strides made in this fifteen-year experiment, a sense of all that remains to be done in re-visioning the thrust of what philanthropy can mean for a more just society remains a challenge, personally to Ms. Weicker and to the fund's trustees.

If this case study of Open Circle compels any new thinking at all, it is perhaps stronger in pointing to the direction of intangibles such as trust and vulnerability. This pair of characteristics, humble and philosophical as they are, does not exactly point to an atomic detonation of philanthropy as we know it. But it does leave one with a certain conviction floating in the inner chambers of the heart: for philanthropy to become, instead of a "master's tool" with limited capacity to ultimately transform "the master's house," an axis where social justice and democratic pluralism can come together for a better society, at least three fundamental things must happen:

- ✦ *We need new models for imagining wealth distribution, period.*
- ✦ *Creativity led by artists pure and simple, not overwrought language and navel-gazing themes du jour, should dominate grantmaking.*
- ✦ *The culture of trusteeship in philanthropic organizations has to be re-contextualized and re-imagined in favor of an ethic of community partnership.*



Wisdom of Elders/Huebuetlatoli. 2004

ENDnotes

- ⁱ Ostrower, Francie. *“Why the Wealthy Give: The Culture of Elite Philanthropy”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- ⁱⁱ See for example, John F. Sherry Jr. “Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective.” *Journal of Consumer Research* (1983): 157 - 168; Campbell, Leland, Charles S. Gulas, and Thomas S. Gruca. “Corporate Giving Behavior and Decision – Maker Social Consciousness.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 19.4 (1999): 375 – 383; and Lombardo, Barbara. “Corporate Philanthropy: Gift or Business Transaction?” *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 5.3 (1995) 291 – 301.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Woody Tasch, *“Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money”* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008).
- ^{iv} Arthur C. Brooks, *“Gifts of Time and Money: The Role of Charity in America’s Communities”* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).
- ^v René Bekkers and Pamela Wrepking. “A Literature Review of Empirical Studies of Philanthropy: Eight Mechanisms That Drive Charitable Giving.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (October 2011, Vol. 40 No. 5) 924 - 973.
- ^{vi} Elizabeth Cabal Curtis. “National Capitalization Project 2010 Summary” *Grantmakers in the Arts* (September 2010): P. 4.

OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX: A list of many of the projects the Open Circle Foundation funded.

**A PLACE
for Sustainable
Living**
aplaceforsustainableliving.org

A PLACE is a public-serving, experiential learning center to showcase and foster sustainable living practices, urban homesteading, community resilience & preparedness, social justice and artistic expression. OCF supported *A Place Through and To Nature*.



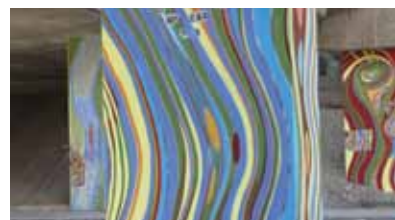
**Afrique Sogue with
artists Abigail Fritz
and Mohamed Lamine
Bangoura**
afriquesogue.com

Dancer Abigail Fritz and master drummer Mohamed Lamine Bangoura created a collection of African ballet pieces with Afrique Sogue Percussion & Dance. The artists portrayed their unique perspectives and cultural identities that united to tell the same story: our relationship to water. *A Precious Drop* draws on the importance of water in reference to the Liberian/Sierra Leone civil conflict, as well as from the traditional water deities and water rituals of African tribes.



Alan Leon
alanleon.org/artist

OCF supported muralist Alan Leon on two projects to animate two freeway underpasses in the Temescal neighborhood. These projects engaged neighbors and businesses in the neighborhood planning process and received support for the community. Both murals are a source of pride. An adjacent phase of work, currently untitled, will be completed in late 2015.



**ALICE:
Arts and Literacy
in Children's
Education**
blackswanarts.org

OCF supported ALICE over several years for a project called *In Praise of Soil*, a program in Oakland elementary schools that integrated arts education, gardening and nutrition. The program also worked to reinforce grade-appropriate literacy and science standards. Children created contemporary sculptures based on the food they were growing and presented their concepts to parents and teachers. OCF was impressed with how ALICE worked in a variety of settings and delivered high quality programming.



ArtsChange
artschange.wordpress.com

ArtsChange was founded at a county health center in Richmond in 1996, forging a new artistic tradition between professional artists, healthcare workers and patients. With a focus on migration stories as community identity, environmental and food justice, and the penetrating effect of violence, the organization built exhibitions, performances and social dialogues specifically for public sites, for audiences who do not frequent galleries or museums. OCF supported the organization's varied methods of creative engagement, from health center exhibitions by Bay Area artists, to traveling puppet shows, youth art making and gigantic community meals.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Bay Area

Youth Journalism with artist Lisa Shader

oaktownteentimes.blogspot.com

Bay Area Youth Journalism's Oaktown Teen Times was printed four times a year and has a circulation of 10,000, making it one of the largest student newspapers in the U.S. OCF supported *Share the Harvest*, including a Green Page for the paper, expanded gardens at Media Academy, Unity High School and Oakland High School, as well as environmental literacy through news articles and events.



Berkeley Art Center Association

berkeleyartcenter.org

OCF supported several exhibitions at the Berkeley Art Center gallery featuring local artists who focused on environmental issues in the urban and natural environments.



Brett Cook

brett-cook.com

Reflections of Healing is a multi-faceted process of community building led by artist Brett Cook that includes the collaborative development of large-scale public works featuring Bay Area residents pictured as adolescents, who through practice or legacy demonstrate healing. *Reflections of Healing* is anchored in Life is Living, a national initiative that establishes a new model for partnerships between diverse and under-resourced communities, green action agencies, and the contemporary arts world.



California College of the Arts

[center.cca.edu/
community/100families](http://center.cca.edu/community/100families)

OCF supported the California College of the Arts (CCA) 100 Families Oakland Project, an art and social change project that has engaged four Oakland neighborhoods since 2005. The program included tours of the Oakland Museum and weekly art classes in painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture, printmaking and mask-making at a community location. Families selected a medium and embarked on a ten-week class in which they worked with art instructors to create new works. The OCF grant supported the work of families in West Oakland.



Christopher Castle

[http://christophercastle.com/
christophercastle/Home.html](http://christophercastle.com/christophercastle/Home.html)

OCF supported artist Christopher Castle over a number of years while he was working on a mapping project in collaboration with a variety of residents and students in Richmond. The map that was created documented the rich physical and cultural history of the Baxter Creek watershed, as well as a map of Richmond showing the sea-way connections to the Bay and the Carquinez Strait. The piece, called *Soul of the City*, now hangs in the Richmond City Hall.



City of Berkeley

Jennifer Madden and Jeffrey Reed

[ci.berkeley.ca.us/ContentPrint.
aspx?id=34170](http://ci.berkeley.ca.us/ContentPrint.aspx?id=34170)

With the City of Berkeley and the Audubon Society, artists Jeffrey Reed and Jennifer Madden created an "Open Circle" installation and environmental artwork featured at the Berkeley Marina in Winter 2010. Their art created destination areas for viewing habitats and wildlife, an outdoor classroom, and an educational walking tour, while respecting the part-time home of the burrowing owl.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

City of Oakland

In 2009-2010, several East Bay cities cut their arts funding or scaled it back significantly. OCF saw this as an opportunity to support local artists by supporting public art funding. To this end, significant grants were made to both the City of Berkeley and to the City of Oakland. OCF gave a grant to the City of Oakland that was used in an open call and panel selection process to commission the following artists:

(1) City Canvas

citycanvas.org

Youth workshops with eighth grade students from Westlake Middle Schools to create murals on public utility boxes in the Lake Merritt Uptown area.



(1)

(2) Favianna Rodriguez

favianna.com

The Future of Food, including three posters on food justice distributed to community organizations and displayed in Fruitvale BART station ad kiosks, and a community "Eatln."

(3) Delaine Hackney

delainemosaic.com

Mosaic mural and pet portraits on the Oakland Animal Services building located at 1101 29th Avenue. This project will be completed in 2015.

(4) Scott Oliver, Yuri Ono, and Maria Porges

onceuponatime-happily-everafter.com

Once Upon A Time, Happily Ever After, an interpretive watershed project at Lake Merritt, including permanent markers at sites of inflow to the lake, audio walking tour, map, postcards and information booth at the Rotary Center.



(5)

(5) Sue Mark and Bruce Douglas

10ksteps.org

Walking the Invisible City, a component of the 10,000 Steps project, fostering community awareness and stewardship at Jefferson, Lafayette, Madison and Lincoln squares.



(6)

(6) Youth Uprising

youthuprising.org

Worked with youth on a *Be the Change* project, highlighting four images on the Clear Channel billboard on MacArthur corridor in East Oakland.



(7)

(7) Life is Living Festival

youthspeaks.org/lifeisliving

Support for the 2015 *Life is Living* Fall festival at DeFremery Park in West Oakland.

OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Combat Paper Project (Drew Cameron and Ehren Tool)

combatpaper.org/firehouse.html

The Combat Paper Project, a project of artists Drew Cameron and Ehren Tool, utilizes art making workshops to assist veterans in reconciling and sharing their personal experiences, as well as broadening the traditional narrative surrounding service and the military culture. OCF provided support for Paper/Cups, a project repurposing donated military uniforms into paper through hands-on workshops, and the Community of Veterans Engaged in Restoration (COVER) Project which facilitated papermaking workshops for veterans incarcerated in the San Francisco County Jail. The project also included an exhibition at the Worth Ryder Art Gallery at the University of California, Berkeley.



DANCE MONKS (Mirah Moriarty and Rodrigo Esteva)

dancemonks.com

DANCE MONKS is an experimental dance-art company committed to collaborating with artists of diverse disciplines to make pieces that explore cross-cultural connections, as well as the intimate relationship between people and nature. OCF supported GREEN, an environmental community dance project that integrated oral history excerpts from East Bay residents' reflections on the land with movement videos, and use of a multigenerational cast of local East Bay residents and professional dancers. OCF also supported *Conversations with Trees*, which highlighted three internationally-traveled performing artists living in the East Bay whose work focuses on the intimate and ancient relationship between people and nature.



EarthTeam

earthteam.net

An environmental network for teens, teachers and youth leaders, EarthTeam brings environmental experiences that inspire dedication to a healthy environment into the classroom and the community. EarthTeam's projects range from replicable community service projects to restoration efforts that appeal to teens and meet the needs of teachers. OCF supported the creation of a Student Editorial Board and an expansion of The Green News, an online newsletter of youth perspectives on the environment and related social, economic and health issues.



East Bay Center for the Performing Arts eastbaycenter.org

The East Bay Center for Performing Arts engages youth and young adults through the inspiration and disciplines of rigorous training in world performance traditions. OCF supported a partnership with Leadership Public School to provide an after-school theater program around environmental toxicity, gang violence and drugs.



EcoVillage Farm Learning Center with artist Lauren Elder ecovillagefarm.org

OCF supported *Wilkie Creek Watershed: A learning lab at EcoVillage Farm*, a project led by visual artist and community activator Lauren Elder. EcoVillage Farm Learning Center is a place where urban residents of all cultural backgrounds feel welcome and come to learn through participatory "mind/hands-on" activities on how to restore and protect Mother Earth and her people.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Emerson Elementary School with artist Sofie Siegmann emerson.berkeleypta.org

OCF supported artist Sofie Siegmann to conduct classroom visits at Emerson Elementary School in Berkeley, exploring making a sculpture out of recycled plastic toys with students. The students learned to think like artists as they researched how plastic is made and the problems associated with recycling it. The sculpture from recycled plastic toys was installed for Earth Day on April 14, 2007 at the Education Center/Transfer Station in San Leandro.



Favianna Rodriguez culturestrike.net

OCF supported the broad work and goals of Culture/Strike, which was founded by activist-artists in 2011, and led by Favianna Rodriguez. Culture/Strike and its broad network of artist-activists has become a recognized leader in creating and sharing cultural strategies in the service of social justice—approaches that are community-rooted, collaborative, and led by migrants, women, and people of color. Culture/Strike believes that changes in culture are necessary to build political will for progress and improve lives for communities—and thus artists and cultural leaders are and should be central actors in advancing social change, and fighting anti-immigration hate by bringing out the stories of and about immigrants and migrants.



Friends of Golden Gate Library fopl.org

The Friends of Golden Gate Library was established to keep enrichment programs alive at the Golden Gate library. The Golden Gate Branch was one of the first neighborhood libraries to be established by the City of Oakland in 1899. OCF supported the Summer Jazz series in 2012.



Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park peraltahacienda.org

Peralta Hacienda Historical Park is a green haven in the center of the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland. Their mission is to promote understanding, historical healing and community amid change and diversity. OCF supported *Project S.O.S. (Sharing Oakland's Stories)*, a digital storytelling program for high school students in Oakland.



Friendship House Association of American Indians friendshiphousesf.org

OCF supported Friendship House's East Bay Cultural Education program to connect American Indian youth with traditional culture including dance and drumming classes.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Greenway Gateway Baxter Creek Restoration

OCF's grant enabled the El Cerrito Greenway Project to bring together neighbors, artists, students and local Baxter Creek activists to develop a community-based vision for the site. This collaborative project resulted in construction and landscaping that honored the location and protected the environment.



Habitot Children's Museum habitot.org

Habitot Children's Museum provides early childhood learning and exploration, parent education, and community connection. OCF supported *Art for Earth's Sake*, providing children 0-5 with opportunities to create art using natural materials to reflect on their growing appreciation and awareness of the earth. Their works were featured in a Community Art Show at sites throughout the Bay Area.



Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center haywardrec.org/hayshore.html

OCF supported the 2009 Children's Bay Trail Art Contest and Exhibit, which raised awareness of the Bay Trail and the plants and animals supported by the Bay in order to preserve them for future generations. The Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center is a wetland ecology facility located in Alameda County and operated by the Hayward Area Recreation and Park District. For more than 22 years, the Center has provided programs for local schoolchildren about the natural and cultural history of the San Francisco Bay Estuary.



HEARTH artseed.org/ 2010/06/16/hearth-community- art-garden-project

HEARTH explores the intersection of family, community, art, education, horticulture, ecology and the urban landscape. HEARTH nurtures the environment by utilizing art as a tool for social change and justice. OCF supported programming at Bridges Academy at Melrose in Oakland.



HerPic Performances with artist Irva Hertz-Picciotto herpic.org

OCF supported choreographic works by HerPic Performances, a Berkeley-based dance and theatre company led by Artistic Director, Irva Hertz-Picciotto, with a history of performing choreographic works in the natural world. Among a series of spring 2008 dances, HerPic Performances collaborated with East Bay Regional Parks for performances of *In Praise of Insects* and *Water, Water Everywhere* at Tilden Park in a program related to the park's watershed hikes.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Hugh Livingston

[livingstonsound.com/
hidden-creeks.html](http://livingstonsound.com/hidden-creeks.html)

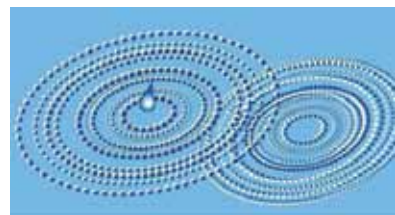
OCF supported artist Hugh Livingston for *Sound & Place Oakland: Hidden Creeks*, a mapping and outreach effort that explored the real and imagined sounds of the creeks and streams of Oakland, almost entirely hidden in underground culverts. Oral histories and recordings of flowing water were collected into a web archive.



Independent Arts and Media with artist Rene Yung at the 81st Avenue Branch of the Oakland Public Library

oaklandspeaks.weebly.com

OCF supported artist Rene Yung in the planning and implementation of community engagement through outreach and gathering of archive content. *Oakland Speaks: Eastside Stories* was an integrated public art project with the purpose of beautifying the new East Oakland Community Library on 81st Avenue through an architectural art glass installation and creating a related permanent digital archive of community stories told by residents through photos, videos, and recorded narratives.



Jake Schoneker

meaoakland.org

Jake Schoneker, a filmmaker and media artist, produced three short films in collaboration with local spoken word poets, musicians, and students participating in Media Enterprise Alliance at Oakland's MetWest High School. Media Enterprise Alliance provides high school students with the opportunity to study media arts with a focus on video production. OCF supported the creation and production of *Muse Video: Inspiring Climate Action and Education* (2012) and *We Are What We Eat* (2013).



John Muir Elementary School

johnmuirschool.org

John Muir Elementary serves a diverse cross section of the Berkeley population, with more than 50% of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. OCF supported the Girls Outdoors Club, helping girls improve their connection to natural environments.



Josh Healey

joshhealey.org/video

Josh Healey is a writer, performer, filmmaker, and creative activist in Oakland who works towards environmental justice and exposing and exploring the connections between the social world and the natural world. OCF supported *When the Environmental Goes Viral...* which combined political comedy, spoken word, and multi-media performances in a series of short films to creatively call attention to the most pressing urban environmental struggles of Oakland and Richmond.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Junior Center of Art and Science juniorcenter.org

OCF supported Nature in Your Neighborhood, a program for fourth grade students in East Oakland. Students created a mural for the exterior walls of the school and produced laminated cards of animal drawings for extended use in science classrooms. OCF also supported Shared Spaces, encouraging children's appreciation and advocacy of the birds and wildlife found in Lakeside Park.



Kala Art Institute kala.org

OCF supported Mapping Environments, an integrated art and mathematics program that built awareness of environmental science and developed stewards of the schools and city. Artists participating in the Residence and Fellowship programs at KALA received support for residencies at Jefferson and Oxford schools in Berkeley that served over 300 students ages 5-11. Kala Art was also awarded three years of general support funding.



Kerri Gawryn brl-inc.org

Beats, Rhymes and Life, led by artist Kerri Gawryn, documented the participation of nine Oakland youth involved in a six-month Hip Hop music therapy workshop based out of Oakland High School and guided by social worker Tomas Alvarez. The filmed workshop, recording sessions, final performance, and supplemental interviews revealed the challenges specific Oakland youth face while uncovering the resiliency they draw upon and cultivate in a shared artistic experience.



Kim Anno kimanno.com

Kim Anno is a painter, photographer, and video artist. OCF supported *Men and Women In Water Cities*, a work-in-progress that utilized volunteer actors from different schools around the world to convey the conditions and challenges of life in port cities in a post-sea level rise society. There were a number of public events focused on water issues in support of the work.



Lana Husser lanahusser.com

OCF supported Lana Husser, a multimedia artist and educator, for the Richmond Greenway Green Screen project, during which she guided 12 middle school Richmond-based teenagers in filming, editing, welding, and painting skills, as well as deepening their understanding of the role of the Greenway in their community.



Life Academy of Health and Bio-Science with Inner-City Outings lifeacademyhighschool.org

OCF's grants supported Inner-City Outings (a Sierra Club organization) to offer two programs for students. A small autonomous high school within the Oakland Unified School District, Life Academy offers three-week intensive courses between regular semesters. One program offered day hikes and a four-day backpacking trip. Another course called "The Great Outdoors" combined hiking, camping, health education, artistic expression, team building, and environmental studies. As part of this program, each student produced a personal portfolio of their experiences to share with family and friends.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Mira Manickam

miramanickam.com

Mira Manickam is the creator of a diverse body of work ranging from lyrical documentary film to creative non-fiction. OCF supported hip hop workshops in parks for which she collaborated with several other artists to create series of songs, raps, poems, and word sketches, as well as facilitating a series of workshops with Galen Peterson at Oakland Roots.



Navarrete x Kajiyama Dance Theater (Debby Kajiyama and Jose Navarrete)

nkdancetheater.com/home

OCF supported two projects of NAKA Dance Theater: NAKA Dance works in a style that incorporates multimedia, theatre, art installations and live music in a site-specific setting. In 2013's *BAILOUT!*, our relationship with the earth was focused through the lens of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. The question of how we cope with and contribute to massive environmental catastrophe was explored. In 2014, *The Anastasio Project* explored the links between state brutality at the U.S.-Mexico border and police violence and brutality on the streets of Oakland. NAKA's work is influenced by ritual, cultural studies, as well as political and environmental concerns.



Oakland Asian Cultural Center

oacc.cc

OACC builds vibrant communities through Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) arts and culture programs that foster intergenerational and cross-cultural dialogue, cultural identity, collaborations, and social justice. OCF supported *Bubble Tea Chats* (2009) and *Tai Chi Chats* (2010): conversations about community redevelopment in Oakland Chinatown and the creation of oral history exhibits featuring video and a memory map.



Oakland Based Urban Gardens

[lifelongmedical.org/Services/
oakland-based-urban-gardens.
html](http://lifelongmedical.org/Services/oakland-based-urban-gardens.html)

OCF supported OBUGS' Youth Landscaping Training Program, which incorporates ecological principles and design basics. OBUGS builds healthy communities through neighborhood gardens.



Oakland High School ousd.k12.ca.us/domain/1708

A grant from OCF supported the *Beautiful Struggle* mural project. Social commentary murals were created at Oakland High School addressing the United Nations' Millennium Development goals, including: the eradication of poverty and hunger; the achievement of universal primary education, the promotion of gender equality, and the creation of environmental sustainability. Images captured hope and possibility by illustrating the works of Nobel Laureates who have addressed some of the most pressing issues of our time.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Oakland

International High School

oaklandinternational.org

A new small Oakland public school, Oakland International High School is designed to meet the academic and social needs of recently arrived immigrants. OCF supported a Multilingual Newspaper and Mural, two projects of the Foundations class, and a social studies class for one hundred 9th graders, all of whom immigrated within the last four years. OCF also supported Storytelling Through Art, a new course focused on building school culture by strengthening cross-cultural understanding between members of the ethnically diverse student body; the Beats Circus Theater performing arts program; and the Raised Beds School Garden.



Ohlone Natural & Cultural History Greenway Project

karlinn.org/projects

Beside the BART tracks in North Berkeley, along the Ohlone Greenway, the East Bay's cultural and natural history unfolds through a series of murals and art installations. The first grant from OCF focused on the East Bay's agricultural history through an educational exhibit, steel wrought cows and tractor-seat benches under pear trees. The second grant focused on the Ohlone of the East Bay, yielding an installation incorporating a range of symbols representing the Ohlone way of life and culture.



Patricia Bulitt

patriciabilitt.com/home.html

OCF supported performance artist Patricia Bulitt's *Honoring the Birds* and *Under the Wing* performances at Oakland's Lake Merritt and in the Tilden Park Nature Center in Berkeley. In addition to these performances, Patricia held storytelling, dance and singing workshops that encouraged children to see the world through the eyes of birds.



People's Grocery peoplesgrocery.org

OCF supported People's Grocery's California Hotel urban garden mural project, which was a community-driven work incorporating art, environmental, and food justice. Artist Hang Nguyen was selected by the community to create the mural work in collaboration with residents of the California Hotel. People's Grocery is a community-based organization in West Oakland that develops creative solutions to the health problems in the community that stem from a lack of access to and knowledge about healthy, fresh foods.



Peralta Elementary School with artists Trena Noval and Ellen Oppenheimer peraltaschool.org

Through a collaboration with artists-in-residence Trena Noval and Ellen Oppenheimer, Peralta students studied the environment with a focus on stewardship and community sustainability. OCF supported Peralta's School Environmental Stewardship program.



Richard Lang and Judith Shelby Lang beachplastic.com

Artists Richard Lang & Judith Selby Lang collected beach plastic detritus for a variety of artworks and installations to educate and demonstrate the ubiquity of plastic waste in the oceans. They displayed image and text panels from *Disposable Truths*, a traveling exhibition, at the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center in September 2009 to coincide with the California Coastal Cleanup Day. OCF also supported a public conversation with the artists, a hands-on workshop, and reception.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

River of Words

riverofwords.org

River of Words was an international education program that promoted watershed awareness and ecological literacy through art and poetry. This intergenerational public education pilot project engaged young people and elders in an exploration of the Bay-Delta estuary, looking specifically at the Codornices Creek watershed. The project used science, geography, history, culture, as well as art and poetry to engage participants.



Riverview Middle School with artist

Annemarie Baldauf

riverview.mdusd.org

Annemarie Baldauf led students in the creation of six, permanently installed mosaics on the outside of the gym at Riverview Middle School in Bay Point. Riverview was founded in 1956 and is the only secondary school and gym in Bay Point, which is also used for community meetings and events.



Robert Holmes

robertholmessculptor.com

OCF purchased a bronze bicycle sculpture by artist Robert Holmes, which was donated to the Richmond Art Center to be installed in the West Gallery.



Rock Paper Scissors Collective rpscollective.com

Rock Paper Scissors Collective is an Oakland arts and craft collective and volunteer-run community space, as well as one of the founding members of the First Friday Art Walks that led to the establishment of Oakland Art Murmur. OCF supported Green Street Style, a youth internship program for starting an art-based business in fashion and accessories. OCF also supported Community Collaborations, connecting the arts community and larger non-arts community in Oakland to make arts accessible to all people and promote creative resourcefulness in underserved communities.



RYSE Center with artist Robert Trujillo and ArtsChange rysecenter.org

Open Circle Foundation supported RYSE's arts programming, including the RYSE mural project. RYSE is a safe and welcoming center for West Contra Costa youth that builds youth power and leadership towards personal and community health and transformation. The project allowed a group of youth leaders from the RYSE Leadership Team to work directly with *Trust Your Struggle* artist Robert Trujillo and ArtsChange in developing the content, design, and execution of a mural along RYSE Center's exterior.



OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

**Satellite Affordable
Housing Associates with
artist Juana Alicia**
juanaalicia.com

OCF supported the installation of artist Juana Alicia's *Wisdom of Elders/Huehuetlatoli* ceramic tile mural project, a beautification project depicting the natural elements and community members from diverse cultures. Satellite Housing is a non-profit affordable housing provider formed collaboratively in 1966 by ecumenical and multi-racial community groups concerned about the housing needs of low-income seniors in the East Bay.



**Speaking Tributaries
(Ana LaBastida,
Sadie Harmon
Jesus Landin-Torrez)**
speakingtributaries.com

OCF supported a collaborative project entitled *Speaking Tributaries*. Ana LaBastida, Sadie Harmon and Jesus Landin-Torrez create art through media such as social practice projects, architectural interventions, sculptural projections, and photography. This project explores the human relationship to water over a 12-month timeline following the seasonal changes, and is site-specific to Oakland's Sausal Creek and its surrounding neighborhoods.



**Streets Alive, a fiscally
sponsored project of
Earth Island Institute**
earthisland.org/index.php/streetsalive

The *60 Boxes Project* promoted environmental, social, and economic sustainability through the empowering and employing of local artists and community members to participate in public art improvements. By installing artwork on utility boxes in Berkeley, the project created a platform for storytelling and communication, transforming neglected urban landscapes and infrastructure into vibrant art pieces and a topic of interest for the community.



The Crucible
thecrucible.org

The Crucible fosters a collaboration of arts, industry and community. Through training in fine and industrial arts, the Crucible promotes creative expression, reuse of materials, and innovative design, while serving as an accessible arts venue for the general public. OCF supported the Crucible's bike program, which offers free bike repairs to West Oakland residents and workshops where youth can earn a free bike.



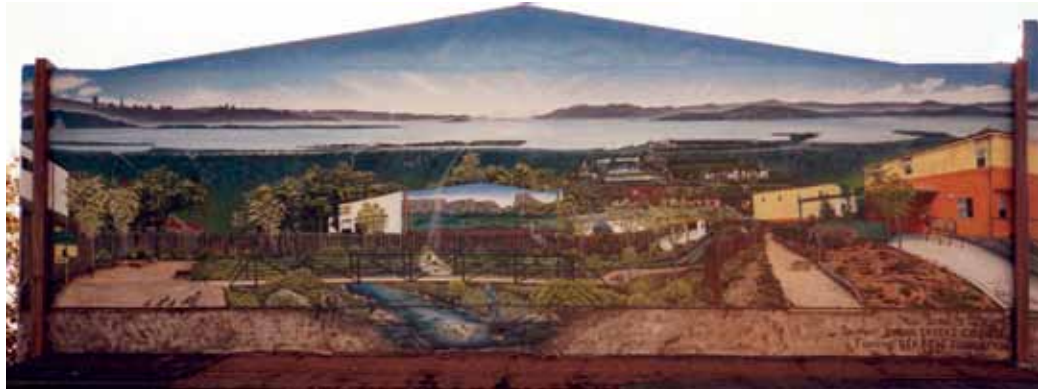
OPEN CIRCLE FOUNDATION APPENDIX continues

Urban Creeks

Council of California

with artist STEFEN

stefenart.com/megamurals.html



OCF gave support to East Bay muralist STEFEN to paint a mural celebrating Codornices Creek, San Francisco Bay, and Hetch Hetchy Valley. The mural is approximately 300 square feet and is located on Kaines Street between Harrison (Berkeley) and Dartmouth (Albany). The mural site overlooks a new low-income housing project, Codornices Creek, and a vacant lot. The creek and lot were slated for restoration to become a pocket-park. After 12 years, the lot remains undeveloped, but funds have tentatively been made available for use in 2015.

Visual Arts/ Language Arts (VALA)

valaproject.org

Working with public school children and their teachers in Oakland, Berkeley and Richmond, VALA uses the arts to overcome cultural barriers among children from different ethnic backgrounds and to improve their language arts skills. In addition, VALA provides teachers with professional development opportunities that enable them to infuse the arts into the curriculum.

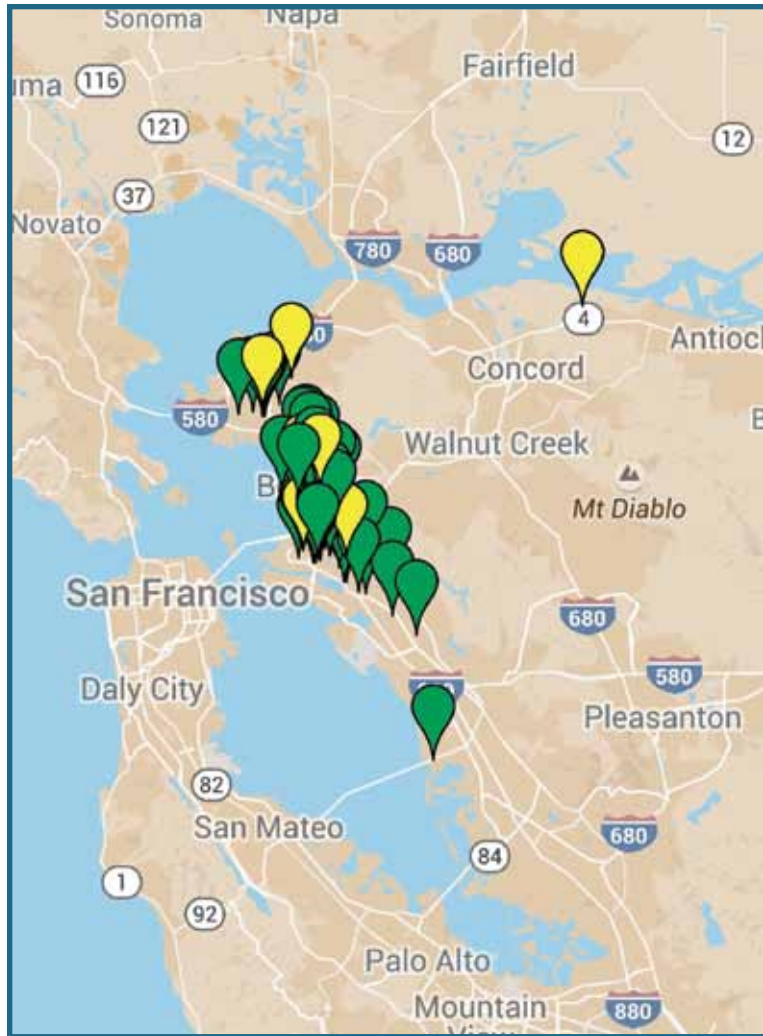


Zach Pine

naturesculpture.com

OCF supported Art to Action on Codornices Creek with children of the Ursula Sherman Village. Environmental artist, Zach Pine, in partnership with environmental educator, Susan Schwartz, led homeless children living at the Ursula Sherman Village in a series of hands-on art-making events on the banks of nearby Codornices Creek. Children learned basic facts about the creek and visited areas that have undergone a range of restoration efforts. Exploring the ecosystem, they made temporary art installations along the creek using natural materials found on site.





This map shows the location of many of our projects. Public art locations that may be visited in person are highlighted in yellow. To view the online, interactive version of this map, please follow this link: <http://bit.ly/opencirclefdn>.



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