

Art Plan

Seattle's Community Centers 1999 Community Center Levy Program

Carolyn Law
Seattle Arts Commission
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OVERVIEW

The Community Centers Art Plan describes a method to link Seattle's community centers and create a sense of shared identity through art. Exterior artworks, sited in the centers' entry zones, will engage all visitors as they come and go, and amplify the community centers' street presence even to passersby. Artworks will provide a memorable experience for users of all ages whether they visit once or many times over the years.

INTRODUCTION

Seattle's community center system is an established network of buildings scattered throughout the city delivering a wide array of services to Seattle's citizens. These centers are more than just buildings. Each is a vibrant, effective place for people of all generations to gather, exercise, learn, and share regardless of the age or size of its facility. These facilities work tirelessly, year-round, for the entire community.

Seattle's citizens have always appreciated their community centers. Their support has led to the passage of a number of levies over the years to strengthen and improve them. The current levy, passed in 1999, will address a number of physical deficiencies that hinder full programming in many of the older community centers, and establish new



The artworks above and below engage the entry zones of each building in different ways. While the piece above pushes the idea of gateway into a more creative form, it remains more of a static marker that frames this community center's entrance. The boat form has a nice, lively presence at night when it is transformed through the use of internal lighting and appears to float above the ground.

The grouping of sculptural key forms below animatedly marks the entrance to the high school, while also making a conceptual and physical reference to the school's namesake, Ben Franklin. These sculptures suggest many options and choices to people as they come and go. They are also quasi-functional as seating and might suggest physical interaction to younger people. This artwork is closer to the vision of this art plan.



Currently, the centers are not linked together visibly as a network, other than by the Parks Department “rainbow” sign and the general sequence of interior spaces. Typically the design of each community center is architecturally distinct. This will continue to be the case with these current renovations and new designs. This Art Plan offers a way to link the centers visually, while also honoring the distinctive character of each center and its neighboring community. The plan also focuses creative attention on the exterior entry areas, which are not a high priority element on the list of complex programmatic needs developed for the community center architects.

THE ROLE OF ART IN SEATTLE’S COMMUNITY CENTERS

The Seattle Arts Commission has created a legacy of public art in Seattle’s community centers that is as diverse as the centers that contain it. Artwork exists in many different exterior and interior locations. Some art projects have become part of the persona of the center, while others have a much lower profile and little impact. In some cases, the art might not even be noticed, except by the most regular users of the center. At other community centers, such as South Park, Miller, and Ravenna Eckstein, the art projects were sited in visible outside locations and acted, incidentally, as entry markers.



While these two gateway pieces above and below announce their community centers very well, acting as a type of beacon, they do not engage people in the active manner desired through this art plan. In order to do this, the artwork will need to be a significant part of the area through which people move.

At South Park Community Center (above) the arch with images and words can be read from the street but presents its back to those leaving the center. We want to engage people coming and going.

The gateway at Miller Community Center (below) is very visible from the street, but not from the parking lot entrance. The wind vane and decorative cornice above the door enliven the building but are outside people's physical experience as they move through the entrance zone.



Seattle's community centers usually treat the exterior entry zone in a fairly perfunctory way. However, because the "action" of the community center begins upon crossing the threshold, the entrance area is of great importance in greeting and saying farewell to users and in establishing a street or neighborhood presence. The entrance can "advertise" the vitality of a center and underscore its individuality. This area is open-ended, waiting to be mined, so to speak.

The Community Center Art Plan recommends that the entrance area of every community center become the focus for siting public artworks. Most people enter and leave community centers with positive prospects. They are out and about, participating in an activity they have chosen. They are interacting in a caring, interesting environment. They plan to accomplish something. All this human energy can merge in a wonderful way with some great art energy to underscore that *transitional moment*. For the many people who travel to different community centers, it will be great fun to compare the different entry experiences. And those who drive or walk by will be more likely to take note of the community centers because of the visual "beacons."

CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

The concept for art at the community centers is to employ artists to create an "entry experience" at each community center. Each artwork will serve as a three dimensional "welcome mat / experience." This interactive, surrounding experience will begin in the zone outside the center's main entry. It could begin at the curb or walkway from the parking area, certainly within the larger area outside the entry door as described by the architecture and landscape design, and will continue to the threshold of the center. Each community center will have its particular "art zone" delineated for the project.

In conceptualizing their artwork, artists should first consider what a community center is and then the nature of their specific community center. In addition, artists

should consider the particular characteristics of the location within the city and the architecture and landscape of the community center site. At the same time, artists should be aware that, while working at an individual center, their work would be part of a network of entry artworks that will create a sense of connection among community centers citywide.

This approach allows for:

- flexibility in developing the art project schedules, as artists need not be tied tightly to the project design schedules;
- involving artists at various stages of the design process and working with diverse community center schedules during the life of the levy;
- applying construction dollars to art projects when possible (Arts Commission and Parks Department project managers will work together to identify and facilitate these opportunities); and
- using One Percent for Art funding directly to develop significant artworks, instead of spending a considerable portion for artists' time on design teams.



The artwork at the entrance to Meridian Parks embraces people by literally putting them entirely inside the artwork as they enter and exit. The piece also lets visitors interact with it through an enticing use of materials that beg exploration, a form that invites climbing, and placing a hidden seat within the structure.

Below, the two areas in the Vulcan Plaza combine an engaging and dramatic use of materials and landscaping to create unique zones that invite and draw one in. Many of the sculptural elements double as seating and also allow people of different ages to physically interact with them in other imaginative ways. Only the area in the top photo has a vertical presence that announces itself from a distance.

These two examples are very close to exemplifying the vision and goals for the artwork laid out in this art plan.



VISION

The artworks under this Art Plan will:

- conceptually connect the individual community center to a greater whole of the community center system within the Parks Department by activating the same area at each center;
- allow for individuality of artwork that reflects a particular center and its neighborhood;
- be visible from the street and as people approach, increasing the presence of the centers within the neighborhood and the city; and
- act as identifiers for their community center.

GOALS

Each artwork:

- expresses an idea about or interprets what a community center is (gathering, community, learning, experiencing, athletics, all ages, neighborhood, city, etc);
- acts as a beacon and/or icon within the neighborhood and city;
- creates an interactive, three dimensional experience that engages people on a number of levels coming and going;
- makes a tangible connection to people, possibly on a multi-sensory level;
- communicates its intended concept(s) well;
- creates an active outside zone linking it to the active inside of the center;
- works functionally and aesthetically with the landscape and architectural design and other important site issues;
- works in three dimensions, within the entire envelope of the zone's space; and
- adds spice and life to the center's entry.