



A Snap Shot-Landmarking Community Cultural Arts Organizations Nationally: The Impact of Public Policy on Community Arts Funding

Sonia Manjon, Marta Moreno Vega

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The organizations in this Snap Shot study play a vital role in the cultural arts field highlighting institutions that reflect the aesthetic spectrum of excellence grounded in the international community perspectives that nurtured their growth. These organizations reflect the rich tapestry of racial and cultural groups that are major contributors to the cultural life of this nation. They also represent important pillars in the infrastructure of historically underserved and under-resourced communities of color and poor white rural sectors. This initial ³Snap Shot² has raised more questions than it answers. It is clear that a more extensive, in-depth study must be conducted to fully understand how organizations that are critical assets to their communities and influence the cultural diverse programming of large organizations are still fragile and at risk of surviving. Similar to the questions raised by the Occupy Wall Street Movement, how does the role of the top 1% of wealthy individuals, corporate, foundation, and public funders, influence policies to disproportionately support the more endowed organizations and under resource the community cultural organizations that reflect the 99%? Historical underfunding coupled with economic crisis have further impacted the ability of these important organizations to sustain their operations and some of the Snap Shot organizations have been forced to close their doors. Others continue to struggle to survive while serving their communities who are also at risk due to the fiscal crisis that has heightened unemployment, homelessness and decreased social services vital to the infrastructure of underserved communities. These community cultural arts organizations are in large part multidisciplinary in their framework and are beacons of light for communities that still believe in the promise of equal opportunity and access for all. Since the second edition of Cultural Centers of Color by the National Endowment for the Arts, December 1993 (first edition, August 1992) there has not been a critical look at the state of the community cultural arts field. This preliminary study begins to address this void by identifying a sample of multidisciplinary cultural arts community organizations that developed specifically to address the cultural and artistic contributions, histories, and cultural legacies of their communities to a national audience. The work of these organizations have been instrumental in making visible and insisting that the stories of their communities are part of our nations narrative. The realization that these vital small and mid-size community organizations survive in a year-to-year funding world speaks to the commitment of Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and audiences that are committed to their survival. It is our expectations that this Snap Shot of Community Based Cultural Arts Organizations encourages policymakers, funders, and communities to understand the critical voices that these institutions contribute to the cultural life of the Nation, our international profile, and their immediate communities.

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