



Culture Counts:

Strategies for a More Vibrant
Cultural Life for New York City

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Cover photos (clockwise):

Susana Torruella Leval and Amy Schwartzman Brightbill, two members of the Working Group for *A Cultural Blueprint for New York City* at the New York Foundation for the Arts. Photo by Jaime Permut.

Pianist and composer James G. Williams at an Artists' Focus Group at The Bronx Museum of the Arts. Photo by Jaime Permut.

ArtsConnection teaching artist Ross Lewis works with a C.E.S. 53 student on brush painting technique. Photo by Evan Kafka.

New York children at the Brooklyn Children's Museum. Photo courtesy of the Brooklyn Children's Museum.

The New York Foundation for the Arts serves individual artists, promotes their freedom to develop and create and provides the broader public with opportunities to experience and understand their work. NYFA accomplishes this by offering financial and informational assistance to artists and organizations that directly serve artists, by supporting arts programming in the larger community, and by building collaborative relationships with others who advocate for the arts in New York State and throughout the country.

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Culture Counts:

Strategies for a More Vibrant Cultural Life for New York City

We extend our most heartfelt condolences to all who have suffered through the horror and aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The core of this report — its research and findings — was written well in advance of our national tragedy. We regret to say that the effects of this tragedy give additional urgency to its conclusions.

Prologue

On the morning of September 11, 2001 this report, *Culture Counts*, was delivered to the printer, but by that afternoon we stopped the presses. We could not move forward with the release in the days and weeks immediately following the tragic events of that sad day in the history of our city and our nation. The burning and collapse of the World Trade Center and the resulting loss of life and the searing of the fabric of our City have left us with indelible images and indescribable feelings of loss.

Relief and Recovery in the Near-Term

The cultural community suffered losses of its own. Artist Michael Richards, creating new works through the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's (LMCC) artist in residency program at the Twin Towers, sadly became one of the lost. LMCC saw its offices and all of its works crumble. The spaces of the multi-media performance group 3-Legged Dog, located at ground zero, were leveled in the attacks, along with computer, video, and other equipment vital to their artistic work.

At least 200 cultural organizations are located below 14th Street, according to the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts. And though the number of individual artists residing there is unknown, almost a third of the 2,200 artists below 14th Street who recently applied to the Artists' Fellowship program of the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) live below Canal Street. These people and groups are part of a larger universe in every discipline and throughout New York's cultural sector that was affected by the catastrophic events of September 11.

As it has in other times of crisis, in the hours immediately following the attacks, the cultural community provided aid and comfort to those most in need (see sidebar).

The City's museums, performing arts, and community-based organizations in all disciplines, and all boroughs, gave people a place to go, to reflect or, at least briefly, to forget, to celebrate life or remember the lost. At the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, president Judith Zuk reported, "People's need for the Garden was immediately evident on the Wednesday after the attack, when people lined up at our gates seeking the Garden's calm and beauty."

Shrines of flowers, candles, drawings, and photographs began appearing as an expression of collective grief. Artists and citizens created art spontaneously in public squares in acts of communal healing. In the years ahead, the experience of these terrible events will become part of the work that artists create, and the public will benefit from their transformative vision.

Despite their own projected budget deficits, cultural organizations collected donations for the September 11th Fund and other funds. From the dance community's benefit at the Joyce Theater to donations made to local firehouses and police precincts and to the Thanksgiving weekend events planned by the Center for the Arts on Staten Island, the cultural sector has been reaching out to fellow citizens.

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum on September 11

As thousands of people staggered up Allen Street from the Financial District, the Museum opened its offices and tenement building to minister to the dazed and dusty survivors. Providing water, food, and bathrooms, the Museum staff made sandwiches, applied bandages and ice packs, helped people clean up and contact their loved ones, listened when people needed to talk, and offered hands and hugs to anyone in need. Afterward, many of our staff walked miles home only to find out that their own friends or neighbors were among the survivors, missing, or dead.

Ruth J. Abram
President and Founder
Lower East Side Tenement Museum

Long-Term Implications for Culture

Coalitions of cultural organizations, including the Alliance of Resident Theaters/New York, Dance USA, the New York City Arts Coalition, the Arts and Business Council, and the Alliance for the Arts, have begun meeting to assess the impact of September 11 on the stability and well-being of cultural organizations.

At a recent meeting of artists and community-based arts leaders involved in generating this report, the writer Elena Alexander told us, "While I am not at a loss for words, I am at a loss for a voice." The following report, *Culture Counts*, is the very document that can give voice to artists and organizations. It also gives voice to the citizens throughout the City who have spoken of culture's importance in their lives and the lives of our children. It provides strategies for City leaders and it points to models that can assist in rebuilding lower Manhattan — and the entire city — in a way that will also strengthen the cultural economy.

While many individuals and industries have been affected by the World Trade Center attacks, the cultural community is facing a difficult financial future. Historically undercapitalized, its support system of contributed and earned income, both public and private, has been fragile in recent years. Before September 11, the economy of culture in New York was of great concern; now we have ample cause for apprehension. The total damage to the cultural community is yet to be calculated. But we already know of numerous instances of destroyed work, lost equipment, destruction of office space, and loss of income. Nonetheless, the cultural industry has begun to assist in the relief, recovery, and rebuilding of our city, and it will continue to do so in the days, months, and years that follow.

Culture's Ability to Aid the City as It Rebuilds

The City will turn to the creative community to rebuild. Architects and designers will consult on the reconstruction of Lower Manhattan. Artists will create memorials to honor those who have fallen and to offer opportunities to mourn, heal, and hope. Arts educators will continue to help children express themselves in profound ways. Culture will play an even more important role as an economic engine driving tourism and creating jobs, and as an anchor and a catalyst for building bridges of cultural understanding.

This report reveals that culture counts and that New Yorkers overwhelmingly support and believe in its importance. Culture creates meaning, allows dialogue about difference, builds community, stimulates learning, generates economic and social capital, educates our children, stabilizes neighborhoods, and attracts new businesses and visitors. As we look ahead, from September 11 forward, *culture counts more than ever* as we rebuild this great City.

Margaret C. Ayers
President
New York Foundation for the Arts

Theodore S. Berger
Executive Director
New York Foundation for the Arts

Preface

As New Yorkers, we pride ourselves on the richness and diversity of our city. Our unique cultural resources enhance the aesthetic, intellectual, and educational life of our citizens and our visitors and produce a powerful economic effect, employing thousands and generating new businesses.

As we face the largest change in city government in our history, the obvious importance of the cultural sector to the City's prosperity and destiny needs a driving vision to help sustain and expand New York's leadership in the century ahead. *Culture Counts* is an indispensable tool in designing and carrying out that vision.

The first in-depth study of its kind, *Culture Counts* presents a series of findings and recommendations that take a fresh look at public policy in New York City. As we prepare for the future, *Culture Counts* marks the beginning of a vital discourse among New York's citizens, its leaders, and its cultural sector. We invite all who read it to join us in planning for the exciting destiny of our cultural life, which is inextricably entwined with the long-term goals of our great city.

Linda LeRoy Janklow
Co-Chair
Citizens Advisory Committee

Richard D. Parsons
Co-Chair
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Foreword

Culture Counts is a report of the New York Foundation for the Arts' special initiative, "A Cultural Blueprint for New York City." It marks the first comprehensive study of our cultural life in almost thirty years. We are pleased for the collaboration with many on this special project, for the strengthening and empowering of this city's arts and cultural sector is directly related to maintaining and improving the health and vibrancy of the City as a whole. This endeavor clearly serves the interests of many constituencies beyond the cultural community and all the citizens of New York.

Answers for *Culture Counts* were sought from the spectrum of New Yorkers — residents, artists, and cultural, civic, and business leaders in every borough, representing a diversity of age, gender, and ethnicity. Over the past year, we have spoken to many in various forums, including one-on-one interviews, focus groups with individual artists, community-based organizations, arts-in-education professionals, and funders. Town hall meetings in each borough attracted representatives of arts and cultural organizations, artists, independent arts professionals, community representatives, and interested citizens.

Arts and culture are central to our neighborhood and borough identities, which are enlivened by the diverse individuals who live and work here. Arts and culture are central to the City as a source for creative talent in a global marketplace. And arts and culture are central to New York's identity as a cosmopolitan center — as central as Wall Street is to New York's identity as a world-class business capital. Yet we often take for granted that the richness of our city is fed, invigorated, and even created by the interplay between New York's commerce and its creativity. New York's many gifts and strengths work in concert to make it a powerhouse, a recognized top player in many arenas, nationally and throughout the world.

Culture Counts is a resource for policy makers, to catalyze their discussions and decisions. It ponders strategies that can dramatically improve the benefits of culture to the lives of all New Yorkers, and to the visitors we welcome every day. This moment in our city's history provides the opportunity to protect and enhance the investment — financial, intellectual, social, and, yes, spiritual — that we as citizens have made in the cultural life of our city, and to insure that our grandchildren's grandchildren will continue to reap its benefits.

Kinshasha Holman Conwill
Project Director
A Cultural Blueprint for New York City

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