



Number



'Lightspan' by Electroland, interactive lighting design at Court Avenue Pedestrian Bridge, Memphis.

Expectations: Artists, your city owes you a lot.

Cities are great places. They are cradles of innovation, economic powerhouses, centers of commerce and academia, and they tend to have a lot of really good places to eat. The best ones offer one of life's most sublime joys: people-watching. But successful people-watching requires two things, the first of which is lots of people, and the second is lots of people to watch those people.

People mean a lot to cities, because people mean money. People buy houses and pay property taxes. They shop for things and pay sales taxes. The money they don't spend, they tend to put into banks. Cities need people doing all these things all the time in order to survive and grow.

Arts tend to act as an accelerant for all the things a city does to attract people. Cities that have vibrant, successful, thriving arts communities have an easier time recruiting big companies that provide lots of good-paying jobs. Wherever arts happen, meaningful social interactions also tend to occur, whether on the floor of a concert venue waiting for a band, in the lobby before or after a play, or in front of a painting at a gallery opening. Artists tend to swim against the real estate tide and move into neighborhoods that a lot of middle and upper class families are vacating. When they do this, they occupy and renovate urban neighborhoods that would otherwise fall—or may have already fallen—into blighted condition. Over the long term, neighborhoods that are reclaimed in this way begin generating valuable taxes that fund other civic improvements like good public schools and nice sidewalks.

More than all this, artists make your life interesting. Think of your favorite part of the city, and then subtract

from that mental image all the museums, theatres, concert venues, murals, and sculptures within in it. The image you end up with is dismal and unnerving. Think of your own life, and then subtract all the films, plays, concerts, books, and paintings that have made you laugh, cry, get angry, or understand somebody else's point of view a little better. Think of the art that has made you understand yourself a little better.

Art makes us do all these things. In doing so, art makes us.

Making art may be essentially private for some and collaborative for others, but consuming and appreciating art is almost always social. If we want to think about neighborhoods as magnets, and arts are the coils we wrap around them, then vital cultural and economic activity is the hum that results. Cities not only couldn't do what they do without the arts, there would be no point in even trying.

The people that make art are entitled therefore to certain rights because of their utterly essential roles in urban life. Your city demands a lot from you. You should expect a few things in return:

First and foremost, people who want to create new work should have easy, timely access to adequate funding. Grant monies should be available that not only fuel the creation of new work, but its distribution and monetization as well.

Similarly, artists should enjoy the support of a business community that not only supports culture in a philanthropic way, but also recognizes its professional worth and compensates performers and artists appropriately. Artists make life worth living in cities, and shouldn't have to worry about their own livelihoods in doing so.

To that point, safe, accessible, affordable space should be available where artists can both live and

make work. Cities should work to develop built environments—and protect them where they already exist—that foster density and different uses. These areas are inherently more vibrant and more social, and therefore more conducive to both the development and consumption of creative work.

Finally, artists need criticism. They need it from the press, from their funders, and from their peers. The way to support your local arts community is to embrace the highest possible standards of professionalism and quality. Artists who are trying to sharpen their craft against the soft edges of low expectations and easy satisfaction are doomed to never reach their full potential, which over the long term will cripple their communities, waste their patron's support, and inhibit the further development of their communities.

Where these things are present, artists should be able to do the things that cities need them to do. The City of Memphis is working toward meeting some of these needs. In partnership with ArtsMemphis, two new grant-making programs will be launched this summer to provide monetary support specifically to emerging artists. The Mayor's office is also working with Artspace, a nationally renowned developer of live/work space for artists, to create more affordable residential and studio units in our urban core. The UrbanArt Commission, which is funded through the city's "Percent for Art" ordinance, is putting more local artists to work creating more public art projects in more parts of our community than at any point in its history.

We know we need to do more, not just for the benefit of artists, but for the health and wellbeing of everyone in our community. Where artists lead, jobs, capital investment, robust neighborhoods, and smart, compassionate cities follow.