



## *Artist Displacement* 2016 Report

### WHAT IS BOULDER COUNTY ARTS LEADERSHIP FORUM (BCALF)

Boulder County Arts Leadership Forum (BCALF) supports and advocates for artists and arts organizations in Boulder County by fostering collaborations, sharing resources, facilitating discussions and creating opportunities to experience art.

### WHAT IS ARTIST DISPLACEMENT?

We know that artists are attracted to Boulder County, but conditions are becoming increasingly challenging which, we believe, will eventually cause artists to leave. The high cost of living and lack of affordable performance, exhibit, and studio space make it difficult for artists to produce work. Other factors, such as lack of diversity and prohibitive city ordinances also contribute to an inhospitable environment for the arts. As cities across the Front Range create cultural plans that are intended to outline strategies to increase sustainability for artists and arts organizations, we're finding some incorrect assumptions and gaps in the research. We are interested in identifying the issues and imagining solutions so that Boulder County and cities along the Front Range can thrive as arts hubs.

### INITIAL EXPLORATION

On September 28, 2015 at Boulder Public Library BCALF hosted a meeting with stakeholders to explore the topic.

Laura Ann Samuelson, dancer

- ☐ In Boulder, the more that people see art happening the more that they want to participate and have the ability to be a part of it.
- ☐ Looking at what is happening and having conversations helps artists find their place.
- ☐ "Offering something small is big. My growth as an artist has happened because of collaboration."

Kimberly McKee, Executive Director Longmont Downtown Development Authority

- ☐ Longmont is supportive, but the artists need to have a stronger voice in expressing their wants and needs to the city.
- ☐ "Longmont does not have the right venues, but what is the right space? Affordability is the next big push for the city, but Longmont needs a champion of the arts like Boulder and Louisville now have. No one has said how important arts are to the community."

Tamil Maldonado, Founder of Barrio E' Centro and Boulder Arts Commissioner

- ☐ “The drift happens to where there are funds. For example: Denver Arts & Venues offers space to my organization for free. This pulls me to Denver. I also love Boulder because there is funding and there are stable organizations like The Dairy that my organization can count on. I want to create art where I live (Boulder) so I keep creating partnerships. There is so much unused space in Boulder, like the park, but there are so many hoops to go through to use the space – why does it have to be so complicated?”

## ARTIST DRIFT RESEARCH

“[Artist Drift in Boulder](#)” report completed by CU Presidents Leadership class students: Chip Bollendonk; Sarah LaFasto and Nicolas Pinkowski in November 2015. Full report available on the [BCAA website](#).

## PANEL DISCUSSION #1

February 3, 2016 at Longmont Museum and Cultural Center

### PANELISTS:

- ☐ Deb Gardner, County Commissioner of Boulder County
- ☐ Lisa Gedgaudas from Denver Arts and Venues
- ☐ Tamil Maldonado of the Boulder Arts Commission and founder of Barrio E'

The panel was highly attended and highly charged; it was difficult to capture all of the voices. We discovered it was a hot topic, inspiring a storm of strong feelings and opinions. Unlike previous BCALF hosted panels, the discussion immediately veered away from our agenda. The panelists were unable to respond to our prepared questions because of the need of the attendees to express their opinions. The strongest reactions we heard addressed zoning issues unfavorable to artists.



## PANEL DISCUSSION #2

May 6, 2016 at Colorado Creative Industries Summit in Carbondale

This audience represented a different sector of the arts world, but we asked a lot of similar questions. The issues of the Front Range differ from those of the mountain towns and smaller communities, but the complexity of spaces and affordability were universally experienced. Being a part of CCI expands the dialogue by taking a countywide discussion and seeing it have impact statewide.

### PANELISTS:

- Matt Chasansky, City of Boulder Arts Manager
  - Matt observed there is a policy aspect to this issue: it has to go hand in hand with policy making. He spoke to the difficulty of art in public spaces programs and of the economic impact. There needs to be more funding available in order to keep artists in their communities.
- Lisa Gedgaudas, Denver Arts and Venues
  - Lisa gave an eloquent description of the power of community activism and of steps that Denver Arts & Venues has been taken to help artists: "If you want to have change in your area, you have to *show up* at the city meetings. Get involved and organize people around you. Be persistent."
- Kim Olson, Artistic Director of SWEET EDGE Dance Company
  - Kim's descriptions of the many rehearsal spaces she has found and lost in Boulder County and Denver and her current difficulty producing work were highly impactful and a prime example of Artist Displacement. The audience related to her experience and shared similar stories on an individual level.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The Artist Displacement panel was a great opportunity for BCALF to jump in the middle of an increasingly hot topic and better understand how the cities of Boulder County can provide more sustainable living situations for artists.

As a BCALF moderator for two panels – one held at the Longmont Museum in October 2015, the other held at Colorado Creative Industries conference in Carbondale – I tried to ask questions of panelists and listen to audience members concerns to create a dialog that captured the many perspectives of this situation.

Here are a few of my takeaways:

- Frustration
  - Individuals supporting themselves through the arts and creative industries have serious concerns about how they can sustain themselves in communities where the housing and studio space expenses are increasing dramatically. It is becoming especially problematic for younger, earlier career artists who aren't able to get started in their field due to the high cost of living. That said, we did hear from later career artists who had moved many times due to rising rents.

- Role of Municipal Government
    - The role of municipal government was mentioned repeatedly. A number of audience members brought up how restrictive zoning limits work at their residences. In the second panel, Matt Chasansky, director of cultural affairs for the City of Boulder, mentioned that there was a renewed effort in the City's cultural plan to address how to be more responsive to the arts community and find ways to keep artists from leaving due to cost of living. Matt also mentioned the importance of advocating to City Council members about this issue. Another panelist from Denver's Dept. of Cultural Affairs, Lisa Gedgaudas, mentioned that artists in Denver have been successful about organizing groups to raise awareness about neighborhoods like RINO, that have then led to more dialogue with developers and City planners.
  - What would an ideal situation look like?
    - Based on everything I heard, an ideal situation would involve more civic engagement from arts groups and artists: a concerted effort to follow the activities of the city planners and new developments. Use every opportunity to convey the challenges artists face in the community as it relates to living and working spaces. Emphasize the importance of the arts in the community: what would some of our communities be without the creative class? I think it is important to frame the conversation in terms of what a dynamic community looks like versus an uninteresting tract home/mini mall saturated suburb, which the communities of Boulder County are not. Emphasizing the importance of sustaining and growing the creative and artistic populations to the key municipal and county elected officials has to be a priority.
- Wes Jessup, Executive Director, Longmont Museum and Cultural Center

During the 20 years I have worked in this area, I have seen many artists leave in search of more supportive arts communities. The most dramatic was the mass exodus after creating my show METAPHOR in 2013. Unfortunately within two months of opening the show, five out of seven of these excellent cast members had moved to the east or west coast for new jobs and better opportunities. This exodus of my collaborators and colleagues and decreased grant funding for projects have me seeking increased opportunities to work and perform elsewhere.

- Betsy Tobin, Now Or Never Theatre

Summarizing the topic of artist displacement reaches down to a personal level for me. It was the intensity and the passion of the artists that struck a chord through each of the three stages of gathering information and presenting the panels. An artist can create work if there is no grant funding ("Meet Your Funders", the subject of the first panel); an artist can create work without outside publicity ("State of the Print Media for the Arts", the subject of the second panel); however, an artist needs a secure, affordable place to live and work in order to be successful and have a recognized place in the community. This is why the people attending each presentation were so focused and involved. It is a personal topic and touches on the core of how we live and where we live in order to be fulfilled as artists and creative beings. BCALF opened the conversation, but our findings cannot solve the problem, we can only cast light on it and open the topic for more discussion. One observation from a panelist seems self-evident; the artists as individuals and in groups need to make their voices heard.

- Pat Connelly/Blue Moon Dance Company

## SUMMARY

- ADVOCACY from the artists and arts organizations is crucial to build awareness of our needs and create change among the community.
  - ARTIST NEEDS
    - Affordable living and work space
    - Funding to support the arts
    - Audience to experience art

## NEXT STEPS

Please [follow BCALF on Facebook](#) to stay up to date on future panel discussions as well as a Thirsty Artists Happy Hour to discuss this report. We hope to address Relevance/Audience Engagement in our next season of panel discussions.