



# CIVIC ART AT WOODCREST LIBRARY

## 1340 W. 106<sup>TH</sup> STREET, LOS ANGELES, CA 90044

A project of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission Civic Art Program  
*Extraordinary Experiences in Everyday Places*

### ABOUT THE ART

Designers from Swift Lee Office (SLO) conducted several site visits and had conversations with staff and neighborhood residents. On one of their visits, they observed an impromptu jump rope session with local youth in the library's entry plaza. This led them to ask how the space could be used as a flexible program space. SLO worked with art and public engagement consultant Sara Daleiden to test this idea with the community by hosting a community workshop. At the workshop families were invited to design canopies for the plaza using recycled materials. Many of the designs included natural elements, such as trees, flowers and a turtle pond. Residents also confirmed their desire to use the plaza as a place to sit, read, play and have community events.

The artwork titled "Butterfly Wings and Scales" reflects a playful and colorful spirit that activates the plaza. Based on microscopic images of butterfly wings, the sculptural canopy is made of translucent panels that provide shade for educational programs and cultural performances. Future plans being developed by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation will incorporate the artwork's thematic elements and further transform the plaza into a lively community space. In addition, a corresponding mixed media mural on Normandie Avenue connects passersby to activities happening in the plaza.



*Sculptural canopy on the library plaza*  
Photo: Elon Schoenholz



*Mixed media mural on Normandie Avenue*  
Photo: LA County Arts Commission



*Canopy design workshop on the library plaza*  
Photo: LA County Arts Commission

The artwork is a part of a series of projects funded by a grant from the Los Angeles County Parks and Regional Open Space District that use arts-based solutions to promote the value of civic spaces and deter vandalism at County properties. SLO hopes that by enlivening the plaza, continued activation will instill community stewardship of the Library and its resources.

**To learn more about the artist:** <http://www.swiftleoffice.com/>  
Swift Lee Office was founded in 2000 in Los Angeles. SLO's founding partners, Nathan Swift and Gloria Lee, met while at Harvard and established their office in an artist complex downtown. SLO was launched as a multidisciplinary design laboratory, combining an architectural studio, a hands-on prototyping workshop and a gallery for artists. Since then, SLO has transformed into a full service architectural firm with an extensive portfolio of projects built throughout Los Angeles.

In December 2004, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted the County's first Civic Art policy, which allocates one percent of County capital projects to civic art. The policy allows for integrated permanent public art enhancements, temporary art commissions, restoration of historic artworks, and the creation of cultural spaces or activities. The Los Angeles County Arts Commission is responsible for the administration of the Civic Art policy.

The County's Art Collection belongs to everyone. If you notice an artwork is damaged, lost or in need of care, please notify the Los Angeles County Arts Commission Civic Art division at 213-202-5858 or [civcart@arts.lacounty.gov](mailto:civcart@arts.lacounty.gov).

For more information, please visit [www.lacountyarts.org](http://www.lacountyarts.org). Facebook.com/lacountyarts. Twitter/@lacountyarts

# ART AS INFRASTRUCTURE

## An Evaluation of Civic Art and Public Engagement in Four Communities in South Los Angeles

Swift Lee Office's artwork was part of a series of projects designed around the idea that better engagement in the development of artworks would promote community value for civic spaces and deter vandalism at county properties, led by the LA County Arts Commission and funded by a grant from the Los Angeles County Parks and Regional Open Space District.. Artist Sara Daleiden of s(o)ul supported the artists in developing engagement programs at each site and produced a documentary titled *Civic Art: Four Stories from South Los Angeles* that follows the development of the artworks and engagement programs at all four sites.

Along with the three other project sites, the LA County Arts Commission evaluated the success of these artworks in

- ▶ shifting perceptions about the sites
- ▶ increasing positive activity
- ▶ reducing graffiti vandalism
- ▶ building a sense of community ownership
- ▶ building capacity for future arts and culture activities

**The projects were successful at shifting perceptions of place through beautification and encouraging new use.**

- ▶ Community members interpreted the installation of artwork at these public facilities as positive investment in their neighborhoods and as signs that the government cares about their community.
- ▶ Community members shared that a well-maintained appearance, through artworks and a lack of graffiti vandalism, and the presence of family-oriented activity can foster the perception that a place is safe and welcoming.



Video still from "Civic Art: Four Stories from South Los Angeles"  
Photo: © Mark Escribano and Sara Daleiden, s(o)ul, 2017

- ▶ Pairing art projects and new infrastructure increased the impact of both kinds of investment. The "energy" that artwork brings to a place spurred maintenance, stewardship, and increased activity.

**East Rancho Dominguez Park and Community Center experienced a reduction in requests for graffiti removals, which suggests highly visible placement of artworks may be especially effective for graffiti abatement.**

- ▶ Engagement strategies enhanced attachment and the sense of ownership of public facilities when the artists Involved community members in design or fabrication
- ▶ Provided opportunities for interaction with artists during the artwork development
- ▶ Created space for social interaction among participants to foster bonds important for social cohesion and civic engagement
- ▶ Investigated and worked with the attachments to place that already existed in the community

**The projects built capacity for future arts and culture programming by generating new ideas and strategies for public engagement among parks and libraries staff.**

In the end, the project demonstrated that government investment in artworks at neighborhood parks and libraries that include artist-led engagement programs can lead to better outcomes for communities. Agencies planning similar projects should consider

- ▶ Increasing investment in artistic engagement throughout physical artwork development and through multi-year artist-in-residence programs.
- ▶ Creating a "maintenance" plan that continues the communication and relationships built for temporary participatory artworks to enhance the impact of artistic engagement
- ▶ Partnering directly with community-based organizations such as a neighborhood association or Friends of the Library group to increase civic engagement

For the full evaluation report and information about the other projects in this series, visit [www.lacountyarts.org](http://www.lacountyarts.org)