

To: Culver City's Department of Cultural Affairs
From: Victoria Marks

I offer this letter to express my interest in serving as Culver City's Artist Laureate, 2025-2027.

As a choreographer/director, the greatest contribution I can make is in support of the fabric of community.

My primary medium is dance and performance. I define dance broadly: as conscious and chosen movement that occurs outside of everyday actions. For me, dancing is about who we are and who we can be together. Through dance, we make visible life's vitality. Whether in the kitchen, on the street, in the park, on film or on stage, dance can offer resources for imagining future possibilities together.

As an artist living adjacent to Culver City (across Venice Blvd in Mar Vista), for 25 years I see myself animating the city by making public space more vital as I also dip into micro-communities to support growth and interconnection. I view the city as a canvas for projects that connect residents and build civic pride.

A while ago, I began to create "choreo-portraits" of real people. I have created Choreo-portraits for elderly men in Alberta Canada, for fathers and daughters in Washington, DC and LA, for mothers and daughters in London, for religious leaders in Houston, Texas, among others.

Portraits led to "Action Conversations" bringing two groups of people together who would not otherwise have a shared social anchor. I have brought together rehabbing military veterans and artists; teen mothers and older women in a working-class rural community; and fraternity and sorority students enmeshed in hook-up culture. "Action Conversations" are processes where spoken conversation yields playful moving and moving yields deeper and richer conversation. These active conversations, yield live performance, or film. In this work, a performance portrait is created as participants build understanding across difference.

My projects mean to unsettle existing power dynamics, generating new possibilities of relationality between individual participants, and between their affiliated groups. I practice justice-focused leadership: holding safe yet playful space. In a polarized society, where groups are isolated and under-resourced, forms of portraiture including Action Conversations nurture understanding between communities, moving us out of Isolation.

Action Conversations: Bellows Falls

<https://vimeo.com/99760165>

Action Conversations: Veterans

<https://vimeo.com/99743786>

Outside In (choreo-portrait)

<https://vimeo.com/106007951>

Mothers and Daughters (choreo-portrait)

<https://vimeo.com/83466458>

Working in Bellows Falls, Vermont, partnering with Windham County Social Services and the Vermont Performance Lab, (2014), I asked: *could I contribute to that community through engaged art making?* There was concern about teen mothers who were dropping out of high school. With the assistance of civic partners, I brought a group of older women and teen moms together for a period of 5 weeks in Action Conversations. My hope was that later, when the local librarian bumped into a teen wheeling her infant/toddler crossing main street, they would pause at the side of the road to share photos and ask after one another's health and well-being.

At the heart of a call for an artist laureate is an invitation to enter community with curiosity. The beginning is about deep listening, followed by questions, followed by deep listening. I ask, "how can art help?"

I offer two projects here for discussion. These might be beginnings that will grow and change as conversations with Culver City stake holders deepen. They are informed by our post pandemic experience, and increased uncertainty about our social, economic and political futures. I believe we need to come together.

Project 1: Public Performance Installations:

Stopped at a light on my drive home from work, I noticed two people on the shoulder of the road, paused in an extended embrace. A hug. So beautiful, I thought. Such a private moment right here in public space! I wondered what it would be like if 50 feet further down the road there would be another two people, paused in an embrace. Then 50 more feet and another pair, hugging. And then another and another. What would have seemed at first a private moment of connection, would grow to become an event—an encounter with staging the possible.

I can imagine staging this filial embrace, enacted by Culver City citizens, in public spaces: Between parking garages and cinema. Around the Farmer's Market. In parks. While I imagine a sustained hug, there could be many different iterations of this idea: many pairs of people, distributed widely through public spaces quite still, but holding hands.

Project 2:

Choreo-Portraiture/Action Conversations:

I would like to collaborate with domestic workers who toil, mostly invisibly, navigating power and self-determination in the homes of others. Domestic employer/employee relationships frequently take place at the crossroads of class, language, citizenship, education, and age. Can performance acquaint us with the complex dynamics of labor between domestic workers and household employers?

Culver City's Artist Laureate program is an invitation for an artist to step into the complex weave of civic life. What a progressive, pro-active and hopeful vision for a city's future! I view this opportunity not only as one that will enliven the literal town square, but one that will light up the metaphorical spaces of exchange and meaning-making within community.

If I am selected for this post, I will begin by attending City Council meetings and listening to stake holders. I will learn about city history. I will tour neighborhoods and observe the different patterns of life that occur at different times, and on different days of the week. I will notice when and how and by whom public spaces are used.

I view the people of Culver City as participants in creative process and as audience. Anything I undertake will be particular to Culver City: a series of civic portraits.

Art can address problems in registers that cannot be addressed other ways. In this, I seek to make art that brings wonder, that causes people to feel connected, that places hardship in greater context, that builds empathy, that makes work meaningful and that makes ordinary life more beautiful.

I inspire and engage by joining people where they meet and by creating warm, playful and relevant opportunities for engagement.