

# **Artist Laureate Program 2020 Report**

I had a delayed start to my Artist Laureate Program.

I had developed plans to be presented to the CAC at the March 17, 2020 meeting. But the onset of the COVID-19 emergency drastically impacted my plans. In effect everything I was planning was put on hold. But instead of taking the survive-wait-and-see approach I addressed the crisis by adopting a crisis mode of operation. I identified urgent needs of the moment and the AL Program was effectively launched and continues as part of the City's crisis operation.

Yet, even in the midst of crisis, I view my AL tenure as setting the tone and identity for the Artist Laureate Program going forward, and developing an active framework for key long-term collaborations.

## **Communications**

I set up a private Facebook group and rebranded my own FB page as AL communication vehicle, and I set up an AL email account. I began making social media posts to FB and Nextdoor highlighting my activities.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/240988417055368>

## **Love My Neighbor 2 Prevail**

I developed and implemented an emergency art relief program - a collaboration with the City's PRCS Department: Neighbors Caring for Neighbors Emergency Relief Food Drive and Distribution Program. I proposed, developed and implemented the inclusion of printed artworks created by home quarantined children to provide emotional support and relief to home quarantined at-risk neighbors receiving food. I promoted the affirming theme of recovery into the graphics of every artwork.

- I conducted outreach and Zoom training sessions with Cub Scout Pack 79 to produce artworks for the program.
- I developed outlines and requirements for children participating in the program.
- I wrote, printed, and signed personal notes accompanying every new artwork.
- Out of the recorded Zoom meeting I have developed a dedicated online training video and program materials.
- I included poetry with the artwork in collaboration with a poet group led by Dr. Janet Hoult.
- I produced graphics and printed artworks - 12 original works for 15 weeks of emergency food distribution.
- I reached out to local Blanco Park neighborhood children to participate in artwork for food relief, 10 events/artworks.

- The program is ongoing and publicized on my social media pages. It was featured in the number of City-wide mailings and City social media posts.

<https://www.facebook.com/CulverCityPRCS/posts/culver-city-artist-laureate-alexey-steele-is-adding-a-special-touch-to-the-emerg/3199497260063550/>

- I reached out to CCUSD to expand the artwork creation and looking for ways to expand the reach of the artwork distribution.
- The curriculum was developed and sent to the school district and I am now following up in an attempt to solicit wider participation.
- This program continues and kids from Culver City Cub Scout Pack 79 at my direction again provided artworks for emergency food distribution. The artworks were well received by program participants and featured PRCS mailings and social media postings.
- They were also included in the holiday food distribution.

### **Singing Street**

Responding to activities of my neighbors, I advanced a community initiative, conceptualized and organized implementation of safely-distanced community singing on Rudman Street in the Blanco Park neighborhood, as a form of providing emotional relief to crisis-impacted neighbors as well as the vehicle to solicit artworks from neighborhood kids for the Love My Neighbor 2 Prevail program.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/240988417055368>

### **Culver Arts Collaboration**

- I have regularly participated in Culver Arts Foundation meetings.
- I addressed and delivered keynotes at events and forums organized by Culver Arts, delivered progress reports on ALP and contributed to ongoing discussions.
- Arts Townhall – I was invited by Culver Arts Foundation to give an address to the first Culver Arts Town Hall.
- I was asked to participate in the video series for newly launched Culver City Artists Emergency Resiliency Fund campaign and designed my version of lawn signs.
- I was asked to participate in an introduction of Dr. Janet Hoult at the Culver Arts holiday event launching the #CulverCityResilient campaign.

### **Cyber Fest**

- Cyber Fest - I was invited to be a member of the Curator Circle. In this capacity, I advocate for a focus on Culver City's cultural and artistic identity, promoting the

project as a vehicle for expression, of the city's artistic identity, and closer coordination with the City.

- I proposed inclusion of "Creative Culver" into a title which was accepted. Project is now called "Creative Culver Cyber Series". I view this project as potential vehicle for achieving multiple goals I originally set as part of my AL tenure, such as helping to organize and showcase the Culver City creative community.

### **Projecting Possibilities**

- In collaboration with Helms Bakery District, I was invited to open a unique public art show planned for the emergency, possibly the first of its kind in the nation, combining the elements of a curated gallery show with the exposure and scale of public art. As the first artist, I participated in development of procedures and protocols of the project.

<https://helmsbakerydistrict.com/projecting-possibilities/alexey-steele/>

### **Kids Scoop Media**

- As part of Projecting Possibilities, I participated in a wide-ranging filmed interview with Kids Scoop Media, which is now up and running on social media.

[KidScoop Media interviews visual artist and Culver City's Artist Laureate, Alexey Steele](#)

### **Distant - Live Sessions**

- With enormous preparatory work we have launched Love My Neighbor Project Distant - Live Sessions.
- The concept of distant - live sessions was developed in order to adopt the Love My Neighbor portrait series to the changed conditions of COVID-19 emergency while securing the artistic integrity in the key aspects of my artistic process.
- The preparation and organization of infrastructure necessary for conducting distant live sessions took from April to August 2020. It involved:
  - Setting up sufficient internet band width and wiring my studio building area for internet connection with adequate bandwidth;
  - Learning and developing various video conference options most suited for live portraiture work;
  - Learning and developing most suited technical solution for live casting;
  - Collecting the necessary hardware for multi angle live cast; and
  - Setting up the network of equipment and broadcast studio capability.
- With critical support of the City staff, every aspect of technically challenging instantaneous dual stream was tested.
- The first series of Distant - Live Love My Neighbor portrait sessions and live casts were conducted on October 6, 8 and 10, 2020.

- The First Distant Live Sessions Broadcasts were conducted in celebration of National Arts and Humanities Month.
- The City Issued an official press release about the event.

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/CACULVER/bulletins/2a26391?reqfrom=share>

[https://nextdoor.com/news\\_feed/?post=163521373](https://nextdoor.com/news_feed/?post=163521373)

- The featured neighbor I chose to open the Love My Neighbor project in Culver City was the beloved community icon Dr. Janet Cameron Hoult.
- The platform proved a unique and innovative way to produce a work of art, to engage wide audience of much greater capacity than at any fixed location, to showcase the live story of a special neighbor.

Sharing with you some statistics of our Janet drawing outreach campaign.

This is on our end only, not including City distribution statistics.

- 3 Live-streams
- With 1091 combined views, 131 comments
- 15 Facebook posts
- With combined 6,301 people reaches
- Instagram
- Combined 731 likes, 11,025 combined individual reaches
- Constant contact
- 3 mailings
- Combined 7,184 sends, 1,684 opens with average opening rate of 28.6 percent
- Total: 19,010 individual reaches, not including City distribution statistics and opening rate.

I think it illustrates how important the informational outreach component really is.

- Importantly the project showcases how non-media-based arts can adopt to necessities of COVID-19 crisis and demonstrates the resilience of creative community.

<https://www.facebook.com/140283802730349/videos/375158850520097>

<https://www.facebook.com/140283802730349/videos/650364349185651>

<https://www.facebook.com/140283802730349/videos/3062464947210556>

- I have begun considering the next candidate for a portrait and have begun to reach out to solicit suggestions.

## **ERTF**

- ERTF – I was invited to participate with ERTF. I advocated the view of art as an integral part of city-wide emergency and recovery planning and operations. I suggested development of art-driven positive public messaging as a communicative recovery effort component and form of public positive reinforcement campaign.
- I have advocated to view art as key component of the important “emotional emergency relief”.
- I was invited to participate in the message development working group.
- I continue my work on ERTF.
- I participated in most of its sessions and provided my input and feedback in relation to arts.
- I was asked to participate as part of the Arts and Culture Working Group.

## **GPU**

- I was asked to participate in the work of GPU by Raimi+Associates
- I participated in 2 meetings, providing my feedback and experience
- I proposed to Raimi+Associates to collaborate with ALP on Love My Neighbor project as part of their Story Bank program
- We had the first meeting to discuss possibility of collaboration between ALP and their Story Bank as well as Tactical Urbanism programs
- I have proposed to bring CCUSD’s art program into this possible collaboration between ALP and GPU

## **CCUSD**

- I have initiated a conversation with Heather Moses, proposing a writing/art collaboration project that could be incorporated into their distance learning curriculum.
- I participated in statewide and county wide art education webinars.
- We held a meeting and submitted proposal to CCUSD on collaboration with kids art on food relief packages and on Love My Neighbor project.
- The emergency relief project as well as distant live sessions with Janet Hoult were featured by CCUSD in Culver Pride.  
#CULVERPRIDE For The Week Of September 21, 2020 with Alexey Steele

- The collaboration on Love My Neighbor project is in the consideration for curriculum/extra curriculum inclusion into 2021 school year, depending on crisis policy and conditions.
- I participated and contributed to a conversation at the number of DCAT meetings
- I conducted a meeting with Heather Moses on supporting by me the recent “ART and Innovation Lab” CCUSD initiative that will actually reposition art inside the existing curriculum more closely integrating it into all other educational aspects. I fully and strongly support this initiative as aligning with my overall artistic philosophy of close integration of arts into a society as opposite of strict “art for art’s sake” viewpoint, importantly NOT as a way to diminish the pure artistic expressive side, but to reinforce its societal position. We discovered very close art philosophy intersection with Heather which I believe will lead into important collaborations of ALP with CCUSD.
- In our meeting, Heather Moses expressed strong long-term support for Love My Neighbor project as platform of collaboration with CCUSD along the lines we outlined in my proposal to CCUSD.
- In our meeting Heather Moses expressed her keen interest in proposed by me collaboration of ALP, GPU and CCUD organized on the Love My Neighbor project as platform.
- The Love My Neighbor Distant Live Sessions were promoted by CCUSD to students.
- At CCUSD invitation I collaborated with Tony Spano’s music group on a production of holiday rendition of *’Twas a Night Before Christmas* alongside other prominent members of CC creative community and the CCUSD leadership.

<https://youtu.be/hulcrM5oGtU>

## **New Strategic Collaborations**

### **Village Well**

- New strategic collaborations were developed that can be instrumental for AL program long term.
- As Culver City AL, and along with Janet Hoult, I was invited to participate in the launch event for the important new Culver City book store, Village Well, celebrating the new book by Brian Sonia-Wallace.
- I participated in the panel discussion and we had a public unveiling of the finished portrait of Janet.
- It was amazing to see the reaction to an artwork by the participants in the distant Zoom format, particularly Janet who saw her portrait for the first time.
- Jennifer Caspar, the Village Well owner, proposed to have portrait of Janet as well as following portraits to exhibit at the store. I think the collaboration with

Jennifer Caspar and the Village Well can be of a long-term benefit to AL program.

<https://losangeles.eventful.com/events/village-well-hosts-oct-17th-inaugural-author-evening/E0-001-135805467-6>

<https://booksigningevent.com/event/village-well-hosts-oct-17th-inaugural-author-event-2020-10-18/>

<https://www.culvercityobserver.com/story/2020/10/15/arts-and-entertainment/village-well-presents-peripatetic-poet-brian-sonia-wallace/9376.html>

## LA Goal

- At the generous suggestion of Janet Hoult, the contact was made with LA Goal, an amazing organization that provides creative artistic outlet to program participants with developmental special abilities. I think the program is the natural fit for a long-term collaboration with ALP.
- I proposed two areas of collaboration with LAG:
  1. The inclusion of artworks of LAGoal participants into our ongoing emergency relief food distribution
  2. The inclusion of group's participants into my Love My Neighbor Series as portrait subject representing this historically neglected and overlooked community.
- Both ideas were enthusiastically received by LAG, with one ready to be implemented pretty much immediately
- The portrait will take more time to organize due to their current work overload resulting from recent staff change and sizable logistical difficulties of such project. I want to reiterate that both myself and LAG see my proposal to showcase their participant in my series as an important step in promoting the inclusion of the developmentally disabled community into our shared community fulfilling the goal of wider inclusivity.
- Also, I view as a tremendous artistic opportunity to showcase the representative of this particular social group in our community and fully prepared to meet all arising logistical challenges.



## Outside Culver City

I view my title of Artist Laureate as an important *ambassadorial role* in my actions outside CC and view ambassadorial capacity as an important aspect of ALP.

- I have launched a new collaboration with the office of Al Austin III, the Councilmember 8th District of Long Beach, to expand my Love My Neighbor public art project into the area surrounding my new studio in the Bixby Knolls neighborhood.
- At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, I implemented the project of using children's art as a form of emotional emergency relief with food relief in the Scottsdale neighborhood of Carson. We were up and running by March 22, within first week of the stay-at-home order. The emergency model we developed there became a tested blueprint for my ongoing Emergency Food Relief program in CC. This project also provided the Carson Sheriff's Department Gang Diversion Team with a viable emergency program and youth engagement activity at the time when most other operations were suspended.
- As a result of the exposure of my art projects in Scottsdale (in Carson), I was made aware of a local community challenge. The success of the art project enabled me to advocate for and secure leadership support on the issue. I have initiated and assembled the working group on a California legislative matter. With Assembly Member Mike Gipson's direction, the working group is focused on the development of relevant California code language to be introduced in the next legislative session. The legislation will attempt to address housing association rule language that makes local leadership difficult, if not impossible, in communities like Scottsdale. However, while it would specifically help communities like Scottsdale, it would have a wide-ranging impact on a variety of communities throughout California. *This activity is an example of the power of art to solicit change.*
- I continued to lead the emergency art and food relief program in the long marginalized "Scottsdale" community of Carson in collaboration with Artward Initiative nonprofit. This project continuously serves as Social Art Lab for generating approaches, experiences and practices I am able to implement in CC.
- I am pleased to inform that our ability to pivot the community-building public art project there to the needs of emergency had earned us a special grant by the Bank of America Foundation. The Culver City Artist Laureate Program is referenced in Artward Initiative's press release.

<https://www.wfmj.com/story/43000820/carson-based-community-organization-awarded-15000-bank-of-america-grant-on-givingtuesday-to-continue-critical-needs-services-during-prolonged-pandemic>

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/CACULVER/bulletins/286efec>



## Next Steps – Goals for 2021

- As I continue all ongoing participations and programs, my particular focus looking into 2021 is to translate my recent emergency relief work experiences into the body of work expanding the Love My Neighbor Series.
- I am planning that the next candidate for LMN Distant Live Portrait and Broadcast Sessions be a representative of CC creative community who is also active in making art relevant in our management of this crisis. I think this is a great opportunity to showcase community engaged arts and artists as part of local neighbors-heroes whose images converted into iconic presence through my artistic lens will help define and reinforce our community identity.
- I have reached out to Commissioners, City Council Members and CCUSD with opportunity to suggest special Culver City neighbors to be considered for the series.
- I am working with staff on formal recognition of the children who participated in our Love My Neighbor 2 Prevail Emergency art relief program with certificates of recognition.
- I will also resume my work on the prototyping for the new promising public art material and sculptural concept I am developing, the work that was put on hold during the crisis.
- I would also like to explore ways to convert the images of Love My Neighbor series into a large-scale public art, a form of outdoor art gallery and activating public spaces after experiencing my work from the series at large scale as part of Projecting Possibilities.
- I would also like to work with the school district to develop a Love My Neighbor activity in the schools that coordinates with my portraits in the community.
- I continue to see my tenure as laying the foundation for ALP into a future.
- I see the importance of the next stage of this foundational period as ALP contributing specifically along the lines of Creative Economy Report and building the program as vehicle of showcasing and defining the special place art plays in CC into a future along the line reflected in GPU.
- I look forward to continue developing key collaborations that I see as strategic long-term partnerships with ALP, the keystone of all collaborations being the one with the Cultural Affairs Commission.