Assessing Arts for Change
UNDERSTANDING AESTHETICS PERSPECTIVES

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Agenda

I. Introduction
II. Overview of Aesthetics Perspectives Framework
III. Attributes Deep Dive
IV. Applying the Framework
V. Questions
What is Arts for Change?

Projects at the intersection of artistic creation and civic engagement, community development, and justice

Arts for Change can:

• raise awareness
• challenge current circumstances
• empower individuals
• reinforce individual and/or group identity
• inspire people to action
• build communal strength and capacity for action
• critique dominant social and historical narratives
• enable people to hear and understand different perspectives
• propose new possibilities
• create a focus and/or process for the exchange of ideas and perspectives
what difference do ARTS and CULTURE make?

continuum of impact

KNOWLEDGE
WHAT PEOPLE KNOW
- awareness
- understanding

ATTITUDES
WHAT PEOPLE THINK & FEEL
- values
- motivation
- vision

ACTION
WHAT PEOPLE DO
- participation
- mobilization

DISCOURSE
HOW PEOPLE COMMUNICATE
- deliberation
- dialogue
- media

CAPACITY
WHAT PEOPLE HAVE & CAN DO
- social capital
- leadership
- creative skills
- civic engagement

POLICIES
WHAT CHANGE IS SUSTAINED
- systems
- conditions
- access
- equity

ANIMATE
INFORM
INFLUENCE
EXPRESS
ENGAGE
Evaluation Learning Lab

Promote evaluation that embodies values & practices aligned with arts & social justice work—equity, inclusion, understanding context, and the role of arts and culture.
Discussion

WHAT DOES EXCELLENCE MEAN TO YOU?
Why an Aesthetics Framework?

Enhance understanding & evaluation of artistic dimensions of Arts for Change

• expand criteria for considering aesthetics in Arts for Change
• elevate aesthetics in civically & socially engaged art
• see aesthetic values in creative process and practice
• address historical domination of Euro-centric aesthetic standards

“Aesthetics is an inquiry into how artists, in their products & processes, utilize sensory & emotional stimulation & experience to find & express meaning and orientation in the world & to deepen relationships amongst artists & their partners across differences.”

Bob Leonard

Alternate ROOTS
ARTS • COMMUNITY • ACTIVISM
The Aesthetics Attributes

Commitment - Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.

Risk-taking - The creative work assumes risk by subverting dominant norms, values, narratives, standards, or aesthetics.

Communal Meaning - The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.

Openness - The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.

Disruption - Art challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action.

Resourcefulness - Imaginative use of available resources drives artistic innovation and demonstrates responsible social and environmental practice.

Cultural Integrity - The creative work demonstrates integrity and ethical use of material with specific cultural origins and context.

Coherence - Strong ideas expressed with clarity advance both artistic and social purposes.

Emotional Experience - Arts for Change facilitates a productive movement between “heart space”—the emotional experience that art evokes—and the “head space” of civic or social issues.

Stickiness - The creative work achieves sustained resonance, impact, or value.

Sensory Experience - Vivid sensations deepen the experience of the creative work and heighten the power of its messages and the potential for change.
The AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES framework is best thought of as ...

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Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change

**OPENNESS**

The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.

The creative work embodies the nuances of issues, traversing between the extreme poles to allow exploration of complexity and ambiguity within opinions and attitudes.

**Consider:**

- How does the art and its process offer multiple points of entry and/or forms of participation for people with varied expectations and aesthetic preferences?
- How do the artists open their process to multiple viewpoints and show their willingness for the work to evolve based on what is learned?
- Does the work allow for multiple perspectives or conflicting truths, even within shared goals?
- If the work is designed to be adaptable to varied situations, how does it change in form or meaning with new contexts, participants, or input?
- How does flexibility align with the social justice intentions of the project or partners?
- Is the development and creative process of the work transparent to stakeholders and participants?
- Is the artistic team committed to analyzing, and possibly changing, creative choices in relation to context?
The creative work is accessible and **offers multiple entry points for people to engage** in the research and development stages, artmaking, and presentation and engagement around products.

There is **transparency around artistic choices and ethical use of community stories** or other material to help level power and build trust.

Artists invite fluidity in and between process and product, **allowing the creative work to change based on stakeholder exchange and input**.

The creative work embodies the nuances of issues, traversing between the extreme poles to **allow exploration of complexity and ambiguity** within opinions and attitudes.

The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.
“I wanted the project to be something that the community could be proud of and I wanted to have their input, and what better way than literally for them to be a part of the process. Local projects that socially engage like this become so important because they are stories from the people by the people it showcases.”

Ngoc-Tran Vu

Community in Action: A Mural for Vietnamese Folks in Fields Corner

Photos by Linh Pham
Ngoc-Tran Vu
Poll

Images with labels:
- commitment
- communal meaning
- cultural integrity
- disruption
- emotional experience
- sensory experience
- openness
- risk-taking
- coherence
- resourcefulness
- stickiness
Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.

Creative project/work?

What resonates?

What challenges, questions?
Art challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action.

Creative project/work?
What resonates?
What challenges, questions?
Arts for Change facilitates a productive movement between “heart space”—the emotional experience that art evokes—and the “head space” of civic or social issues.
Vivid sensations deepen the experience of the creative work and heighten the power of its messages and the potential for change.

Creative project/work?
What resonates?
What challenges, questions?
The creative work demonstrates integrity and ethical use of material with specific cultural origins and context.
Minneapolis-based artist, Oskar Ly uses her location in the Hmong and queer communities to reinterpret traditional cultural clothing. She has created a collection called Little Black Shh, an exploration of gender expression through traditional Hmong clothing.
Creative work assumes risk by subverting dominant norms, values, narratives, standards, or aesthetics.
Strong ideas expressed with clarity advance both artistic and social purposes.
The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.
The creative work achieves sustained resonance, impact, or value.
The Matthew Shepard Foundation provides creative consultation to enhance local productions and guidance on post-show discussions and community conversations, helping to maximize meaning and impact.

Tectonic Theater Project keeps The Laramie Project true and relevant in a national context of continuing education about homophobia, bullying, suicide, and hate crimes.
Imaginative use of available resources drives artistic innovation and demonstrates responsible social and environmental practice.

Creative project/work?

What resonates?

What challenges, questions?
How might you apply the framework to your work?
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http://www.animatingdemocracy.org/aesthetic-perspectives

COMPANION GUIDES
Performing Artists
Mark Valdez, theater artist/organizer

Funders
M. Christine Dwyer, RMC Research

Evaluators / Researchers
Susannah Laramee Kidd, Metris Consulting

Educators
Bob Leonard, Professor of Theatre, Virginia Tech

Curators
Sara Reisman
Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation
Questions/Comments

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