

Art Spaces in Northeast Los Angeles

A qualitative study on their perceptions of their role in gentrification and how they engage their community



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Abstract

This research concern

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recommended on both the city and state level that would alleviate the pressure and stress of gentrification on thousands of Angelenos.

Image Courtesy of the Urban Displacement Project based on 2018 data

Neighborhoods in Northeast LA, as has been discussed, have a high population of Latinx residents, and this figure displays there are also sizable populations of Asian and white residents. It also shows how some areas, like Eagle Rock and Atwater Village, are more racially integrated than other neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and Lincoln Heights.

History of Gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles

and aspiring homeowners or renters who could no longer afford nearby “trendy” areas. One Glassell Park resident who grew up in Eagle Rock explains that since 2008 “a lot of cool coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and vintage shops popped up in [Highland Park], making it basically a less expensive and cooler version of Echo Park” (Staff, 2015). Cafe de Leche, a coffee shop that opened in 2009, is considered ground zero for gentrification in Highland Park (Lin, 2019). Other shops linked to gentrification and Highland Park’s new white hipster neighbors opened their doors in the following few years.

Although Highland Park is often the most extreme example of this trend, other neighborhoods in Northeast LA feel similar effects. Those in the market to rent or own a home look to these neighborhoods, like they do for Highland Park, as the new affordable option. Due to the saturation of the housing market in Highland park and adjacent neighborhoods,



Image Courtesy of the Urban Displacement Project Based on 2018 Data

The Urban Displacement Project shows which areas in Northeast Los Angeles are experiencing exceptionally high levels of displacement. These areas include Atwater Village, Highland Park, Mount Washington, and Eagle Rock. Glassell Park and Montecito Heights are relatively stable, while Cypress Park is labeled as susceptible to gentrification (Urban Displacement Project, 2021).



Image Courtesy of the Urban Displacement Project Based on 2018 Data

This graph displays the vulnerability of renters, which is often an issue linked to gentrification because gentrification increases rent prices. As shown, there is high vulnerability among renters in many neighborhoods of Northeast LA. When landlords sense an increase in the value of their area or property and realize they could gain a higher profit from new renters, they are more likely to evict those who have been in the community for a long time and are unable to pay higher rents.

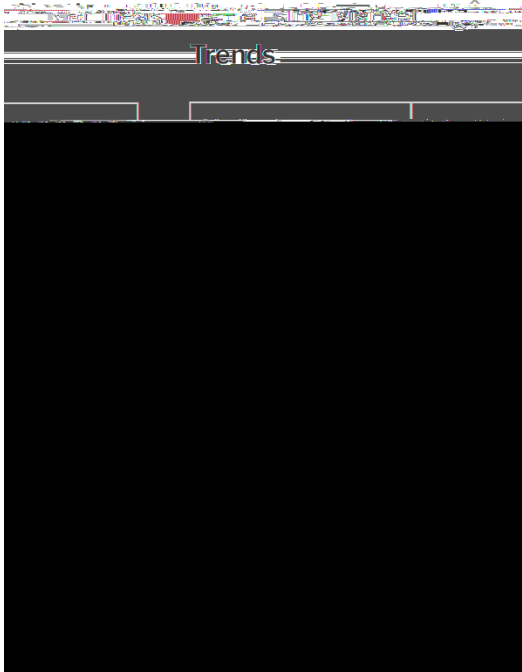


Image Courtesy of Redfin*

*Note: This data does not include Boyle Heights, El Sereno, or Lincoln Heights

Another sign of gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles is the astronomical rise of home prices. Redfin found that the median single-family home price in Northeast Los Angeles has increased 21.3% since 2020, and has risen from 695K to 1.183M.

History of the Arts in Northeast Los Angeles

The Arts Scene in Northeast Los Angeles was first characterized by the Arroyo Culture, which celebrated hand-craftsmanship and other art forms and worked towards progressive issues. As white residents moved out of the area towards the suburbs as part of the nationwide phenomenon known as ‘white flight,’ this scene declined (Lin, 2019). With the influx of Latino/a

residents, the arts scene in Northeast LA was enlivened and grew to reflect both its original Arroyo culture and the culture of its new residents (Lin, 2019). Some of the earliest known art collectives are the Mechiano Art Center, Centro de Arte Publico, and the Arroyo Arts Collective, all founded in the 1970s and 80s.

Muralism was a fundamental art form in the Latino/a revival of the NE LA Art scene. Artists embraced the Mexican art form associated with social justice and political statements. These murals “evolved into representations of urban icons, cultural heroes, and Aztec symbols conveying political messages for equality and social justice for minorities and Third World peoples” (Lin, 2019). Ten of these murals were created on the walls of Boyle Height’s Romona Gardens Housing Project through a grant received by the Mechiano Art Center.

In 1989, the Arroyo Arts Collective was founded. This collective involves artists of all mediums, and through an annual dues, members receive access to opportunities to show their work. Eagle Rock Center for the Arts, originally Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center, was formed in 1998 with a focus on education and youth development. Avenue 50 Studio was established in 1999, centering the empowerment and visibility of Latino/a, specifically Chicano/a artists (Lin, 2019).

Arts in Northeast LA has proven to be a lucrative business, as many art galleries have closed throughout the years. These include Gallery Figueroa, Rock Rose Gallery, Galleria Mundo, and Gallery Ophelia (Lin, 2019).

Literature Review

Examining literature related to art and gentrification will provide context situating my research on art establishments in Northeast Los Angeles. This literature review will discuss how art spaces can benefit communities, arguments surrounding art's relationship to gentrification, and responses to art's perceived influence on gentrification and gentrification in general.

How Arts Spaces can be Beneficial to Communities and Individuals

One way art can benefit people is through its relationship-building capabilities. A study discusses how free community art galleries can provide low-stress environments optimal for creating relationships. Featured art starts conversations, and activities related to art can produce a shared experience community members bond over (Connal et al., 2020). Additionally, just as other public spaces such as urban parks and community gardens, community art spaces can add a spark of joy into a passerby's day.

Older community members who experience dementia can benefit from art activities in unique ways (Mondro et al., 2020). One study recruited duos of caregivers and care recipients experiencing dementia in which art facilitators taught an art project to care recipients each week for four weeks. Caregivers taught the same project to their care recipients. The study found that these workshops resulted in communication discoveries, insights into partners' abilities, and personal creative realizations (Mondro et al., 2020). Even outside of a caregiver care recipient partnership, this study shows how art can provide insight into oneself and act as a way to get to know someone else better based on how they approach their projects.

Younger generations can also benefit from exposure to a space where they can make their art. Rhodes and Schechter (2014) outline the impacts an Artist Collective had in the North End

pavilion, and restrooms. What makes it extraordinary are the approximately 40 murals painted

meet these requirements, they are identified as undergoing or undergone gentrification (NCRC, 2020). Census Tracts are a small area of measurement created by the U.S. Census Bureau to study trends. The average population of a census tract is 4,000 inhabitants, with the minimum being 1,200 people and the maximum being 8,000 people.

The National Community Reinvestment Coalition found that between 2000-2013, nearly half of national gentrification, or 501 gentrifying tracts out of 1,049, occurred in just seven cities; These cities are New York City, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Baltimore, San Diego, and Chicago (NCRC, 2020). Throughout these cities, gentrification disproportionately affects Latinx and especially Black residents.

In order to measure these trends, the NCRC used two criteria to determine census tracts with significant Black and Latinx population loss. The racial group's population percentage had to decline by more than two standard deviations from the mean of all census tracts, and the absolute number of residents had to decline by at least five percent (NCRC, 2020). Nationally, Black population loss occurred in 187 tracts experiencing gentrification, with an average loss of 593 Black Residents. Nationwide, Latinx population loss has occurred in 45 tracts experiencing gentrification, with an average loss of 542 Latinx residents per tract. The nationwide total of Black residents displaced between 2000-2010 was 110,935, while the nationwide total for Latinx residents displaced was 24,374. Though Black population loss in gentrifying areas is more prevalent than Latinx population loss nationwide, the issue of Latinx displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods is more likely in Los Angeles due to its sizeable Latinx population.

Gentrified tracts in Los Angeles make up 14% of the total census tracts, with 73 tracts being gentrified out of 512 eligible for gentrification (NCRC, 2020). In Los Angeles, five

theory, Lin stressed the significance of the kind of art scene that attracted higher-income residents rather than the quantity.

Public art has been scrutinized for how city governments, corporations, and real estate developers can use it to accelerate the process of ‘urban renewal,’ which can ultimately lead to the gentrification of surrounding areas (Kwon, 2002). A case study of the Hollywood and Vine subway station, where multiple large-scale public artworks celebrate the glitz and glamour of old Hollywood, supports this theory (Reynolds, 2012). Since the artwork’s installment, the plaza is no longer suitable for the anti-war protesters who regularly gathered outside the station. Additionally, the pieces replaced bus shelters used by residents of the area. The presence of this public art branded the site in a certain way, allowing the city to more easily attract people who fit this brand and ostracize those who do not.

Concerns that public art may hasten the displacement of people are prevalent in other neighborhoods of Los Angeles as well. In Downtown LA’s “Arts District,” the second wave of urban renewal commenced with the introduction of many new public art projects and cafes, galleries, live-work loft development, and film sets. It is believed that these changes increased rents in the Art’s District to the point that the underground artists who initially characterized the area as an Art’s District could no longer afford rent. In her 1982 book *Loft Living*, Zukin analyzes a similar trend in New York City. The lofts of SoHo, like those in the Arts District, were attractive to artists. Once developers and corporations found they could capitalize on the hip SoHo environment cultivated by its artists, the area transformed, and artists who created the scene were priced out of it (Zukin, 1982).

Methodology

The goal of this study is to find out how visual arts spaces in Northeast Los Angeles perceive art's role in gentrification and how they address gentrification and involve their

neighborhoods in the hope that this would make it more likely that I could find one interviewee from each area. These neighborhoods were Highland Park, Cypress Park, Montecito Heights, Eagle Rock, Glassell Park, Mount Washington, and Atwater Village. However, I was unable to find any art spaces in the neighborhoods of Mount Washington and Montecito Heights. Further, these neighborhoods were absent in any discussion of gentrification in Northeast LA that I read because they are established as higher-income neighborhoods. In response to this, I omitted these two neighborhoods from my research and, based on a wider definition of Northeast LA, included Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights, and El Sereno in my research. I was not able to achieve my goal and set up an interview with one representative from every neighborhood. Ultimately, I got perspectives from the five neighborhoods of Atwater Village, Boyle Heights, Cypress Park, Highland Park, and Lincoln Heights.

I found art spaces to reach out to by using google maps and by consulting an artist and activist who is from Northeast Los Angeles and lives there today. To keep track of these art spaces, I created a color-coded spreadsheet that included key information about each art space like their location, type, website, and contact information. I found this information through the art spaces' websites, and I used the emails provided by the space to reach out to executive directors of art spaces and owners of art businesses. I chose these positions because they have the most decision-making power within organizations and businesses, and they will likely be most knowledgeable about the goings-on of the establishment. Because some art spaces define and create roles in a different way, not all my interviewees hold one of these two roles, but the majority do.

I reached out to potential interviewees in December and January of 2022, and I held interviews with these participants in January of 2022. The interviews were primarily conducted

over zoom. Due to technical difficulties with zoom, three interviews were conducted over the phone. One interviewee had to cancel and instead provided written responses to the questions I provided. With consent, the spok

Glassell Park	0	3
El Sereno	0	1

Table 2. Demographics of Interviewees

Latinx Interviewees	White Interviewees	Asian Interviewees
6	5	1
Female Interviewees	Male Interviewees	Unknown
8	3	1

Table 3. Prevalence of Different Types of Art Spaces Represented by my Interviewees

Non-profit Art Organization	For Profit Art Gallery	Non-profit Art Gallery	Arts Business	
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housing developments that have very little affordable [units]”. This comment displays the issue of an abundance of at-

The interviewee from Space F, a non-profit organization in Boyle Heights said that in

An interviewee from Space A, a nonprofit in Atwater Village, acknowledged the potential art has to gentrify. They also expressed frustration that there appears to be no viable location for an art space like theirs in Los Angeles that would not contribute to the process of gentrification. On this topic, they stated:

“At the end of the day, we only have so many places to live and so many places for businesses.”

They suggest that although they do not like the unintended consequences art spaces like theirs may have on neighborhoods, they do not want to feel so constrained by the potential art has to gentrify that they do not create their business at all.

An interviewee from Space D thinks gentrification is inevitable, and even mentioned that some locals she has spoken to are happy about the decreased gang activity, though they are not happy about the prices.

The executive director at Space F, a non-profit organization in Boyle Heights, shared the unique and difficult experience of people like her who have gone through gentrification and are now working in a field associated with contributing to that process. She explained:

“Arts organizations that are led by and in service of communities of color have an added challenge in that we are the staff members of those organizations and part of the communities that are served by the organization. I work with the added layer of being somebody who has been priced out of the neighborhood that I grew up in. Working within a sector that does have this association, however superficial or not, certainly is a very personal emotional experience.”

She went on to discuss the effect gentrification can have on community members’ imaginations for their neighborhoods’ future. She believes it is unfortunate that amenities are being associated with gentrification because:

“Communities who are at risk will then not want to see these things even though they should also have really beautiful and amenity-filled places to live”

These comments get to the central question this research paper explores; Can amenities exist in communities at risk

She encourages art spaces to be more assertive towards politicians and embrace the attitude “you can’t just use me for your rubber stamp”, implying that the politicians must deliver tangible positive changes to their constituents if they want to use art spaces for personal promotion. She also talked about how art spaces can endorse specific candidates and explain why they received this endorsement. Additionally, she believes artists can contribute by making signs and other graphics for initiatives and candidates at no cost to them.

The founder and senior advisor of community and government partnerships of Space G talked about Space G’s partnership with other community organizations to push back against a luxury apartment development in Space G’s neighborhood. Like the co-founder of Space C, the founder of Space G talks about how art spaces can use relationships with public officials. The founder of Space G believes art spaces should help public officials understand how their constituents and how art spaces are affected by their actions. Regarding the facilitation of planning conversations, Space G has been working with community members to collect their wants and needs and with California State Parks to create these ideas. Additionally, Space G participates in door knocking to gather residents’ opinions on various neighborhood changes.

According to Space F’s website, their non-profit organization in Boyle Heights is one of the partners that make up the Eastside LEADS (Leadership for Equitable and Accountable Development Strategies). Discussing the coalition, the executive Director of Space F states it:

“is focusing on ensuring all development in our neighborhood actively includes community voices at the planning stages and d d Z 2

community outreach and engagement”. They also saw the action as a way to show public officials strategies they could implement to engage community members. The action served as an example because it prompted community members to share what they want to see on the lot.

Community Involvement in the Identity of the Space and Reflecting the Existing Community Back to themselves Can Improve Community Engagement and Benefit Community Members

Incorporating community in their efforts, either through direct impact on the spaces or by intentionally creating programming relevant to the existing community, was important to half of the twelve art space representatives I interviewed.

Four art spaces reflect the community in their exhibits and events. Examples of these exhibits include showcasing incarcerated artists, discussing topics of immigration, the meaning of shelter, land use, and elements of a city. Two galleries focus heavily on promoting Latinx artists who are the historical and present majority demographic in their respective neighborhoods of Boyle Heights (Space E) and Highland Park (Space B). A non-profit art space in Lincoln Heights is planning a show featuring the artists in a former Lincoln Heights studio complex who were kicked out by the owner to honor the artists and celebrate 18(n)20(g)-9(L)11(a)4(t)-41(i)18(nx)1(y)40(-)-2

council meetings, learns about community needs, and thinks creatively about how to translate these needs into Space I's actions and programming.

Creative Uses of the Physical Art Spaces can Benefit Individuals and Groups in the Community

Another way art spaces can benefit their community members is by opening their doors to community groups in need of a physical place to meet or conduct an activity. Three of the 12 interviewees I spoke to discussed how they have opened their doors for a variety of reasons, many of which do not directly relate to art and art-making.

The Executive

Space F, a non-profit in Boyle Heights, art education promotes art education equity through their mobile art studio. The mobility allows Space F to reach populations that may not be able to commute to Space F's location, allowing more students to enjoy the arts.

Some art spaces involve local organizations, schools, and artists to further deepen the experiences of the students. Space B involves youth by working with schools to bring classes into their galleries and learn about the art that is currently on view. At Space B, they are working with the forest service and planned parenthood for two future gallery shows. They are especially excited to incorporate youth with these shows by facilitating discussions about the artworks and

Space K a non-profit in Boyle Heights. Each of these art spaces have initiatives to provide free food packages to their community, either through partnerships with produce and food non-profits or through community donations. Space B has other programs to provide their community with resources such as toy giveaways and a little free library in front of their space stocked with books in Spanish.

Two art spaces work to support people experiencing houselessness. Before the pandemic, Space B had an annual day of giving for people experiencing homelessness. Space D, a for-profit gallery in Cypress Park, uses creative minds to raise funds for youth experiencing houselessness. They also participate in clothing drives and snack pack making for the houseless community and work with an organization that focuses on supporting the houseless community.

Analysis

Interviews conducted with twelve representatives from art spaces helped answer the research question: How do art spaces in Northeast LA think about art and gentrification, and how are they addressing gentrification and/or otherwise working to benefit their community?

Many interviewees speak of gentrification outside of the art spaces interviewed to place responsibility on other parties. Though ten out of twelve interviewees acknowledged the role that art can play in gentrification, no interviewees stated that their space contributed to gentrification. The tendency of interviewees to avoid associating their spaces with gentrification could be in part because half the spaces were non-profit organizations, and three more view their space as community-based and focused. These spaces and may view their work outside of this issue because of their community efforts. However, the interviewees from the two for-profit art galleries, both located in Boyle Heights, did not associate their space with gentrification either. According to the executive director of Space F in Boyle Heights, their neighborhood had a clear face of gentrification, and the face was art. Her comments, along with one of the space's representatives srt

Art spaces opening their doors to parties in the community that are not part of their

its effects would be felt in any art space. Further mutual care box themes art spaces may wish to consider could be birth control products, menstruation products, or products for new mothers.

Space B also organized a toy giveaway around Christmas time with the leftover toys from councilmembers' donations to neighborhood councils. Other art spaces could try variations of this low-

neighborhoods about their perspectives on art's role in gentrification, and how they think art spaces could best exist in their community. Because of this, these findings should be read with

increases are capped at 4 percent or below, and establishing more units as firmly rent-capped spaces would greatly ease the strife placed upon residents at risk of eviction.

Repeal the Ellis Act

Both acts of limiting the power of the Ellis Act and repealing it completely would greatly benefit the tenants of California. These measures would limit the rapid escalation of gentrification in neighborhoods where property value may have increased in a short amount of time. Additionally, it would provide tenants with more peace of mind and security in the place they call home.

Discussion and Conclusion

Though my findings detail productive ways art spaces can involve and better their communities, it is crucial to remember that art spaces can still be harmful presences. Galleries selling higher priced paintings in lower income areas are doing a disservice to the communities where they are located. Even art spaces that seek to do good in their communities can still cause harm if they are not in tune to the needs and the implications of their existence in a particular area. This is why it is important for all art spaces to critically evaluate their role in any ga8(t)-41(-41(i)18TJETQ

Rhodes, A. M., & Schechter, R. (2014). Fostering Resilience Among Youth in

Appendices

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