

THE ART OF SOLIDARITY: ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF SOLIDARITY SPACE DAVIS

*A Community Conversation Project with members of Black Artist Foundry
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As the fiscal sponsor of Solidarity Space Davis, International House Davis (I-House) partnered with Sacramento's Black Artist Foundry (Paul Willis, Maya Wallace, and Niva Flor) to facilitate a dialogue among members of Davis' arts community to help envision the future of the Solidarity Space, and to use that effort as a frame for recommendations to incorporate racial justice into the public art processes at the City of Davis.

Background and Context

Solidarity Space Davis

- Solidarity Space is located in Davis' Central Park. It is a raised stage area designed to be a place for community engagement and performance. It looks out onto the park and the stage is an art installation of stonework.
- During the racial justice uprisings of 2020, Davis community members, led by Sule Anibaba and Kate Mellon Anibaba, began using what is now the Solidarity Space as a platform for organizing around racial justice, equity, and inclusion.
- Solidarity Space has become a community bulletin board and memorial space; individuals have adorned the stage with original artwork, bolted a print of the Black Lives Matter fist icon onto the stage, and made altars and memorials to those lost to police violence.

Davis Arts & Cultural Affairs Funding

- Prior to Covid (2020), the City of Davis issued around \$160,000 in local arts grants annually.
- The pandemic has resulted in deep cuts to the City budget and subsequently to the local arts grants program.
- The city needs to balance the existing uses for the Central Park stage with its current and ongoing usage as Solidarity Space.

Public Art at the Solidarity Space

- In July 2020, Kate Mellon Anibaba proposed public art at the Solidarity Space, including mosaics and screen-printed tiles reflecting the Solidarity Space community. This preliminary proposal did not go through an existing process and was not approved by the City of Davis Civic Arts Commission. They requested a community process for a proposal for public art at the Solidarity Space.
- Solidarity Space and I-House were awarded a grant from the City of Davis Arts and Cultural Affairs program to activate Solidarity Space Davis through June of 2022.



Solidarity Space Arts Community Meeting - 7.21.21

Meeting participants were BIPOC grassroots cultural producers and engaged arts community members. Through a workshop process, the participants were asked to identify elements of the Solidarity Space that they wanted to add, to retain or refine, and what had emerged that they wanted to stop or see less of.

Because the Solidarity Space effort is expanding its reach and focus, the group articulated a desire for some physical improvements to make Solidarity Space easier to use and more accessible, including:

- A storage closet for sound equipment and other materials for live events
- Lighting for evening events
- An electricity source
- A place to insert a flagpole
- Plexiglass covers to protect bulletin boards and other paper items
- Information kiosks

Participants expressed a desire for the space to reflect the community's diversity and center its most marginalized residents, including:

- Powerful Black women
- BIQTPOC individuals

Solidarity Space adheres to mutual aid principles. Participants suggested elements to support the surrounding community, including:

- A community box for people to offer free items
- Access to or information about other resources available in the community
- Collaboration and communication supports, such as an electronic newsletter or What'sApp Group.

To amplify marginalized voices and allow local artists to leverage solidarity space's platform, participants would like to see the City of Davis share these content through social media and other virtual platforms.

Participants had suggestions for expanding the uses of the space, including:

- Spotighting specific underrepresented artists
- Offering free and low cost classes
- Featuring permanent/semi-permanent installations
- Incorporating digital media into programming

The group made suggestions regarding artwork in original proposal by Solidarity Space founders:

- Use mirrors on mosaic to make it more reflective of the community
- Natural installations such as trees, bird feeders
- Add pillars to the mosaic for more visibility
- Consider additions such as plaques and names
- Blend permanent and temporary art across the space





PROTECTION EMERGED AS A THEME; PARTICIPANTS WANTED TO STOP:

- Vandalism
- Hate
- Intimidation

Participants wanted Solidarity Space to be used to conduct outreach and community programming, such as:

- School field trips to learn about social justice and related societal issues like climate and environment justice.
- Community arts space for artists of all mediums to repeatedly organize events and gatherings
- Inclusion of UCD student communities to participate in civic and community engagement activities with residents of Davis

Envisioning an Inclusive Public Art Process

Participants were asked to envision what they would like to see in public art processes in Davis. Suggestions and discussion fell into the following categories:

Funding

- Finding additional funding for public art via the police budget
- Using American Rescue Plan funds to support the local arts scene, with a focus on BIQTPOC artists

Process

- Grant guidelines for larger sums of money (\$50 - \$100k) so artists can dream big and pay themselves a livable wage for their contributions
- Develop a community-based grant program intentionally for members of marginalized communities
- Continue to increase City funding for community art

Access

- Offer live streaming support to increase access and help grow audiences
- Desire for more spaces for live performance and more art of and by the community
- Scholarships for youth art and more opportunities for youth to engage in art-making activities
- Create affordable housing opportunities for artists

Representation and Diversity

- Desire to see more BIPOC Commissioners
- Desire to see artwork that represents the BIPOC and LGBTQIA communities
- Less art that centers buildings, farmland, produce, inanimate objects, and more that focuses on people
- More variety in public art mediums

Collaboration

- Leverage relationship with UC Davis Art, Design, Theatre and Dance departments
- Develop more advocacy opportunities
- Collaborate with partners – parks department, Farmers Market, schools, UC Davis etc.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

from Black Artist Foundry

- Community involvement and representation is a necessary but not sufficient condition of an inclusive process. The original art proposal by Kate Anibaba includes local BIPOC artists and community partners, and is reflective of the community. However, neither the City of Davis nor the Arts Commission issued a formal RFP or developed criteria prior to the initial proposal. We believe a formalized process that is open and transparent is a fairer approach.
- We acknowledge that Kate Mellon Anibaba has created art for the city in the past under the current process. However, the City of Davis must balance it with current usages and processes, and, perhaps more critically, Davis must develop a process for equitable access to public spaces and opportunities for public art within the community. An effective, inclusive public art process should involve:
 - Transparency
 - Inclusive outreach and engagement
 - Clear, accessible selection criteria
 - Open deliberations by selection committee
 - Selection committee members from multiple communities
 - Technical assistance to applicants
- We acknowledge the need to uplift historically excluded individuals, hold space and place, even in the midst of resistance from dominant cultures and community members. Many communities and organizations have engaged in processes to develop race and equity statements. We recommend developing specific goals as part of the statement's implementation, to help hold the City accountable for measurable change.
- We recommend pursuing funding opportunities from the National Endowment for the Arts and private foundations to augment the funding allocated by the City. This year, the California Arts Council and Caltrans have significant additional resources available for public art funding. We also suggest assisting local artists with learning about grant opportunities and supporting their application processes with technical assistance.
- We encourage Davis to look at the City of Sacramento's ARP funds proposal for the creative economy, which focuses on capacity building and professional development for artists, as well as stabilization for venues. More broadly, we recommend revisiting existing funding mechanisms for public art, perhaps with an eye toward place-based approaches to funding.
- We recommend helping local officials understand the connections between thriving performing and visual arts and a healthy economy for the small businesses such as graphic designers, event planners, sign printers and others that support the broader arts economy can also generate additional revenue for the community.

Other Resources:

- See Starlight Square in Cambridge, MA as a model. The city owned a parking lot and transformed it into an event space and venue for artists, activists, small business owners and others. The space is managed by a nonprofit PBID <https://www.starlightsquare.org>
- Inventory of public art spaces: The City of Seattle has a cultural space inventory on its open data portal.