

Movers & Shakers

SD Flash Forward: Movers and Shakers Speak Out **By Patricia Frischer (San Diego Visual Arts Network) and** **Kevin Freitas (ArtasAuthority)**

It turns out we got more than we bargained for when we asked forty **Movers and Shakers**, “What is your vision for the visual arts in San Diego?” They gave a pretty precise view of their particular aspirations, seen by us as a larger reflection on what exists here already and what is ultimately needed. This included more **public art, increased exposure for local artists and sales, more galleries and cultural art centers**. Is it worth taking a closer look at what direction we want to take? Which of the following topics below needs to occur first, to break the log jam leading to a healthier art scene? We decided to find out by commenting on these flashes of the future.

Collaborations between art activists and exhibition venues are needed to travel some of our best curated shows within the county and across the border into Tijuana. Ultimately these shows could be seen statewide, nationwide even worldwide. In turn, exhibitions from other contemporary art institutions from across the land, should be scheduled into the programming here. We understand that there are many potential constraints to this type of collaboration working efficiently. Some are budgetary; some are the contrasting visions and agendas for each institution, lead times, manpower, interest, and let’s face it, a bit of apathy. Meaning the proverbial art pie, speaking of only San Diego, has been cut up and there is no more to go around. Why share? Given that everyone has their slice now and is trying to promote it as the best tasting pie in town, to the public who is doing the tasting, it all just sort of tastes the same. If we are limited by the current resources we have, why not cater to the strengths of each institution, letting them specialize in their own field of expertise, which would allow them to work closer and share resources with like minded parties. Each city has their own arts council or commission but they are constantly re-inventing the wheel to get projects done. Couldn’t there at least be a local association of city art councils or an association of art galleries like the association of art museums? This would also help the general public know where to go to get the flavor they desire.



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Artists have been adapting to the spirit of collaboration with one another for decades now, certainly online social networking and image reproduction in all formats has helped. Galleries are starting to come around but their financial capabilities are often limited –traveling shows are expensive – but their biggest problem might be the illusion that they have what everyone wants, their artists and mailing list. Collaborations are only as good as a participant’s willingness to achieve the same goal in the spirit of healthy compromise with her collaborator. Collaborations also work well for press promotions showing the strength of the visual arts to the community at large. Isn’t this what we want to ultimately portray, strength in numbers? One for all, all for one.

“I would like to see.... a synergy between arts organizations, groups, artists.... There should be a general willingness to take risks.” - **Catherine Sass** ([Port Of San Diego](#))

Galleries and Museums are only viable with support from artists, the public, and a strong collecting population. Major collectors are the back bone of our museum boards, but what we also need is fields of grass roots buyers who learn that owning original art adds a tremendous value to the quality of their lives. As for galleries, more of them mean larger amounts of artwork shown. With encouragement and a little competitive spirit, artists are pushed to do their best work and we benefit from a higher level of quality as the bar is raised.

We often take for granted, the role of the artist in society – portrayed somewhat as an outcast, or a bit *farfelu* if you will – but they are the sole entity responsible for art’s production and economic viability. They are the producer of goods that allow all of us who work in this field to keep on doing what we love so much. How those goods are then distributed, is of course dependent on galleries and museums. While it is not often clear as to who benefits more from this “marriage” of convenience and necessity, the fact remains, if one of them fails, they both fail. Be careful what you wish for Mr. Davies, your first two wishes could also be within your command.

“I would wish to see San Diego become home to a greater number of significant artists due to having more exhibition opportunities, more collectors, and more commercial galleries.” - **Hugh Davies** ([Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego](#))



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Collectors and Community dialogue supply that vital commodity: feedback. For example, collectors buy, giving reinforcement to artists. And emerging artists can be mentored by established artists. An active community arts voice insures success by dissemination of information in the form of printed media and Internet resources such as SDVAN. SDVAN is founded on the principal of encouraging these exchanges and is starting a new feature, *Picked RAW Peeled* which will reveal artistic events in more detail. Too, the mushrooming of Collector clubs all over San Diego can build a larger social network with peer education in the arts at the same time support artists monetarily and proudly.

We like to think that everyone is a collector of something, whether it is stories or art. We also believe that there is a difference between the notion that individuals with “money” are also the same individuals “with money who buy art” or somehow, that they should be the same. There’s no accounting for taste obviously and if you stand in a gallery long enough, something will get sold. But that isn’t the point. The goal is to provide access to many types of art, in all different price ranges, that allow the connoisseurs as well as the amateurs, to pick and choose freely. The objective, for those of us whose job it is to provide this access, is as the critic Arthur C. Danto points out, “That is what education is in art. Helping people find their way. It is [rather] explaining why each work is good in its own way.” Collectors are educated in the art of looking and are only motivated to buy, when the artist has done her job of making work that is good.

Finally, feedback is vital, it is crucial, so is showing support for each other’s endeavors. Recognize the past, but move forward. Talk to everyone, “introduce yourself as Delacroix and hand them your wet brushes” as Larry Rivers use to jokingly say, don’t be afraid to let people in on the artistic process, your fears, your joys, and your art. Dialoguing is for life.

“Influential people need to be educated in the process of purchasing art, actively.” - **Gustav Rooth** ([Planet Rooth](#))

“...a future with.... card carrying collectors with ID that states "I belong, I buy art, do you?" - **Kevin Freitas** ([ArtasAuthority](#))

“If I could make two changes favorable to the visual arts in San Diego, one would be to have more



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venues, commercial and otherwise, so the numerous talented artists in the region would have ample opportunities to exhibit; the other, to have more intelligent writing about these artists and their work.” - **Robert Pincus** ([The San Diego Union-Tribune and Sign-On San Diego](#))

Art Fairs like the one in Miami/Basel could become a standard feature on our events calendar. Ann Berchtold wants to work with our neighbors north and south and hopes especially to promote emerging artists in the first years of the fair. Most major cities have their own annual art fairs, the closest to us, is our friendly neighbor to the north L.A. Why not here in San Diego? We’re afraid that the answer to this is a varied as the logistics and investment it would take to create it. Is it possible we think so; perhaps a look at the success of Comic-Con might give us some clues? Is it for tomorrow or on next year’s cultural agenda, probably not, but efforts are in the works as witnessed by Berchtold’s commitment. It will certainly take more than a strong commitment as one of the first goals would be to establish an infrastructure, capable of supporting such an event. This would of course entail some major political and financial decisions. Many European countries have “sister” cities that enable them to exchange talent and culture on many different platforms from music to the arts to theater. Perhaps San Diego can “host” and vice versa be “guests” in collaboration with another country or for logistical sake, another State here in the U.S. Sending some of our talented artists to the many Biennials would also encourage an outside appreciation of our artistic production, proving that we have the depth to hang with the big boys.

“Launch a successful contemporary art fair in San Diego that becomes a catalyst to encourage collecting art, showcases this cities art institutions and artists, and promotes international cultural tourism.” - **Ann Berchtold**, ([Beyond the Borders Art Fair](#))

Youth and Education are fundamental. Teaching art as parents and volunteers, in most public schools, makes it obvious that we need a consistent and comprehensive arts education curriculum for every institution. Go talk to your son or daughter's Principal now or write a letter to your school's Superintendent, asking for more art. It seems the real issues we’re all facing, is the simple question of who’s going to pay, and if it’s going to be you and us as taxpayers, what are we willing to pay for? And do we have a choice? It is a debate that our attempts even to address it here in a



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few paragraphs, is much too ineffective. We as a country for the most part, universally accept the idea that the basics in school are necessary – reading, writing and arithmetic – but also know that the human spirit and mind is capable of much more, in fact, it craves more. Art in essence is not a luxury, it is a necessity of the human species that will manifest itself in a multitude of ways, not always under the heading of art, but which is as creative, just, and a much needed nourishment for the soul. Creativity knows no unemployment and will always find work.

"Start with art education in the schools for life enhancement and future support of the arts in the community." - **Ellen Phelan** (Art activist, educator, and contemporary art collector).

Public Art created a general consensus amongst the Movers and Shakers that was heard loud and clear. San Diego needs more of it. There was a slightly higher demand to integrate art and artists into any future city planning or development. We like the idea, mentioned more than once, to have temporary outdoor public sculptures placed throughout the city. Rotating them out as new ones come in would be stimulating, exciting, and opens up the possibility for fresher stronger works. We applaud **April Game's** placement of sculptures in Quail Gardens as a step in the right direction.

Though we did not ask for the state of Public Art in San Diego as it currently exists, interestingly enough, there was hardly a mention of what is here in public art already, notably downtown, at UCSD, and on the waterfront. If the vision is to have more, does this mean that there is not enough? What is there to be learned in the statement, "I would like to see more public art." What is it about public art that creates this desire or repulsion in some cases, and leaves its public wanting more of it? It is difficult to know perhaps, how cost effective public sculpture is and how much interest it truly generates. If like Miami/Basel, we were looking for a model for an art fair; than we believe Chicago would be the model to base our own public sculpture program upon. Let it be known, Mayoral influence, money, and manpower, is nine-tenths responsible for the building of [Millennium Park](#). It is also what Chicagoans are most proud of, beside their baseball.



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"I would create a plan with the City of San Diego to integrate local art and artists as well as non indigenous artists into every aspect of public design as well as part of the chamber of commerce" – **Debra Poteet** (Collector).

Studios and Housing is a county wide issue. Only three people thought artists could benefit from more affordable housing and studio space. It is probably safe to say, not just artists, but anyone living and renting within the county of San Diego could use less expensive housing. In the end, you still have to make the art no matter how big the loft is. So, the question is, does every artist need a studio these days? Not likely. A better use of space might be collective work/live centers or cultural centers, like the one San Diego's **Monica Hoover** is working on, located in the former Wonder Bread factory (Ballpark District), or the LUX Institute amongst others. Besides, what are the chances of a perfect storm in the form of the blustery days of SoHo with Johns living above Rauschenberg, heated debates about painting at the Cedar Tavern, and blockbuster exhibits at Leo Castelli, ever coalescing in 2008 let alone in San Diego? This is not criticism, it is about the potential and the physical territory and the boundaries of studio space, where artists have chosen to live. The galleries, and even the art supply stores, are too scattered to warrant the need of a larger supportive structure. The closest we've come to a discernable degree of synergy, is in North Park.

" Through Synergy Art Foundation's Barrio Logan/East Village Arts District (Believe Project), we hope to provide local artists with work/live spaces, a cultural center, exhibition/workshop space, and the ability to unify and support our visual arts community. The ultimate goal is to establish San Diego as a vital international cultural destination." - **Naomi Bianca Nussbaum** (Director [Synergy Arts Foundation](#) and the [BL/EV Project](#))

\$\$\$! Everyone wants it, but artists and the people whose support they depend on, hardly get any. One way to encourage creativity and less dependency on the good will of others, is to stop bartering for services and goods when putting on shows and productions and pay for it, if you're doing the inviting. Artists are as guilty as anyone else in this exchange of free commerce and often end up the victims, giving up time and money for a "free" show and a line on their resume. A more



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proactive stance would be to increase local public and private grants and funding, City and local government philanthropy, create small business loans for galleries, and the buying of art. It just might do the trick. Let's stop thinking of art as a charity and remember it has great value. We are not looking for a handout from others; we are looking for the same basic economic structure that allows millions of Americans to go to work everyday and eventually allows them to retire.

"Diversity of art in both media and style and the democratic selection of art are the best ways to regain public faith and improve finance in the art world. This would enhance the lives of artists, improve the financial viability and ensure growth of art institutions and museums, and greatly improve the public's perception of the art world." – **Dennis Paul Batt** (Executive Director: [Museum Artists Foundation](#), [San Diego Visual Artists Guild](#), [Outdoor Art Foundation](#), [American Masters of Stone](#))

Finally, a special award is given to **Jean Lowe** ([SD Art Prize](#)), for her cheerleading efforts in support of the arts: " San Diego has a really energetic and interesting art scene--it just needs to believe it!!"

The answer in the end might be just a question of confidence.

To read all the visions of our San Diego [Movers and Shakers](#) go to the [Movers and Shakers website](#) (courtesy of [SD Visual Arts Guild](#)) where you can also see them portrayed by local artists. You can see the show in person from Sept 5 until Oct 4 presented by [San Diego Visual Arts Network](#) at [Art Expressions Gallery](#) : 2645 Financial Court, Suite C, San Diego, CA 92117 [Link for map to gallery](#) Exhibition hours: Monday - Friday 9am-5pm, Saturday 10am-5pm More info: [Patricia Frischer](#) 760.943.0148 or [Patricia Smith](#) 858.270.7577

Patricia Frischer, author of "The Artist and the Art of Marketing", has lectured extensively on marketing for artists. She is a trainer of artists' agents, art dealers, consultant and collectors. Frischer has taken on the roles of gallerist, curator, writer, teacher, website coordinator and artist. Her many metamorphoses make her difficult to fit into any of the usual art world categories. She is



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a founding member and coordinator of the San Diego Visual Arts Network, (www.SDVAN.net) which funds the SD Art Prize, directory and events calendar and SmART Collector features. Her own artwork (www.DrawsCrowd.com) has been shown internationally and her most recent one person show was at Oxford University.

Kevin Freitas has been involved in the arts for most of his life (not in any particular order) as: a gallery dealer, artist, art transporter and now blogger and art writer. He constructs these occasional reviews of Visual Arts Exhibitions in the San Diego region which are posted on [Art As Authority](#). The views of this author are not necessarily the views of the San Diego Visual Arts Network.

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