

have always been relatively short in the history of mankind". Even Arendt's cosmology is predicated upon an infinite series of improbable miracles:

"For from the viewpoint of the processes in the universe and in nature, and their statistically overwhelming probabilities, the coming into being, of the earth out of cosmic processes, the formation of organic life out of inorganic processes, the evolution of man, finally, out of the processes of organic life are all 'infinite probabilities', they are 'miracles' in everyday language."

This possibility for historical miracles, whereby freely acting humans redirect history's course to establish a reality of their own, is embedded in Arendt's optimistic view of human capability: "to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom". Art history is full of improbable miracles. As such, every existing thought-thing continues to inject fresh concepts into human discourse, thus altering history's past and future.

Since ecoventions stand to transform local ecologies, they stand as the most tangible manifestation of art's disruptive role. As experiments carried out in the context of the art world, ecoventions are able to withstand a higher level of risk than similar scientific experiments. Such experiments usually cost less as works of art and garner broad support as community-building public projects, a feature that gives ecoventions a distinct advantage over pure science. Furthermore, their success isn't judged by the artists' ultimate ability to publish the results or repay sponsors, as would be the case for scientists. Ecoventions are viewed as a positive contribution that makes a long-term restoration project immediately attractive to a wider audience. By uniting the 'I will' and the 'I can', they provide public models for freedom at a time when liberty is most in jeopardy.

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Artscapes

Susan Leibovitz Steinman salvages materials directly from community waste streams to construct public art that connects common daily experiences to broader social issues.

In the late 1980's, after 18 years as a professional ceramic artist / sculptor, I began creating 'Artscapes' – environmental sculptures and installations that connect political and personal community life, global and local ecological issues. Site-specific and audience-specific, Artscapes celebrate the values of community-based self-determination, collective action, and art as functional part of everyday life.

In transitioning materials and genres, I try to carry forward what I most admire of the ceramic arts community: its earth-based, no-material-waste work ethic. It's labor-intensive, socially functional, technically demanding, and aesthetically rewarding art. Despite real need and creative egos, there's a shared global language among ceramic artists that transcends politics and borders, and is worth studying.

Over the last dozen plus years, the Artscape projects have increased in scale and complexity. Most are temporary and involve community participation or audience interaction. Designed for multiple functions and meanings, the aspiration is to create aesthetically dynamic, conceptually relevant artworks that function as educational greenscape models of bio-intensive gardening, bioremediation, reclamation and recycling. A more mercurial double-sided goal is to critique precarious ecological and social situations and still, to constructively seed hope through action.

**COLLABORATION is key.
INCLUSION is achieved via
collaboration.**

Collaborations – with public school students, community action groups,

community college horticulture students, public infrastructure staff, and other artists – are essential to this methodology. The primary collaborators may be teachers or grass-roots community leaders. For example, rather than my 'teaching' students, I collaborate with the classroom teacher whose on-going relationship with his/her students fosters a deeper exploration of issues and a richer art experience.



'Power Towers East', 1996, temporary installation in series, specific to each site. Salvaged shopping carts, native live trees, outdated computer parts, stones or debris. This one is at Empire Fulton Ferry State Park on the East River, in Brooklyn, New York. Rubble was collected from nearby demolished housing sites. Loaned and/or salvaged carts from nearby streets. Later, the indigenous trees were permanently planted in the park.

Picture provided by Susan Leibovitz Steinman

Collaboration is based on a political belief that people and organizations living in affected communities have a right to participate in a process to create the context and content of public art.

Structurally, collaboration allows me to work on several projects at a time, which is helpful working with communities, cities, permit processes and the like where timeframes are not under the artist's control. It also allows me to work with a vast range of personalities and agendas, visiting different worlds through different people. It's a form of itinerant art that has as many possibilities as people working on any given project.

Collaboration has a built-in critique mechanism that allows for exploring further

than one could realize individually. There's an unpredictable magic that occurs in the best of collaborations that can be addictive.

PERMISSION

Mine is essentially an art of permission. An itinerant, project-driven artist, I acknowledge that I'm a guest in every community, and try to gauge my behavior as if I were invited into someone's home. I design to stated community needs and desires, not really any different than architects or landscape architects who design for clients. The community and the environment are my clients.

COMMUNITY

It's important to define 'community' narrowly and carefully. I don't collaborate with 'The community', but rather 'A community' – a subset of self-selecting community members and grass-root organizations that are project stakeholders.

OWNERSHIP

Ownership resides in community, not the artist. I have strong ideas about ownership, where it helps and where it is harmful. Ownership of material goods for the sake of seeing who has the biggest pile is not helpful to environmental or human health. Conversely, ownership and pride are integral ingredients to fostering stewardship – of the environment, of public art, of neighborhoods, cities, countries. You do not take care of what you do not feel part of. Participation fosters empathy, leadership and stewardship.

LOCATION

As context- and content-builder, site selection is critical. To function as community and environmental catalysts, it is important the installations are created in publicly accessible, highly visible locations. A favorite site is median strips on shopping streets, major thoroughfares and open sites adjacent to community centers and well-used gathering places. Indoor sites are best in street-front windows.

VALUE OF TEMPORARY ART IN THE PUBLIC ARENA

Needing smaller budgets and shorter permit processes, more temporary art can get done in less time. Communities are not afraid to experiment on short-term basis. I often say that the public art process takes



'River of Hopes and Dreams', 1992, permanent 3-acre sculpture garden designed as a model of reclamation, resource conservation, recycling, and community involvement for San Francisco's waste and recycling plant Artist-in-Residence Program. 100 local high school students and SFC staff participated in the artwork. Used for educational programs for 3000+ visitors per year.

three years and three weeks: three years to get permission and raise funds, then three weeks to install.

Personally I like a mix of longer and short-term projects to keep the ideas flowing and my hands and mind busy. There is a spontaneity and joy in working on an almost improvisational basis to build short-term installations that is missing in the high level of pre-planning needed for long-term work.

There are so many degraded urban spaces that will take years of money and political wrangling to fix up (if ever). Through temporary art and garden projects, the public could make good use of undervalued land, physically and psychologically improving blighted areas. Temporary creative structures that enhance the health and aesthetics of neighborhoods also enhance the potential of new economic investment.

WHAT IS PERMANENT ART IN AN IMPERMANENT AGE?

So-called permanent art has to somehow be failure-free, which only ensures that it will look like something safely produced

elsewhere. Composting and recycling art and art materials makes room for more art to be created.

POSITIVITY vs. NEGATIVITY in PUBLIC PROCESS AND CONTEXT – WHAT CAN YOU REALLY GET DONE, or WHY BOTHER?

Exposed to political and meteorological calamities, this kind of artwork takes a certain amount of hubris and alligator-skin grit. Disappointment, frustrations and failures are built-ins. There is never enough money, nor enough time, which is part creative challenge and part unending frustration. Poor neighborhoods and degraded natural and/or urban sites, like art and health care, are the last to get funds in good times and the first to lose funds when the economy weakens.

Often it seems like not much can be changed or accomplished. The permit process can be overwhelming and defeating. The human process, too, can be painful. With so many needs unmet, even a King Solomon would be stymied for the thankless task of dividing a hardtack pie. There are no easy answers, and no easy public projects.

In this genre one can only hope to stay flexible, knowing that no matter what goals a project begins with, it will finish as something shaped more by process and circumstances than strict artistic control.

The rewards are the human and natural histories that emerge in the process. The story-telling and emerging layers of buried histories are worth the journey.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIELD OVER THE INDIVIDUAL

In the final analysis, I believe the cumulative effect of the field is much more important than any one work of art. There are many ways to affect positive change, and we need them all. The only choice is to keep trying. Without action, despite failure, there is no hope.

Susan is currently working on community and artist collaborations in Kentucky together with Suzanne Lacy and Yutaka Kobayashi, and in the Pacific Northwest with Jackie Brookner. Together with Jo Hanson she produces the Women Environmental Artists Directory, WEAD (<http://lwead.dreamfish-creative.com>). Contact Sue on alsteinmann@aol.com or visit www.steinmanstudio.com

