



Strategic Plan 2008-2011



*My Memories | Photo: Joaquim Macamo, Age 16 | Maputo, Mozambique | 2007 | From The House Is Small
But The Welcome Is Big*

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610 California Avenue, Venice CA 90291 | 310.578.1745.



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Untitled | Photo: Tony Bautista, Age 17 | Los Angeles CA | 2008 | From Venice Arts' ArtPartners program with the St. Francis Center

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A Vision for the Future

We enter our 15th year proud of what we've accomplished and inspired by the opportunities before us, with clarity of vision, a new mission, and strategic directions that we believe will serve us well for the next three to five years.

We see our Center in Venice as [a vibrant community arts and media learning hub](#): a place where youth from diverse communities can find their creative voice, broaden their knowledge, and develop their skills; where adults can learn how to use digital media tools; where both novice and accomplished artists can exhibit their work; and where staff can incubate new ideas, experiment, and innovate.

While growing our Center in Venice remains vital to our vision, we also intend to continue to extend our programs—[and accessible arts and media learning](#)—to impoverished communities within Los Angeles and beyond. We imagine accomplishing this both by strengthening our ArtPartners program and by more actively contributing to the field through training, consultation, and special project support.

Our founding mission has served us well: *to bring professional artists together with low-income young people to nurture their creativity, imagination, and talents.* As an outcome of this plan, [a more comprehensive mission was created](#): *to ignite youths' imagination, mentor their creativity, and expand their sense of possibility through high quality, accessible media-based arts education programs; and to serve as a catalyst for people of all ages, living in low-income or underrepresented communities, to create and share personal and community stories through photography, film, and multi-media.* In support of this mission, we have developed the following strategic directions:

- 1) Increase leadership and visibility in participant-produced documentary work.
- 2) Expand our reach to economically disadvantaged youth living outside of Venice.
- 3) Complete integration of Internet-based technology into programs and admin.
- 4) Provide an optimal work environment for participants, staff, and volunteers.

The balance of this document outlines each direction, which represent a major or new initiative, and also describes how we hope to improve our ongoing programs.

Strategic Plan *DETAIL*



Beautiful Agony | Photo: Francesca Thomas, Age 16 | Venice CA | 2004 | From *Advanced Studies: Photo*

Strategic Plan *DETAIL*

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS 2004-07

In Fall 2006, we found that we had reached or made substantive progress toward achieving the goals outlined in our 2004–07 Strategic Plan. Among our achievements, we:

- Grew the depth, quality, and impact of our Art Mentoring program through standardizing course syllabi, with clearly articulated arts proficiency standards, and by placing a paid Lead Artist in every workshop to improve program quality and consistency. We also completed a two-year evaluation of our model that looked at arts learning and the impact of mentoring through the arts on children's self-efficacy and sense of community. The data from this assessment affirmed the strengths of our model and informed our program refinements.
- Expanded our capacity to retain long-term participants once they entered their teens by increasing sequential programs, developing more workshops of interest to teens, and piloting an Advanced Studies program to include paid Youth Art Internships and placements with creative businesses affiliated with the Venice Media District.
- Improved our facilities and better housed our growing programs and staff by adding a second facility, a small storefront Gallery/annex, which significantly increased our visibility and sense of place in our community, while allowing us to engage a broader constituency.
- Developed our internal capacities to sustain our programs over the long-term by building our individual and business donor revenue stream, making significant improvements to our database, institutionalizing our fall individual and Business Art Circle campaign, and realizing a steady increase in both grant and unrestricted support.

Strategic Plan *DETAIL*

PLANNING METHODOLOGY

Our planning update process included analyzing internal achievements, strengths, and weaknesses; discussing the external social and economic environment and, in particular, the changing economic demographics within Venice; initiating a series of discussions between and amongst staff, board, parents, mentors, and youth about their vision for Venice Arts' future; and conducting Key Informant interviews to hear from community leaders on trends in the funding, social, and economic sectors. Based on data derived from these efforts, we framed our strategic intentions and articulated our program refinements goals.

DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The following reviews each Strategic Direction, identifies key goal(s), and outlines data and discussions that informed the development of each direction.

1) Increase leadership and visibility in participant-produced documentary work.

Goal:

- Develop the Institute for Photographic Empowerment with the USC Center on Communication Leadership.

Discussion: Well before we initiated our current planning process, we were interested in how we might more actively engage with others in what we believed was now a burgeoning field: participant-produced photography. We felt that our own history in the field, dating to 1993, the pioneering work of our Creative Director, Jim Hubbard, and the many enquiries that we have received over the years from people around the world, positioned us to take more leadership. We were especially interested in a partnership with an academic institution, as we felt that academe's interest in the area—whether through visual anthropology, visual sociology, communications, public health research, or art—could be enriched through an understanding of practitioners' experiences—and that the converse would also be true.

Strategic Plan *DETAIL*

During our planning year, through the efforts of Board Member Neal Baer, we had the fortune to meet with Geoffrey Cowan, then Dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication. Our meetings resulted in the joint establishment of the Institute for Photographic Empowerment in October 2007.

Goal: Commit to bi-annual Social Art Initiatives—local, national, or international participant-produced documentary projects of significance.

Discussion: We determined that staff had reached saturation in terms of being able to absorb the work related to implementing participant-produced projects. It became clear that there needed to be an explicit commitment to continuing this work with dedicated funds, including for a new staff position. It was also determined that our impact would be maximized if projects were linked, whenever possible, with organizations that could use the images or film to advance their social justice and/or community advocacy concerns.

2) Expand our reach to economically disadvantaged youth living outside of Venice.

Goals:

- Identify a stable ArtPartner for program expansion, and assist with site-based technology and equipment to support the provision of nine workshops, per annum, at the ArtPartner.
- Explore the feasibility of partners transporting youth to Venice Arts' media center so that they may take full-advantage of our resources and programs.

Discussion: As the visibility of Venice Arts' programs has grown over the years and, in particular, our innovative work in photography and digital media learning, we have received numerous requests to develop ongoing programs or special projects in communities outside of Venice and, in some cases, outside of Los Angeles. Concurrently, Venice's economic demographics have shifted, with many affluent residents moving in, housing prices soaring, and poor families being squeezed out—although there is still a significant population of families living in their own homes, long-term rentals, or Section 8 apartments.

Strategic Plan *DETAIL*

Although we have managed to stay true to our mission as Venice has changed, we have had to dedicate significant staff resources to reach local low-income families, as well as to reach and retain volunteers who, unlike in our first decade, no longer primarily live in Venice. We debated the pros and cons of staying in Venice, moving to a community with greater need, or expanding our ArtPartners' program to Los Angeles' most impoverished communities.

Moving our organization did not seem to be the most strategic option, as we have strong ties to the community, there remain many low-income families on the west side, and our roots and reputation—while growing throughout the region—are strongest locally. We also felt that there was an opportunity to increase giving to our programs for low-income children through the support of Venice's newer businesses and residents, many of whom are in the arts or entertainment and may have a natural affinity for our work. Finally, we decided that the synergy of our highly creative staff, working in a well-equipped arts and media center, best supports our interest in experimenting and incubating new ideas, with benefit to all of our programs and projects in Los Angeles or beyond.

3) Complete integration of Internet-based technology into programs and administration.

Goal: Complete the development of our interactive, arts-based social networking site, Beyond MySpace, to support our programs, administration, and fundraising.

Discussion: Initiated in 2006 through a class with youth, Beyond MySpace represents the cutting edge of interactive technology, offering youth an online opportunity for social networking that is based on their creativity. In addition to art and digital media learning components, the underlying software architecture holds tremendous potential for both Venice Arts and the nonprofit sector, as a whole.

Internally, our goal is to use the site's functionality to support a redesigned venice-arts.org; streamline our programs, administration, and fundraising efforts; and assure that important organizational assets, such as curricula and art work, are available to staff and mentors regardless of their site location.

Strategic Plan **DETAIL**

Once we have met our internal needs, we anticipate providing “micro– sites” to other nonprofit organizations working with youth, offering a significant benefit to the nonprofit community—particularly, although not exclusively, those working in media arts—as well as building a larger online network of young artists interacting online and through their art without regard for the usual boundaries of neighborhood or, even, nation.

4) Provide an optimal work environment for participants, staff, and volunteers.

Goal: Move Venice Arts programs and operations into one central facility.

Discussion: After three years, demand for our programs and a larger staff resulted in our outgrowing both our 800 square foot Gallery/annex, secured in 2004, and our long-time space at the City-owned Vera Davis Center. A Facilities Committee of the Board was created to explore our options, preferably bringing all Venice-based staff and programs together in one facility. After ratification of this plan, we lost our Gallery lease and moved to a new, 1,600 square foot space. Together with continued tenancy at the Vera Davis Center, we think this will offer a wonderful transitional venue, while we explore options for securing a facility, such as the potential of securing an under-used City facility in Venice or initiating a capital campaign to purchase a building.

Refinement GOALS



Men at Table | Photo by Angie Nguyen, Age 15, San Gabriel, CA | 2008 | From Venice Arts' project for the Chinese American Museum *Picture This!* [Courtesy of the Chinese American Museum]

Refinement GOALS

ART MENTORING

In addition to defining strategic directions, we established goals for refining ongoing programs and operations. These are outlined by area, with target dates, below.

1. Enroll 150 youth in sequential, mentoring programs in Venice, up from 125 youth, previously. (2008–2009)
2. Evaluate and refine artist training. (2008 evaluate; 2009 implement redesign)
3. Pilot special training for paid Lead Artists (3) and Artistic Faculty (5). (2009)
4. Build a larger base of beginning/intermediate students, closely mentoring youth and retaining at least 60% of youth over multiple sessions and/or years. (2009)
5. Institutionalize Advanced Studies, serving 25 youth annually. (2009–10)

GALLERY

1. Bring focus to gallery exhibits, including soliciting work—by children and adults—of social significance, seeking funds to host shows, and supporting youth–curated exhibits. (2009)

VISIBILITY, BRAND AND MARKETING

1. Clarify and better express, through branding and identity design, the growing scope and geographic reach of Venice Arts' programs and activities, including creating new names, missions/purpose, and logos for Social Art Initiatives and Beyond MySpace. (2008)

DEVELOPMENT

1. Add a part-time staff member to the development team. (2009)
2. Grow individual gifts by 5%–10% per year through a comprehensive, strategic donor development strategy. (2008–2011)
3. Diversify and expand unrestricted, earned revenue sources including revenues from paying students and from special adult workshops and programs. (2009–10)

SUMMARY



Teresa Pacheco | Photo: Timmie Escobedo, Age 13 | Venice, CA | 2008 | From Intermedia Black & White Photography

My Great-Grandmother, Teresa Pacheco.

This was the first time I've met her that I can recall. She was fragile, like a little bird, and seemed to be fluent in English and Spanish. She had been hospitalized because of pneumonia



A Calla Lily In My Front Yard.

I was playing around with a red filter. Just a happy accident that it happened to compliment the picture of my great-grandmother.

SUMMARY

Our planning process—the series of discussions, brainstorming, drawings, emails, and reflections—allowed us time to pause from our daily work and consider both our achievements and our best hopes for the future.

We are so grateful to each person who participated actively with us: Our board of directors who, as voluntary stewards of our organization, often do not receive the acknowledgement that is their due. Our staff, who had to carve sufficient time out of busy schedules and competing demands to think clearly and creatively. The many volunteer artists, parents, and kids who contributed their valuable perspectives—particularly about what works well, what can change, and what their best hope would be for the next generation of artists and youth involved at Venice Arts. And, finally, the community leaders who graciously gave their time and expertise, particularly to reflect on external challenges and opportunities and how these might shape our dreams. To each of you, thank you. It is our hope that you will feel as we do: that the outcome of this process, this strategic plan, will serve us well in focusing, deepening, and broadening our impact in our communities and on the lives of youth.

APPENDICES



Russian Couple with Memories | Photo: Daniel Korochkin-Zoryn, Age 17 | West Hollywood, CA | 2004
From *In a New Land: Photos by Russian-speaking Refugee & Immigrant Youth*

Program Impacts.....A

Educational Philosophy.....B

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Program *IMPACTS*

• *BUILDING LITERACY WHILE FOSTERING COMMUNITY* Our free, year-round Art Mentoring programs in Los Angeles build art, media and digital literacy through close mentoring in photography, filmmaking, digital arts and interactive media for youth ages 10 to 18, and through multidisciplinary art discovery workshops for children ages 6 to 9. The mentoring model, and our emphasis on long-term involvement in our programs, fosters a sense of community in both artists and youth. Our custom-designed web site, [Beyond MySpace](#), supports an online, arts-based learning community that complements real-time arts education, while connecting youth from diverse areas through their art. On Beyond MySpace, youth post art in all genres, blog, share ideas, initiate projects, create galleries, and learn from one another and from their mentors.

• *DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ARTISTS* In our [Advanced Studies](#) program, talented teens have the opportunity to develop their creative and technology skills and knowledge, receive support for self-directed projects, and create portfolios for secondary schools, art institutions, college and universities, and professional opportunities. They may also work as [Youth Art Interns](#) at Venice Arts or in creative businesses of the [Venice Media District](#).

The [Venice Arts Gallery](#) offers a professional space for Venice Arts' students to exhibit their work, features art by young artists from around the world, and serves as a community gallery for professional artists from the local area.

• *ENCOURAGING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT* Through our [Social Art Initiatives](#), conducted locally, nationally, and internationally, Venice Arts teaches documentary photography and film to help marginalized youth and adults tell their stories and explore the social issues that impact their lives.

At our [Institute for Photographic Empowerment](#), jointly run with the USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership, we support the study and practice of participant-produced projects in photography, film, and digital media. The Institute is a resource for people from around the globe—photographers, filmmakers, academics, researchers, and project participants—to share ideas, learn from one another, and develop the field.

Program PHILOSOPHY

- *ARTISTS AS MENTORS AND EDUCATORS* Workshops are led by paid Artistic Faculty supported by volunteer artists working as mentors in the classroom. Paid faculty help assure the quality and consistency of the learning experience, while engaging volunteers allows us to provide a low artist-to-youth ratio of 1:1 to 1:4. This structure provides youth the benefits of both individual attention and group learning, and exposes them to a variety of emerging and working artists. The high level of volunteer involvement by artists also contributes to the strong sense of community at Venice Arts, of benefit to the volunteers, kids, and organization as a whole.
- *AN EMPHASIS ON CONTENT AND CREATIVITY* While our programs are, by nature, technologically intensive, we view technology as another set of tools for youth to use to express their ideas. We are careful to first emphasize content and creativity and provide ample opportunities for “off-line” experimentation with a variety of materials.
- *SEQUENTIAL LEARNING* Our curriculum provides foundation learning relevant to each discipline and a sequential pathway for talented students interested in deepening and broadening their creative and technical skills and knowledge. As the creation of art is increasingly multi- and inter-disciplinary, youth participating in our programs over the long-term learn how to work fluidly in multiple media.
- *THE CLASSROOM AS A LEARNING LAB* Our educational methods reflect principles and practices in art education, digital media learning for youth, and mentoring with high value placed on hands-on learning and on enquiry and experimentation. We believe that learning is a dynamic process and that the most exciting and rewarding learning experiences—for both student and teacher—are both structured and responsive. Thus, while each workshop has a syllabus with learning objectives that support State of California Arts Proficiency Standards, we encourage our artist-mentors to be flexible in their approach and to view the classroom as a learning lab.

CONTACT

EXECUTIVE STAFF [2008]

- Lynn Warshafsky | Founder/Exec. Director | lynn@venice-arts.org
- Jim Hubbard | Creative Director | jim@venice-arts.org
- Joanne Kim | Director of Education | joanne@venice-arts.org
- Liz Koravos | Development Coordinator | liz@venice-arts.org

PROGRAMS | WEB SITES

- Arts & Media Learning Center | Venice | www.venice-arts.org
- Beyond MySpace | The Virtual World | www.beyondmyspace.org
- Institute for Photographic Empowerment | L.A. | www.joinipe.org
- Social Art Initiatives | Worldwide | www.thehouseissmall.org

PARTNERS [2008]

- USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership | L.A., CA
- Chinese American Museum | L.A., CA
- Mar Vista Family Center | Mar Vista, CA
- Olympic Continuation High School | Santa Monica, CA
- OPCC | Santa Monica, CA
- Reencontro | Maputo, Mozambique
- Slauson Rec & Parks | L.A., CA
- St. Francis Center | L.A., CA
- UNICEF | Mozambique