

Transforma Projects

National Performance Network

Transforma Projects, conceived as a multi-year initiative to support, nurture and celebrate creative practices that impact the social and physical environment, specifically within New Orleans, is guided by Rick Lowe, Jessica Cusick, Sam Durant and Robert Ruelo, who bring expertise in a diversity of fields. Over the past year, Transforma Projects [1] hosted numerous forums for artists and community members in New Orleans, [2] convened multiple the Leadership Team on many occasions to plan the internal structure of the initiative, [3] developed an open – source website for community-based projects, and [4] directly funded and offered capacity support to three pilot projects, guided by both local and national artists.

[1] **Transforma Projects Forums:** Multiple events were hosted in New Orleans which engaged active members of the local and national communities in critical conversation regarding the actions and processes of Transforma Projects. Members of the Leadership Team, leaders of the pilot projects, local artists and community activists attended.

- **March 31 – April 1, 2007** (Held at Xavier University and the International House Hotel.) Nearly 50 individuals attended the meeting during which the development of the website was discussed, the pilot projects and other local initiatives were presented and a general roundtable discussion was facilitated about the concept of Transforma Projects.
- **December 7 – 9, 2007** (Held at the Loews Hotel and Ashé Cultural Arts Center) Hosted in conjunction with the NPN Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Transforma Projects hosted two sessions to critically discuss the pilot projects, the website and the overall concept of the initiative. Participants included members of the local arts and neighborhood communities, in addition to artists and colleagues from the NPN Annual Meeting. The pilot projects were presented, a virtual tour through the website was demonstrated and an open discussion was held.

[2] **Leadership Team Meetings:** Members of the Leadership Team traveled to New Orleans on multiple occasions to meet with the leaders of the pilot projects, local community representatives and explore the physical and cultural landscape of the city.

- **August 11 – 12, 2007:** Discussed plans for the website launch, outlined milestones for the coming year, considered a staffing plan, and met with the local pilot projects.
- **November 2 – 3, 2007:** Attended Creative Time's performance of *Waiting for Godot*, participated in local arts events and discussed internal planning.
- **January 18 – 21, 2008:** Met with the participants of the pilot projects and introduced the M.F.A. candidates from Otis School of Design working with Suzanne Lacy to artists. Over the Martin Luther King Weekend, the team participated in various conversations and volunteer events throughout the city, including a clean-up at the Plessy Park site.

[3] **Website:** The Transforma Projects website (www.transformaprojects.org) was developed in a manner to encourage social networking within the creative community. A comprehensive content management system was developed in a manner that will support a diversity of future uses. The intent of the open-source website is to encourage artists and local community groups to post their projects, whether completed or in the development phase. The populated website will serve as a resource and digital space to encourage future project development and creative collaboration amongst artists and communities alike.

[4] **Pilot Projects:** The three pilot projects exemplify distinct models for engaging with community; one as a collaboration between artists and educational institutions (*Home, New Orleans?*), one artist initiated (*Fundred / Paydirt*), one community initiated (*Plessy Park*). Each project has been financially supported by Transforma Projects and continues to be supported in an infrastructural manner.

- ***Home, New Orleans?*** This collaborative project produced a series of performances and installations in four hurricane-affected neighborhoods within New Orleans; Seventh Ward, Ninth Ward, Central City and Lakeview. The efforts are a collaborative between artists, community organizations and the faculty and students from Xavier, Tulane, Dillard and New York Universities. A cross-disciplinary course has been developed as a joint – effort between Dillard, Tulane and Xavier universities and is being offered for the second time in the spring semester of 2008. Transforma Projects has supported *Home, New Orleans?* during the development and implementation phases of the project and continues to facilitate the evaluation and transition processes for the project.
- ***Fundred / Paydirt:*** The project, led by conceptual artist Mel Chin, landscape architect Julie Bargmann and a team of scientists from several universities, draws attention to the widespread soil contamination throughout the city by engaging with local and displaced residents of New Orleans. In schools throughout the country children of the New Orleans Diaspora will create works of art in the form of currency. This art 'money' will then be brought to Washington, D.C. in the fall of 2008 to be 'exchanged' for federal funds to support soil remediation and clean-up in New Orleans. The team is currently in the process of developing a remediation strategy and is working with local institutions such as the Tulane/Xavier Center for BioEnvironmental Research and the Office of Recovery Management. Transforma Projects is working with the creative team to build awareness of and participation in the project on the local level.
- ***Plessy Park:*** Transforma Projects is collaborating with the Crescent City Peace Alliance and community members to create a project that can serve as a tangible first step in the development of a park honoring Homer A. Plessy. The goal is to elevate awareness of the location at the intersection of Press and Royal Streets, where Plessy was arrested in 1892 for refusing to move to a segregated rail car and to build understanding of the importance of the site both to New Orleans as well as to the nation. M.F.A. candidates from the Otis School of Design are working with Suzanne Lacy to develop a design for the space and university students from Xavier University are working with Ron Bechet to develop a strategic plan for working with the community partners. Due to a legacy of conflict surrounding this project, Transforma Projects seeks to re-focus the project to encourage the realization of the public monument.