

City of Newport Artist in Residence Proposal



Recently I was at a gathering to celebrate the installation of a sculpture, by NKU student Jessica Holtman, at the Scholar House in Newport. This project arose from previous collaborations between Mark Neikirk (Scripps Howard Center) and myself, Steven Finke (NKU Spatial Arts program) over the past few years.

The NKU Spatial Arts Program presents public art as a genre for students to explore in both course work and independent study. Public art has been around for about as long as humans have. A contemporary practice in public art, coming out of an academic environment, implies a unique artistic intervention within a community based on dialogue and a relationship with that community.

The reception for Jessica's sculpture "Nurture" brought together an interesting group of people. Most of the attendees were individuals who are in some way working to make Newport a better place. We understand art's value to a community. We work to make things like this happen and then celebrate them. For me, the most compelling moment was when one of the Scholar House residents came walking through the group to drop off her child at the daycare center. She was visibly distraught. Tears were streaming down her face as she passed me. After dropping off her kid she stood near me for a

moment, looking and listening, and then left. I have no data, but I think taking that moment to stop and see “Nurture” could only bring some benefit to her day. Shortly after that the director of the Scholar House asked Jessica if she would come back and teach classes at the Scholar House. That was the moment I decided to make this proposal.

The NKU Visual Arts Program has been working for a while to find situations for our students to explore as creative interventions into the community. As an institution we are committed to community engagement and the Visual Arts program has many examples of this with Newport. I would like to propose the creation of a Newport artist in residence position for a one-year experiment.

As background, before coming to NKU I was part of the Artists in Education Program with the Ohio Arts Council for twelve years. I did residencies all over the state, which ranged from two weeks to one year. While most of these residencies were centered out of educational institutions there was always community interaction. My experience and the model of the OAC program inform my understanding of a workable residency program for Newport.

An artist working in the public art realm has to balance their personal creativity within the context of the community. It is not for all artists. I have been working with Jessica for more than three years. When I first asked her what she was interested in doing as an artist, her reply was, “ I want to be an activist artist, that helps create communication between the races”. Soon after that, I got her involved with the project at the Scholar House that involved artmaking events with the residents as well as the creation of “Nurture”. She spent more than one year on this project.

Last summer, with the support of NKU, Scripps Howard Center and 21st Century Newport, we had a summer program, The Newport/ Bethel Project. High school students from Newport and Bethel, Ohio worked together on a sculptural installation about place and community. Jessica was an assistant on this project. She has also been an assistant on a mural project with Arts Wave in Cincinnati.

Last semester, the NKU Spatial Arts program ran two public art classes taught by Prof. JeeEun Lee and myself. In this class students were exposed to Newport from a variety of perspectives, such as history, ecology and community interests. We heard from residents, business owners and NKU faculty from other disciplines focused on Newport. Based on these introductions, students

designed projects ranging from sculptures that honored citizens of Newport to artistic benches and bike racks. A jury consisting of people from the community chose five projects for further consideration. Jessica's project was one that was chosen.

Her interest in public art has continued to grow. She has made connections with the community that show potential for more impact. Jessica is graduating at the end of this semester and is looking for a situation that will allow her to keep developing on this path. I believe that an artist in residence position would allow her to accomplish this, build upon what we have started and take it further to the benefit of the Newport community.

It would be premature to speak about specific projects but here is a list of connections that have been made as places to begin discussion about where artistic interventions might be of benefit and what constitutes a public art practice.

Newport Historical Museum
Brighton Center
ReNewport
River Metals Recycling
Ecological Remediation
Parks and Green Spaces

Scholar House
Newport High School
Bicycling Community
Steinhauser Printing
Newport History
Business Districts

Following the model of the Ohio Arts Council's Artist in Education program, a resident artist spends three days a week working within the community. Two days a week are spent in the studio working on projects. This should have some flexibility based on the nature of the project. Community participants are divided into two groups. Core groups are usually small in number and working directly with the artist on conception and production throughout a project. Peripheral groups are shorter in term and less involved. This is often realized in public presentations and forums.

Potential projects could include:

1. The creation of artworks (sculptures and murals) in the city.
2. The creation of artistically considered civic objects such as benches, bike racks, signage, fountains etc.
3. Organizing art events in the city. As a liaison with NKU's School of Arts, this could include visual art, music and theater.
4. Working with the schools and education centers to provide art related programming and projects.
5. Meeting with community groups to provide an arts perspective and creative problem solving on issues and concerns of the community.

Jessica's project at the Scholar House was materially supported by Northern Kentucky University, The Kentucky Foundation for Women and Jessica. The funding for any specific future project would be dependent on the nature of that project and would need to be raised. This is in relation to materials and direct expenses. In order to realize these potentials and create this residency position, three critical things are needed.

Jessica will need to be paid for her work. I would suggest a salary of \$32,000 for the year. She will also need a studio located in Newport. An advisory board should be created to monitor activities and aid in direction and problem solving. I think that this committee should consist of myself (as Jessica's mentor), Mark Neikirk (as the connection between participating groups) and individuals chosen based on their relationship with the City and this project. Thank you for your consideration.