



## Public Art—An Investment in Culture and Communities



*Unveiling, Near North Health*



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*Another Time's Voice Remembers My Passion's Humanity*, Michael Canton, Calvin Jones, Bernard Williams, Damon Lamar reed

## Introducing the Chicago Public Art Group

***“Our murals will continue to speak of the liberation struggles of Black and Third World peoples; they will record history, speak of today, and project toward the future. They will speak of an end to war, racism, and repression, of love, of beauty, of life. We want to restore an image of full humanity to the people, to place art into its true context – into life.”*** –William Walker, John Weber, Eugene “Eda” Wade and Mark Rogovin5

The best investments return more than money. They pay dividends in values that inspire and create positive change. Public art is not a commodity that is listed on any exchange. Yet it is a powerful multiplier of positive influences in our culture and communities. Qualities that uplift the human spirit like pride, dignity, and respect for heritage are the priceless benefits of public art works.

Public art belongs to everyone. No matter where you live in Chicago, public art enriches your life. From Bronzeville to Rogers Park and points in between, Chicago is blessed with murals, mosaics, sculptures, and all manner of aesthetic creations that define their surroundings and give neighborhoods their unique identities.

These works are a lens that transform our perceptions and mirror our humanity. Each image tells a story that resonates with its time and place in our urban tapestry.



For over 50 years, CPAG has collaborated with residents across the city to create art that reflects their interests and aspirations. You don't need to visit a gallery or buy a ticket to see our work. The art we create is for and about all of us.

We invite you to join CPAG in making a strong, secure, and vibrant city through art. Your gift is an investment that enriches the spiritual and physical environment we share.

## Mission

The notion of art as an equalizer that uplifts all people is the core of our mission. The Chicago Public Art Group promotes social justice through art. We unite artists and communities to create public art and expand the tradition of community-based public art making. We believe that:

- ✚ All Chicago residents deserve to experience the impact of art.
- ✚ Every community should have a voice.
- ✚ Public art and its creation encourage community investment, provoke thought, and catalyze change.

That vision has never been more relevant.

## History

*The Wall of Respect*, painted in 1967, is believed to be the first large-scale outdoor community mural. William Walker, CPAG's co-founder, mobilized fellow members of the Organization for Black American Culture, to participate in its creation

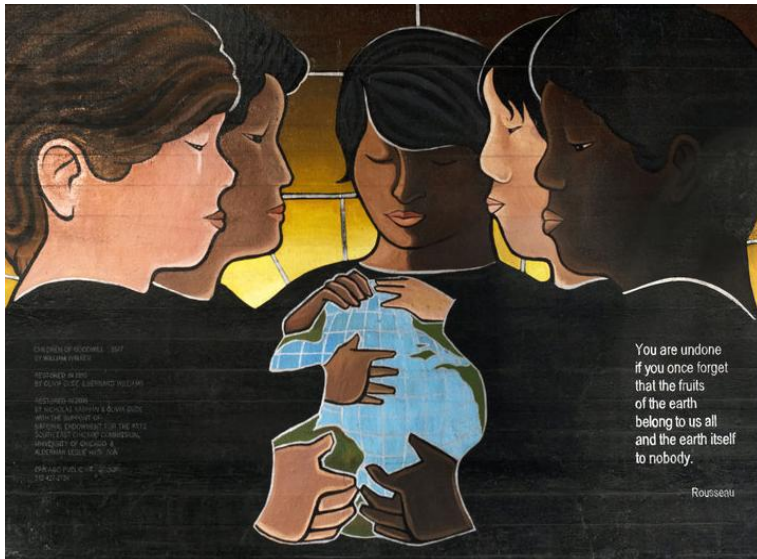


William Walker at work.

The Wall was painted on the side of a Bronzeville tavern. It depicted heroes of African American culture. Art historian Jeff Huebner describes its impact like this. *"It established the street mural as a vital vehicle of mass communication, a form of public dialogue about social and racial issues directly affecting Blacks' lives and communities. It was visual art that functioned as speech, as oral history in brick and paint."*



Walker was driven by the urgency to give a powerful voice to the struggles and stories of marginalized groups. He believed that an artist should be embedded in the community and



reflect its traditions, challenges, and aspirations. He saw murals as a collective voice for the oppressed and as a catalyst for social action and unity among races and cultures.

CPAG Co-Founder John Weber offered this observation on the power of public art.

*“All of the community murals, like any other public art, whether abstract or figurative, assert moral claims to public space, claims concerning the history, identity, and possible future of the*

Detail from *Childhood is Without Prejudice*, William Walker

*surrounding area. Developers may prefer a blank slate, without the cultural or thematic specificities of the existing art. Thus, art may become an important symbolic element in struggles over public space, a point of contention and a rallying point.”*

*The Wall of Respect* was demolished along with the building several years later, but it launched a nationwide public art movement. In 1972, Walker and Weber founded the Chicago Mural Group, which was later renamed the Chicago Public Art Group. Walker was African American and Weber is white. Both were firmly committed to diversity among the members, and female artists were influential from the earliest days.

The Chicago Public Art Group has created over 1,000 murals, sculptures, playgrounds, and mosaics in communities across Chicago. The installations run an aesthetic gamut from provocative to courageous and beautiful. Above all, they are emblematic of their place and time in the life of the city.





# Programs

***“We are not a passé 50-year-old organization. We have fresh energy and are involved in innovative activities. While we want to preserve our legacy, we are doing unique work.”*** John Weber, CPAG co-founder

As CPAG initiatives evolve to meet changing cultural and social needs, these goals remain constant. We strive to—

- ✚ Create public art in partnership with communities and maintain the highest aesthetic standards.
- ✚ Introduce creative skills to youth and adults and provide them with tools to transform their physical environment.
- ✚ Train and educate artists in creating community-responsive projects, enabling them to become leaders.
- ✚ Educate communities about the social, aesthetic, and economic value of collaborative public art.

The following are our programming priorities and representative examples of recent work.

## Improving Neighborhoods and Instilling Pride

DCASE\* Neighborhood  
Access Project, Greater  
Grand Crossing

Artist Pugs Atomz,  
partnered with fellow  
artists and Grand Crossing  
residents, Damon Lamar  
Reed and Joe Cujo Nelson,  
to seed a public art  
corridor. The zone is

intended to stretch from Cottage Grove to King Drive. Reed created a mural for ChiFresh Kitchen, a women and minority-owned collaborative business serving culturally appropriate meals. Atomz’s mural enlivens the new home for Gryls in the H.O.O.D., an organization providing reproductive and health education to teen girls. And Joe Cujo



Reed, Atomz, and Nelson pose in front of the mural for Gryls in the Hood



Nelson restored his 2,750 square foot mural "Greater Grand " celebrating neighborhood life.

\*Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events

*We Are Seeds of Life and Remembering the Baobab Tree*

Artists Sonja Henderson and Alphonso "Piloto" Nieves Ruiz created two murals for a mixed-income apartment building at 551 West Elm Street. LBBA, the architecture firm that designed the building, works with affordable housing clients to include community-based public art in and around their projects. The murals celebrate the neighborhood's cultural diversity. "The interior mural design was inspired by Sacred Geometry and the Seed of Life," says Henderson. "During the family workshops, we discussed the meaning and importance of this element while the children created seed-like, hand-stamped porcelain medallions. The medallions are part of the mural, giving the children a prominent role in designing their home environment.



Detail of *We are the Seeds of Life*.

**DCASE Summer 2024 Mural Projects**

*Under one Roof*



Under One Roof by artist Max Sansing, was commissioned for the Uptown Branch of the Chicago Public Library, Sansing's design celebrates House Music's Chicago origins and its relationship to the Uptown community.



Sansing chose images that represent House Music and mirror its grounding in equity and inclusion. The uptown location is significant because the Gherkin records studio, which was an influential distributor of House Music, is just steps from the library.





### *Our Way Bloom*

As part of the same DCASE initiative Tomokazu Matsuyama created Our Way Bloom for the library’s Edgewater Branch. The library requested a mural celebrating democracy the Asian Pacific Islander community, and the Edgewater neighborhood.

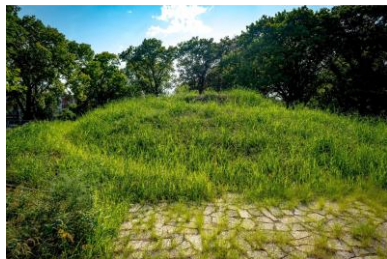
Matsuyama’s work, which spans the Library’s entire face, vibrates with color, youth, and imagination. Large-scale figures that represent different races, genders, and ethnicities are portrayed side by side and of equal stature. A tapestry of flowers weaves in and out of the composition. Matsuyama sees Edgewater as a garden where various cultures bloom together in harmony. His work honors this bicultural heritage, bridging its past with its promising future.



*Our Way Bloom*

### **Engaging Communities**

#### *The Coiled Serpent Mound and Augment Earth*



*The Coiled Serpent Mound*

On June 5, 2024, CPAG celebrated the dedication of the Coiled Serpent Mound and the launch of Augment Earth. The Coiled Serpent is a component of the 4000 N. Interpretive Trail. The trail weaves a connection between the Chicago and Des Plaines Rivers. It employs art, education,





and recreation, to celebrate Native American heritage, neighborhood histories, and environmental stewardship. The mound was created with the support of many community partners including artist X; landscape architect, Nilay Mistry; Chicago Park District; American Indian Center; and the Portage Park Neighborhood Association.

Augment Earth is a groundbreaking project that tells the stories of Chicago's Indigenous people using art and technology. Inspired by his work on the Coiled Serpent Mound, Artist X collaborated with other Indigenous artists to create eight immersive digital experiences. The holograms firmly situate Indigenous perspectives into Chicago's urban landscape. Each story is geo-located and tied to a physical anchor.

## Inspiring Children

*The Shape of Our Dreams, Decatur Classical School*



*The Shape of Our Dreams*

Artists Cynthia Weiss and Mirtes Zwierzynsk created a mosaic mural for an interior hallway at Decatur Classical School. Eighteen students from the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades participated in the project along with several parent volunteers. The mural's title, *The Shape of Our Dreams*, inspired drawings that represent creativity, imagination, and poetic imagery. The design includes dandelions symbolizing humble flowers of hope, the moon representing the passage of time and flowing of new ideas, and an open book celebrating Decatur students' love of reading.

## Restoring and Preserving History

### *Solidarity*

CPAG is the custodian of a treasure trove of historic works. Because public art is vulnerable to both the elements and other aspects of its physical environment, maintenance and intervention are ongoing requirements.



Rescuing the Solidarity Mural, painted by CPAG Co-Founder, John Weber, and the late Jose Guerreo, from the wrecking ball is an example of the types of challenging situations we sometimes face. Painted in 1974, *Solidarity* was installed in the interior stairwell of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) Union Hall.



In January 2024, the UE alerted CPAG that the organization was selling the building. Neighborhood gentrification, the structure's deteriorating condition, and UE's changing needs made the former location a poor fit for the organization's future operations. The Union's new home would be a building owned by the Chicago Teachers Union Foundation (CTU) that also houses the union's offices.



*Solidarity* in its original location at the UE.

CPAG and the UE's leadership and members

were

devastated by the prospect of this important piece of art and union history being lost to future generations. With the building's demolition looming, the two groups swung into action and a plan was quickly identified.



Removal of *Solidarity* at the UE.

The CTU agreed to give *Solidarity* a new home at their facility. The building is a three-story renovated warehouse with a dramatic modern interior, providing an appropriate frame for the art.

In addition to orchestrating the physical removal, storage, restoration, and relocation of the mural, CPAG raised the majority of the \$500,000 plus budget for this project. We are excited that future generations of Chicagoans will view *Solidarity* in a new context.



## Educating the Public and Elevating Artists

### The CPAG Archives

CPAG's archives include 50 years of documents, photographs, film, fine art, and slides. The material chronicles the public art movement in Chicago from its inception through the present and documents the unwritten history of BIPOC immigrant neighborhoods and people. Until 2023, this information was not formally organized.

Grants from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation and the Fay Slover Fund at the Boston Foundation, provided the resources to hire consultants and support staff to organize and catalogue this invaluable material.

Many residents of Chicago are unaware of the wealth of art that surrounds them or its significance to the people and communities where it was created. CPAG's archives are now available to scholars and the public as a tool for informing people of all races, cultures, and age groups about public art's unique role in society.

### Support and Professional Development for Artists

CPAG artists inspire communities across Chicago. We want to ensure that they are similarly uplifted. Our Artists Cafes are professional venues that hone aesthetic excellence and fuel creativity.



Networking at the Artist Cafe.

The Cafes provide an opportunity for both established and emerging talent to network and learn from each other. Artists present to the group on a variety of topics. Designing for Public Spaces, The Creative Process, and the Latina Legacy in Public Art are examples of the subjects explored. The presentations are followed by lively Q&A and networking sessions.

Professional development is a small part of CPAG's overall services to artists. We

provide the salary, administrative, and project management support that enables independent artists to create large-scale public works. CPAG artists gain experience in a variety of settings and mediums. They are also members in a community dedicated to knowledge-sharing and aesthetic excellence.





## Exhibits, Films, Tours, and Educational Events

The CPAG Gallery regularly features work by our artists. Exhibits are free and open to the public. The organization also supports video productions, tours, and lectures showcasing people and projects that are significant to the public art movement.

## Leadership

***“Public art is for everyone. It proclaims ordinary, underrepresented, and forgotten people’s truth in images that are impossible to ignore. Chicago Public Art group champions this ideal.”***

Chantal Healey, CPAG Executive Director



CPAG supports and develops young talent.

CPAG is guided by the Executive Director and a Board of diverse artistic and community leaders. We are mindful of the need to reflect the communities we serve. Directors are nominated based on the unique experiences and talents they contribute to the group.

The board sets the organization’s strategic priorities and monitors their progress. In the summer of 2024, they approved a plan to guide the organization through 2026. The board also provides financial oversight and spearheads fundraising initiatives. Above all, their collective wisdom and innovation inspires our work and motivates the organization to grow, evolve, and proactively meet future needs.

## Giving

***“Art in public spaces is a declaration that beauty belongs to everyone, not just the privileged few.”*** Keith Haring

## The Value of Public Art

While public art is decorative, that does not make it an extra or a luxury. Public art is an essential component of a civil, democratic society. These statistics are a strong case for the value of supporting its creation and preservation.



- ✚ 86% of Americans say, “arts and culture are important to their community’s quality of life and livability,” and 79% of the American public believe that the arts are “important to their community’s businesses, economy, and local jobs.” 89% of attendees agreed that the activity or venue they were attending was “a source of neighborhood pride for the community.” (2023 Arts in Economic Prosperity Report)
- ✚ Communities with strong public art programs often see an increase in tourism. For example, public art in Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program attracts more than 18,000 tourists annually, generating significant economic benefits. (National Endowment for the Arts)
- ✚ Public art can increase property values in the surrounding area by up to 15%. This effect is particularly notable in urban neighborhoods undergoing revitalization. Murals and sculptures can transform blighted areas, making them more attractive for residents and businesses. (Knight Foundation, Soul of the Community)
- ✚ 81% of Americans believe that the arts are a positive experience in a troubled world. Engagement with public art can also reduce stress and improve mental well-being. A study found that people who experience public art reported higher levels of happiness and community pride. (Public Art Network, Why Public Art Matters)
- ✚ Public art can contribute to reducing crime rates. For example, the presence of murals and other forms of public art in certain neighborhoods in Philadelphia has been associated with a decrease in crime rates, including vandalism and violence. (University of Pennsylvania, Impact of Public Art on Crime Rates)



Mural for Sarah's Circle, Sandra Antongiorgi

## Why Your Support Matters

CPAG is a small organization with a big mission. In a rapidly changing social and economic environment we are called on to—

- ✚ **Transform communities.**  
Our murals in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood are spotlighting local businesses and organizations. They reflect the community’s spirit in images of joy and achievement.



**✚ Improve communication, break down barriers, and foster pride of heritage and place.**

The Coiled Serpent and Augment Earth teach the public about Chicago's Indigenous roots and the importance of environmental stewardship to the city's wellbeing.

**✚ Inspire a future generation.**

Children at Decatur Classical School and 551 West Elm learned about expressing creativity and participated in creating their own work of public art.

**✚ Teach history and drive social change.**

The *Solidarity* mural has inspired union workers for over 50 years.

These are several out of many examples of projects that are completed each year. Public art is resource intensive. CPAG allocates just 30 percent of each project to cover our administrative costs.

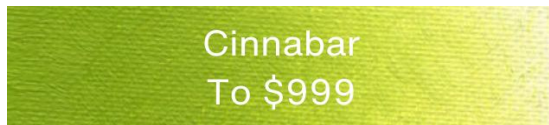
Fortunately, we have positive relationships with many foundations and government agencies. But that is a strategy for maintaining the status quo. A limited group of public funders cannot support the evolution and growth needed to remain relevant in a changing economic and social environment. We must adopt a more dynamic approach.

To meet our commitment to the city's future, it is imperative that we expand our base of support. Our roster of donors reflects the value Chicago residents place on public art. We hope it will grow to include you and other individuals, businesses, and corporations from across the city who believe in our mission and are eager to live in a city enriched by art.





## Ways to Give



*Breathe* Gloria Talamantes, Delilah Salgado

# DONATE

To make a gift, click on the picture above. To learn more about our organization and become involved, contact Chantal Healey, executive director, at [chantal@chicagopublicartgroup.org](mailto:chantal@chicagopublicartgroup.org). or visit our [website](#).

Thank you for your interest in the Chicago Public Art Group. We look forward to learning more about you.

