

Public Art as a Catalyst to Bridge Two Communities

Washington D.C., Cesar Chavez Capitol Hill High School 12th Grade Art + Design



ISSUE

The redevelopment of the 11th Street bridge connecting Washington, D.C.'s Capitol Hill and Anacostia neighborhoods will transform the old infrastructure into the city's first elevated park. This project presents an opportunity to unite historically divided communities through shared civic space for healthy recreation, environmental education, and the arts. Y-PLAN Client Scott Kratz of Town Hall Education Arts Recreation Campus (THEARC) commissioned students at Cesar Chavez Capitol Hill campus to create prototypes to inspire a significant piece of public art that has been commissioned for the park. Throughout the past year, students conducted research, site mapping, and interviews with long-time residents to learn about the history of Navy Yard and Anacostia. Students worked together in teams to bring their individual visions to life in the creation of five prototype pieces of public art that simultaneously honor the individual identities and unity of these two communities. Student work was displayed in the THEARC gallery, illustrating the capacity of public art to unify communities by stimulating critical community conversations.

“Y-PLAN isn’t just any type of project. I refer to it as a “Big Time Project,” because it was hands down into work and research. We were able to see the outcomes and impact Y-PLAN can make. We really made something that could potentially inspire architects to create something that would have an everlasting impact on the community and the 11th Street Bridge Project.”

– Y-PLAN Student, Cesar Chavez Capitol Hill

QUESTION

How can the rich histories and cultures of two D.C. communities, Anacostia and Navy Yard, be stitched together through civic space and public art?

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: Y-PLAN TEAM

Instructor: Jennifer Sonkin - Students: 12th Grade Art

Client: Scott Kratz, Director of The 11th Street Bridge Project, THEARC

YOUTH DRIVEN DATA AND INSIGHTS

- Public art is an important catalyst for community engagement and a way to honor the identity and history in community development initiatives.
- Youth seek diversity, unity, and connection across racial, socio-economic, and geographic boundaries.

“Students went through a pronoun switch; it was no longer “your” bridge – it’s “our” bridge. This is the future generation who will be using this space; so not engaging them now would be a totally lost opportunity. It’s also a way to engage the broader community that may never go to a community meeting.”

– Scott Kratz, Y-PLAN Client, 11th Street Bridge Project

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Glimpse Through Time: Anacostia + Navy Yard Three boxes portray the historical characteristics and the future vision of the Anacostia and Navy Yard communities. The hands on the front of the boxes are formed into a house to symbolize unity, togetherness, and community. Although these neighborhoods have different histories, they are part of a bigger community. The future 11th Street Bridge Project can weave the history of both communities.



Two Hands with Siamese Crocodile Symbol Two large human-like hands represent the unity and diversity of Anacostia and Navy Yard. On each hand, there is a West-African symbol that symbolizes unity, translated: "two-handed crocodile with a common stomach." This is a symbol of the unity of people despite cultural, racial, and social differences.

La Passerelle Muslim wrapped and painted model of a mosaic tile bridge. The merging colors represent the intertwining of the two communities through the creation of the 11th Street Bridge and highlights the names of famous people and historic areas which reflect both communities.



Tree of Life This piece of art represents unity as a whole. It is conveyed through the concept of a tree to demonstrate how a tree is made strong by its roots (the history) and how it grows stronger by the branches (the people) who all are held together by the trunk (the bridge) that connects and unifies everyone from both communities. The leaves then provide an opportunity for people to write their personal visions of an ideal community to put onto the tree. This tree is meant to tie together the two communities that demonstrate similarities through past events and how they can move forward to create new legacies together.



Every Neighborhood Has a Stereotype

The Anacostia Neighborhood: Abandoned homes; Barbed-wired-in parking lots; predominately African American; Low-Income; Liquor Store on every corner; Welfare; Section 8.

The Navy Yard Neighborhood: Largest continually operating naval facility in the country; Near the Nation's Capitol; High Income; Predominately Caucasian.

In order to destroy these stereotypes we must realize that every community has its own distinct features and these features were formed through history. It's through history where we see the similarities between the two communities. The 11th Street Bridge will connect both communities and take away the separation and the stereotypes.



NEXT STEPS

Student work will be presented to a panel of architects and designers for the 11th Street Bridge Project as prototypes to inspire continued dialogue and permanent, large-scale installation of public art into this innovative redevelopment initiative.

For more information on Y-PLAN, contact Jessie Stewart, Y-PLAN National Coordinator: jessie.stewart@berkeley.edu