



COMMENTARY

Opinion: Many artists can't afford to stay in San Diego. Community art spaces keep the scene alive.



Adrian Arancibia one of the co-founders of the taco shop poets poses in front of El Comal (Adrian Arancibia)

The economic situation of the city and country have many artists pondering their next move outside of San Diego.

BY ADRIAN ARANCIBIA

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The times we live in are, perhaps, the most difficult I've seen as a business owner, a professor, a poet and an artist in this community for 30 years.

As much as we want to proclaim San Diego a hub of arts and design, the reality is our city and its housing issues have clearly failed our arts community.

As we watch large chunks of our city be sold to developers, short term rentals and large equity firms, the ideals of arts spaces of the early 1990s are rapidly disappearing. The causes of this can be arts funding and a lack of infrastructure for arts. Or it can be easily explained as gentrification.



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Opinion: The San Diego-Tijuana region is culturally rich. How can we better support its arts scene?

July 6, 2023

In 2012 I finished my dissertation at UC San Diego on the ills of gentrification and the lack of memory and place. Coupled with the current inflation and the volley of rising interest rates, this is a moment so challenging for the arts in San Diego that the arts might not recover.

Those of us supporting and producing arts and literature in the San Diego region face the end of making due, the end of finding ways. The economic situation of the city and country have many artists pondering their next move outside of San Diego, pondering their move to other states.

While we proclaim that we are funding arts initiatives, California artists earn too little to sustain and exhibit their work. That leaves artists to eke out an existence while struggling to eat, to pay electricity and to pay water bills.

That reality is not sustainable for the artist community of San Diego.

I want to be a civic booster, to point to the great things our community is doing for the arts. I wish I could support arts as something sustainable in San Diego. The reality is much different. The reality is much more dire.

My wife Delia is a principal at a local elementary school. She and I purchased Twiggs Cafes after my 30 years of being a professor, writer, performer and arts advocate in San Diego. We did this because it had a small venue to help ensure young writers had a place to develop their craft and work to establish written and performance work for the region.

Our venture was hit by the economic uncertainty of the times.

Raw material scarcity, rising interest rates, steep inflation and a loss of consumer confidence pushed this dream of a sustainable arts space to the brink. And yet we continue to plug along. We continue to work as a community center in University Heights. We continue to be community-based and supportive of local artists. We've hosted San Diego's poet laureate Jason Magabo Perez and nationally recognized author/activist Kevin Powell.

What's lacking is a real effort to support working artists and artist organizations. This support must come with affordable housing for artists as a growing number of artists are leaving the city.

Secondly, there must be a real effort to support brick and mortar spaces featuring community art. These are bedrocks of our communities. They are community centers.

They are the threads holding many communities together.

I've been blessed to have an amazing general manager and a fantastic team. As a department chair at Miramar College and board trustee at Sweetwater Union High School District, I know the importance of such teamwork. Yet even employees bear the brunt of increased rents, displacement and longer commutes.

Our work at Twiggs maintains the legacy of one of San Diego's true placeholders, a space where Chris Vannoy and Jason Mraz hosted poetry and music during the 1990s and early 2000s. We hope the larger community sees this effort and supports it in an ever more stressful economic climate.

In San Diego, we know art matters. We've had a long-storied tradition of breaking ground, from artists like Border Arts Workshop/Taller Arte Fronterizo to the India Street Poets and the Taco Shop Poets, which I helped found in 1994.

As a community, we need to put our money where art can continue to affect the region. If you feel you can help the arts in San Diego, please reach out to spaces like ours.