



PRO ARTS – An Introduction

Mission: Pro Arts supports the arts within communities by serving the ongoing needs of artists.

About Pro Arts: Pro Arts was founded in 1974 as the Alameda County Neighborhood Arts Program, and soon became a national model for utilizing CETA funds for artists and arts projects. In the late 1970s the organization shifted its focus to public service and provided stipends to artists for workshops, installations, and performances. By 1980 the organization was renamed, and an emphasis on visual arts and exhibitions became the cornerstone of programming.

For over 35 years Pro Arts has contributed significantly to the infrastructure of a thriving artist community and brought visibility to thousands of artists in Oakland and the Bay Area. Last year Pro Arts produced 22 exhibitions, 40 events; exhibited works by 690 artists; and participated in 21 successful community-based collaborations. Pro Arts programs attract 15,000 gallery visitors and draw an annual audience totaling 72,000.

Programming Overview: Pro Arts provides critical access to contemporary art in the region and serves as a regional hub for arts activities, independent curated exhibitions, advocacy, and artist services. It is the only organization in Oakland and the East Bay providing the breadth and depth of programming and services to artists, arts organizations, public audiences and youth. In addition to its major visual arts programming, Pro Arts provides these programs and services:

Arts Activities: Pro Arts presents over 26 diverse multidisciplinary, collaborative programs annually in the gallery;

Advocacy: Pro Arts is the founding chair of the Oakland Cultural Trust, an association of arts organizations, artists and stakeholders that serves as an advocacy tool, peer network, and platform for promoting the impacts of artists' social, political, and economic contributions, and public value.

Artist Services: Pro Arts provides professional development workshops and networking sessions; fiscal sponsorship; resources for artist opportunities and employment; and professional exhibition services matching artists with community and business partners for off-site exhibitions. Additionally, Pro Arts' Youth Fellows program matches young artists in Oakland Public Schools with working artists to integrate arts education, exhibition opportunities, professional arts training, and youth development.

Visual Arts Programming:

Overview: Pro Arts' visual arts programming provides an array of opportunities and resources to support Oakland/Bay Area artists in different stages of their careers. Pro Arts produces five major visual arts programs annually: 2 x 2 Solos, a commissioning series; two juried exhibitions - Bay Area Currents and the Juried Annual; East Bay Open Studios, and the Curatorial Proposal Call. Each program draws on a different curatorial model ensuring that annual exhibitions are distinctive, fresh, and relevant. In short, **Pro Arts' visual arts programming functions as a showcase for the best new work made in the Oakland/Bay Area, including cutting-edge, risk-taking contemporary art, and important works by artists representing under-served populations and communities of color, and working artists.**

Programming is guided by an independent Curatorial Advisory Committee consisting of artists, independent curators, and curators from peer arts organizations. The Committee makes recommendations on juror invitations,

reviews program criteria, and constitutes, in large part, the Curatorial Review Panels established for nomination programs and open calls. Independent and emerging curators play a vital role at Pro Arts, through the Advisory Committee, as jurors, collaborators, and by working one on one with artists in connection with Pro Arts' commissioning program.

2 x 2 Solos is a commissioning program and exhibition series featuring 4 accomplished emerging artists based in the Oakland/Bay Area. Artist nominations are accepted from curators of regional arts institutions, galleries, art spaces and peer arts organizations based on the criteria that nominees must demonstrate exceptional and innovative art-making. The selected artists receive a commissioning for new work supported, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The artists each work closely with the independent curator, and receive a commissioned essay about their work in an exhibition catalog. The program culminates in a series of four solo exhibitions. The program provides 1) creative freedom and monetary support for the commission of challenging, non-commercial work not available elsewhere in Oakland and the East Bay; and 2) support for multiple levels of the regions' arts ecology by providing honorariums to independent curators, and commissioning essays from arts writers/scholars. **Recent Curators:** Julia Hamilton, Lucy Kalyani Lin, Cicely Sweed, Anu Vikram **Recent Artists:** Nadim Sabella, Imin Yeh, Luther Thie, Elisheva Beirnoff. **Artists Served:** Artists making the transition from 'emerging' to 'mid career.'

Bay Area Currents is a juried exhibition based on studio visits by a regional curator. The exhibition offers a snapshot of the energetic and risk-taking work made in the Bay Area today, selected by a curator who has a clear knowledge of the region, and illustrated by a small number of key artists. The program provides a springboard for emerging artists to establish their work in a critical contemporary art context, and presents new works of high artistic merit. **Recently Exhibited Artists:** Stephanie Metz, Bert Bergen, Annie Vought. **Recent Jurors:** Jens Hoffmann, CCA Wattis Institute, Rene De Guzman, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts; Kevin B Chen, Intersection for the Arts.

The Juried Annual presents a wider survey of current Bay Area work based on selections by a Juror from the national and international arts community. The program provides a platform for showcasing new work of interest from regional artists. **Recently Exhibited Artists:** Timothy Buckwalter, Frederick Loomis, Helen Lee, Elyse Hochstadt. **Recent Jurors:** Sherman Sam, Independent (London); Laura Hoptman, New Museum (NY); Ali Subotnik, Hammer Museum (Los Angeles).

Annual Exhibition Call for Curatorial Proposals establishes an open submission process for artists and curators to present and produce a curated exhibition in collaboration with Pro Arts. The program provides a platform for exceptional and unexpected presentations of work from a range of artists and curators. **Recent Curated Exhibitions:** marksearch, *10,000 Steps*; Taller Tupac Amaru; NIAD at 25; Jingletown Junction.

East Bay Open Studios serves as the East Bay's premiere vehicle for connecting artists to public audiences. The annual event features 400-500 artists in 14 cities and 2 counties; draws over 55,000 visitors to artists studios; and stimulates nearly \$350,000 in art sales directly by artists over two weekends. The program includes a preview exhibition, online maps, artist webpages, curators' tours, and the *Directory of East Bay Arts* (circ. 60,000). The *Directory* profiles Oakland/East Bay artists and serves as the definitive guide to regional arts, including a multidisciplinary Arts Calendar and East Bay Arts Index- a comprehensive guide to arts groups, companies, organizations, galleries, theaters, art spaces and services. The program provides visibility for artists' work, a structure for ongoing artistic practice, resources for professional development, a sales platform, and a strong peer network for regional artists. Participation is open to all artists with a studio, home, or exhibition space in the East Bay.

Pro Arts' visual arts programming is strategically planned to support artists in varying stages in their careers, inspire innovative art-making, cultivate artistic practices, and showcase the best new work in the Oakland/Bay Area.