

**Interview with Tom DeCaigny**  
**Director of Cultural Affairs, San Francisco Art Commission**

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**MW** Introduction: This interview is between **Megan Wilson (MW)**, artist and writer, and **Tom DeCaigny (TD)**, Director of Cultural Affairs, San Francisco Art Commission.

**MW:** What changes have you observed in the arts community over the past two to three years in relation to the booming economy that is happening with the new tech sector or old/new tech sector that has moved in and the real estate development?

**TD:** I've lived in San Francisco since 1998, so I've seen the full cycles. When I moved here 1998 and came here out of college it was just at the first tech boom, or dotcom boom at the time and I lived in Hayes Valley and I watched the radical transformation of a neighborhood and the gentrification. So having seen that cycle at the time and the displacement of arts organizations – at that time numerous dance studios closed and rehearsal spaces closed for very similar challenges in the commercial real estate market, and then to see a cycle when that bust happened and to have seen the out migration of those tech spaces only to have that space left vacant. So for me seeing this current iteration is a real indicator for the need for real long-term policy solutions that ensures that arts and culture can thrive both as individual artists and as non-profit art communities because while there are bound to be economic cycles this has become a necessary requirement in capitalism and in San Francisco because we've had such a vibrant arts and culture community and because artists have been so core to defining the city I think it has become an attractive place for people who are looking to be entrepreneurial and innovate – it's become a challenge – and one that other cities also face, including New York and working with my peers nationally, it's very similar in Seattle, and Detroit where I was recently. I was at the Detroit Institute for the Arts to meet with peers from the 60 largest cities across the country and Seattle is facing this and New York has been through this over a long period of time.

For the Arts Commission it means we need to be working both for the immediate need to respond to some of the immediate needs of our artists and arts

organizations, but I think that we also need to really have to begin thinking our long term strategy about how we set policy for the arts and culture to thrive in a very complex and intense economic environment.

**MW:** Yeah, I have a good friend who is working on Portland's new Neighborhood Economic Development Strategy and they are actually looking at San Francisco as the Anti-Model and they are developing legislation through which if you are a developer you have to really work with the community and have policy in place so that people who are low-income will be a part of that process and will not be displaced.

**TD:** I think the issues of zoning and planning are under the jurisdiction of the Planning Department and I think there needs to be a lot of rethinking about what our urban development looks like in the current market and what strategies work and don't work. I will say that I think San Francisco has led on its arts investments. San Francisco was one of the first 2% for the arts programs to make sure that any public infrastructure development included money for the arts in 1969 and we led the way on that.

As part of our (the San Francisco Art Commission's) Strategic Planning process we did a benchmark study of five comparative cities – Seattle, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Los Angeles and on a per capita basis San Francisco does fund the arts significantly greater – just the Arts Commission's funding alone on a per capita basis makes a greater investment than any of those five cities. And then if you include the Grants for the Arts funding and city's funding for the museums, we do fund the arts well on an operational level, but where I think we have fallen short is on our investments in capital and infrastructure that leads to arts ownership – especially in the cultural equity arena where we're working with organizations that are small and mid-size budgets who work in diverse communities and don't have that capacity of where wealth transfer happens and I think we know that government has to have a role in leveling the playing field for the purposes of equity.

The Art Commission's Cultural Equity Program is a national model for specifically funding artists and arts organizations in the development of work in communities that

have traditionally been underserved. The Cultural Equities Program did get a 10% increase last year in the budget process so that's good news and with the city revenue going up I think that was a deserved allocation for insuring that we make a deeper investment in arts and culture. And we received a 5% increase for our cultural centers. The Arts Commission owns the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, SOMArts, the African American Art and Culture Complex, and the Bayview Opera House. And for years the city's investment in infrastructure for those organizations was inadequate – extremely so – and so our budget for the maintenance and care for these citywide and neighborhood institutions has increased. And one of the charges of my tenure and what I hope to accomplish is to raise the awareness in infrastructure and capital investment that we need to find ways at an infrastructure level to make investments and the financing mechanisms to make sure we sustain those investments. I am pleased to say that we just broke ground at the Bayview Opera House on a \$5.3M renovation. It took a number of years to cobble the resources and to form a partnership with the Mayor's Office on Disability and the Office of Economic Workforce Development and others to support this asset that has been in the community since 1889 and it's been a hub for the neighborhood and its history and I think that we have to make sure that we respect that legacy and celebrate it and make sure that we sustain it. That community has seen one of the greatest out migrations of the African American community that any city in the US has seen and it's a disgrace. So how do we make sure that we invest in a way that allows both a return of people who felt they couldn't live in that community and how do we invest in arts in culture which I believe is core to people believing that they have some ownership in their neighborhoods.

**MW:** How is the Arts Commission advocating on behalf of artists in cases like the lack of taxation and regulation for services such as Airbnb, which has enabled them to avoid paying into the Hotel Tax Fund / Grants for the Arts, as well as contributing to the loss of housing in the Bay Area?

**TD:** As a city department we're bound from advocacy per se, but that's not to say that we don't have a role to play in terms of research and in terms of creating policy opportunities. I have to say, I love the idea of how when we look at how we build parity and when we tax companies that are building revenue in the city and to make

sure that there is parity with our hotel and lodging industries. So while we're excited by the advances happening in a shared economy, and it wouldn't just be Airbnb, it would be HomeAway and other shared economy vehicles to try and think about what the governments role is in ensuring parity and parity of regulation first of all, but also how do we as a city support the innovation in the private sector, but also ensure that there is parity in terms of resources coming to the city as a whole. I really like this idea and we looked at a number of different revenue streams that could come to benefit the arts and I think the challenge is the issue of affordability affects a lot of communities and it is not just artists – it's teachers and early childhood development workers, who have been underpaid for years and work in our pre-schools.

So my vision of the Arts Commission is how are we a partner in this broad affordability challenge because I have seen unfortunately even in the current conversations times where some of the rhetoric and language that is used to make a very strong point in the arts community, sometimes feels a bit alienating to people who are teachers or working families who maybe don't identify as artists – so I think it's important that we see this as a partnership where we're working with other people around affordable housing and looking at that universally and I think at the Arts Commission we're committed to doing that in partnership to that ensure that affordability impact on everybody regardless if you're an artist or you benefit from the arts because you are in the neighborhood and you've lived there for years and you might be a teacher or a single parent or whatever challenges you might face. I think on that level it becomes an issue on how those new resources are allocated and I think while the Art Commission's role is to educate policy makers on the return on investment and I don't just mean that financially, I mean the way the arts have defined neighborhoods in our city and how they contribute to community health and to community development in a positive way. I know you had a question about the unintended consequences the arts have played in gentrifying neighborhoods and I think that's absolutely a challenge nationally in terms of how the arts may be building a more healthy community and addressing whether there's environmental injustice or other challenges in the community and how artists have been a part of the solution to that and then how at times that evolves at a neighborhood's expense to become a weight on the artists who helped to build the neighborhood and be part of the neighborhood than not be able to afford to live there.

**MW:** Right, we create our displacement.

**TD:** Yes, and it's a conversation – you mentioned ArtPlace as a national funder and supporting creative placemaking and I actually just talked to the new director Jamie Bennet and he's coming to the Bay Area in April and we've invited him to participate in a roundtable discussion – so we'll be hosting him on April 22<sup>nd</sup> to meet with funders – some that are Art Place funders and some that are not and this focus is really on affordability. I think we need to better understand the outcomes that we need to look for in terms of place making and I think there are some and I will reference right here. I think there are some people who are doing great work nationally to define what the arts role is in placemaking or some of us are calling “place keeping” – that we don't really need to make place and sometimes that place already exists and we should understand how we participate in it, but I think defining what those outcomes are and in Tuscon at the Tuscon Pima Arts Council Roberto Bedoya who is originally from the Bay Area and who is the director there now – he is trying to define more of a community-development basis that includes issues of prosperity or economic development as a part of a suite of indicators of a healthy community but I think we all know they are not the only indicators so I'm not sure we should use “white tablecloths” as a benchmark for the success of a neighborhood.

**MW:** Yeah, I was a baffled by the Art Place \$777,000 grant award to Intersection for the Arts and the 5M Project given that the collaboration is with a for-profit \$9 billion publicly traded corporation. That's a huge amount of money that could have been invested in many different arts organizations in the Bay Area, yet it was awarded to a collaboration that already has significant resources. It's also worth noting that being a publicly traded corporation Forest City's priority is to their shareholders profits.

**TD:** You know I would direct you to the Intersection staff. I know that the grant went to Intersection.

**MW:** I am meeting with Deborah Cullinan (former Executive Director of Intersection for the Arts) next week and I do have a long relationship with Intersection so I'm hoping to learn more about this myself.

**TD:** Yeah, before Art Place comes out I am hoping to learn more about the outcomes of that grant to Intersection. I think from my understanding of it, the intent was to learn how an investment to a non-profit can leverage private dollars and to the same point that we might look at missed tax opportunities from the sharing community, I think we also need to look at how the developers contribute a financial commitment to community benefit in a way that is meaningful. My hypothesis would be that there was an investment there to see how that might work in a partnership, but I don't know enough about the intended outcomes and I think the grant is still open. And I do know there have been some good artist projects invested in with the Who? What? Where? When? Why? Exhibition, which did come through our visual art committee so I know more about that part of the project. I am excited to see the final report and see what lessons were learned and how that might inform the way that we work with developers to work on their community benefit.

**MW:** Right. What is your take on Community Benefit Agreements?

**TD:** Well I have had a measured sense that I don't want to put eggs in a basket of a temporary solution to a permanent problem. I think the challenge with some of the visibility of the community benefit agreements in central market is that it's a bit of a red herring to what is a much more systemic policy issue of how we invest in arts and culture. So those are temporary agreements and I think from the government we should be looking for long-term policy solutions. That said, I think the arts should be included in them and we've made efforts in working with the City Administrator to help connect to organizations like Cutting Ball and others that are working in the arts sector to see how they can benefit, and I think they need to be meaningful and support substantial investments. But a lot of people come to me and say "could you introduce us to Twitter or introduce us to Zendesk – we want to look to them" and when we look nationally at data and for years there have been studies by organizations like the National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy and corporations give the smallest percentage of dollars to non-profits in any sector.

**MW:** In addition to the arts, my background is in non-profit development and that is what I have found as well. Corporate giving is a really paltry amount compared to what I

believe they should be contributing and paying their fair share to the communities that they live and work in.

**TD:** Yeah, and I think that the idea of a corporation or for-profit entity is profit, right? That's inherent in their definition and their mission so to me that is a given in the context and NCRP (the National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy) does some great research about responsive philanthropy and where some corporations that have stepped up I think when we have models of the good corporate citizen we should champion those, but I also think that we as a city, but more broadly speaking as a world government it also needs to look at issues of parity and equity and how those resources are distributed and when we leave that to the free-market I think we are disadvantaging artists, we're disadvantaging a lot of communities.

**MW:** So how is the Arts Commission addressing some of these issues such as the cost of living and the evictions that have been happening and the displacement of artists? I think you somewhat addressed this with the homogenizing of the demographics by investing in organizations of color, but what about the displacement and evictions?

**TD:** Well we've been hearing anecdotally, but also trying to look at more systemically where we're seeing the greatest impact in terms of displacement and one of the things that I'm trying to do a lot of is really clarify from a policy perspective the difference between housing displacement and affordability of housing issues and the commercial real estate market where there might be issues around other space issues for non-profits and their administrative offices or theaters or rehearsal spaces. Those are really distinct in terms of structure and policy and often times they're conflated and I think that makes it difficult to look at solutions because from a government perspective, we need to be creating solutions that take root on the ground and have impact so I think its important that we distinguish the two. That said, as part of our strategic planning process we just went through we had a number of town halls in the community. We had numbers of focus groups with our grantees through the cultural equity grants and we heard loud and clear that affordability is the number one issue, that individual artists have to be a part of the equation, and that this non-profit structure sometimes is really supportive of artists, but sometimes is

also outside of where artists do their work and that artists are working in different ways, not always just in the nonprofit context.

We also talked a lot about this idea of economic development in the arts and while I think there are some promising practices, we wanted to look at it more about prosperity and that there are lot of indicators in that work that just shouldn't be about economic development, but it should be about the prosperity that people experience in the community and that means a broader suite of indicators and quality of life indicators, that more money doesn't equate a higher quality of life.

**MW:** Absolutely.

**TD:** So, you'll see that language represented in the Art Commission's new Strategic Plan. We we're appointed, the Arts Commission, myself, and our staff and then we also invited Deborah Cullinan from Yerba Buena Center for the Arts as a representative of the network that has been in the town halls that have happened and Adam Fong from the Emerging Arts Professionals Network to participate in the Nonprofit Displacement Working Group that was called by Supervisor Jane Kim and the Mayor and Supervisor David Chiu, and so we've been working with the Mayor's Office of Housing and Committee Development who is chairing the working group for over the last two months and there is a draft report circulating with a number of stakeholders giving input and the goal is to present and you could recommend looking at the full Board of Supervisor's hearing yesterday. Agenda item 11 was about this Nonprofit Displacement Working Group, because the board did put on reserve, a total of 4.5 million from the general fund reserve inclusive of the tax benefits from the Center for Growth and Central Market constructions. So, the initial 2.5 million was based on the tax increment from Central Market and then Supervisor Avalos added 2 million specifically to the Arts Commission into the arts. So, he has been a great supporter and I think it's worthy to hear the full board hearing on this issue. There was an issue of the timing of putting it on reserve because the report is not finished, but I think you can hear supervisors Kim and Chiu and others talk about the urgency and we know this is an urgent matter. So, that report will come out next month and I think in terms of promising practices and opportunities, one of the things really in the arts



is the Community Arts Stabilization Trust, which I have spoken a bit about in the NPR the past week.

**MW:** That's CAST right?

**TD:** CAST, yeah, and so, they help acquire Luggage Store in Central Market.

**MW:** I did the Luggage Store's Strategic Plan.

**TD:** Okay, so you know them well. And so what I like about CAST as a model is that it is creating a secondary market of arts ownership and it gives access to small and midsize organization that might not otherwise have the capacity to own a property, kind of support them in the technical assistance and capacity building over a 7- to 10-year period. To take back ownership over that time and then it renews the resources. So, after 7-10 years, that money will be back online in the trust, at the Community Arts Stabilization Trust, CAST, to invest in another property or another asset, but they're also looking at shared space and some innovative models. So, they just took over, CAST took on the master lease of the former KUNST-STOFF dance space and a coalition of arts organizations that didn't need a permanent space or could not afford full time to have that lease but includes the Lorraine Hansberry Theater and other of our cultural equity grantees to kind of share that space and CAST holds the master lease. They develop the legal negotiations and real estate negotiations with the landlord and we are allowing then the arts organization to not have to put their resources in to that work, but they also can hold the master lease for a longer period of time. They can manage tenant improvements and the city did invest recently in some of those tenant improvements. So, we've funded over \$300,000 I think in total to Luggage Store to help with their kind of tenant improvements and pathway to ownership. Recently, the Arts Commission gave a \$50,000 credit space grant to CounterPULSE so that they can do their preplanning work for the move to 80 Turk Street. So, I think we have a commitment to invest in historically present organizations that know the neighborhoods they're working and reflect those neighborhoods but also kind of have the share values of the community. And another investment we made in the RP was to the 950 Market Street project, which is if you haven't interviewed or met with Elvin Padilla who is very involved in

the Tenderloin, he has, I mean, been an incredible advocate for the role of the arts in real community development.

**MW:** His partner, the developer Joy Ou of Group i evicted over 150 artists out of the 340 Bryant Street studios in 2013.

**TD:** Is that her property?

**MW:** She purchased the property and then evicted all of the artists out of the 340 Bryant Street studios and is renovating the space for market rate tech offices. So, it's ironic that she is developing this new art center, but yet she displaced over 150 artists out of one of the last affordable industrial art spaces in San Francisco for artists. So, it's a matter of artists losing our studio spaces where can we produce our work, yet that same developer is opening a presenting space that is more about showcasing and the midmarket plan. So, I don't have the best feelings about that (laughter).

**TD:** Fair enough. Yeah, I would encourage talking to Elvin (Padilla). I think the organizations that are involved in 950 site, the organizations' partners are like Youth Speaks and I think some longstanding organizations that do some great work in the arts sector. In this case, I think it's important to look at how we create also for the visual arts arena. I think the studio issue is a huge one.

**MW:** That was why it was so disheartening to learn about a new presenting art space on Market Street, yet the developer, Joy Ou evicted a significant number of artists from one of the last affordable industrial studio spaces. The artists who were in the space, and I was one of them, we were paying just a little over a dollar a square foot.

**TD:** Yeah, this comes back to the need for a secondary market because in the free market where a dollar a square foot is 150th of the market rate these market forces have a significant impact. So, the CAST model, to go back to that ownership idea, to me has to be a part of the long-term equation because we have to own these assets to keep them out of the market forces. Otherwise, we're always, regardless of the individual landlord, we're always kind of bound to the market force. So, I think we

need the policies and the investments obviously to find ways in which we kind of create arts ownership.

**MW:** Yeah.

**TD:** Community ownership, I mean, I think we can...social service organizations and arts organizations, I think pair well in terms of that as well. So, for me though, it's interesting because I think in a couple of other sectors there is more of nonprofit ownership than we see in arts and culture, and I think that's a big indicator for why we need that investment in arts and culture and this came out a bit before the board about why 2 million for the arts and 2.5 million for the whole remaining social services sector and when asked about that and in talking with some arts funders, a mentor of mine, Frances Phillips at the Walter and Elise Haas Fund mentioned various complaints that there is, in a nonprofit arena and social services, a lot more ownership of their own assets. So, if you look at the Tenderloin, there is significant nonprofit ownership in the Tenderloin neighborhood, in the area of Housing Development Corporation and other social service arena, but there is almost zero arts ownership until CAST now with the Luggage Store and with 80 Turk will have the same policy.

So, we need to kind of look what I call is secondary market, because otherwise we're bound to the free market forces and I tend to refrain from any individuals kind of decision in the free market because it's...if we don't have a structure for the regulation or what have you and that somebody is following the law and obviously it requires then an examination of the law or of the policy.

**MW:** Right, but I think calling out the hypocrisy and conflicts of interest with those individuals is also important. What do you think?

**TD:** While I—explaining about the Arts Commission not being able to advocate, I think the other thing that I have shared openly is that I think a more coordinated arts advocacy ecosystem would benefit our sector. I think there has historically been a challenge in the coordination of a coordinated advocacy point, and I think there has been a bit of a divide and conquer structure that has kind of cohorts of the arts

ecosystem, I advocate for a specific thing and at the expense of other resources in the arts and I try to encourage to say let's look at the bigger pie and I think we create with policymakers a sense that they can move resources from one place to another and maybe it is a good intention for culture equity for instance, but if we're just taking from the arts and one part of the ecosystem to give another part, to me equity is about increasing the pie to bring forward the kind of small to mid-sized organizations or organizations working in historically underserved communities to build the parity, but when you take resources from another part of the arts ecosystem and even if it's when you're not a big fan of and I say, it's not like a form of art or the size of somebody's budget, but I think it does hurt the broader ecosystem because those in some way trickle down either to the nonprofit employees that worked at those museums or...there is a way in which to me it's a part of broader ecosystem and we should look at kind of a coordinated effort and I advocate as cultural equity where that's our funding pool.

That's who we kind of represent and who we try to make a case for, but it certainly is complex in that regard and I think a more formalized and more coordinated advocacy structure could support that.

**MW:** Yeah. I think having that kind of oversight and accountability in place would be really helpful for the arts. So as far as the current investment in the arts and the Arts Commission's investment in the Mid-Market, the Mid-Market is the hot buzz area. So, what are your thoughts on how the area is giving value, but yet it's also creating an environment that is part of the gentrifying force of the area. And how do you see that playing in the community? I've worked with quite a few SoMa and Tenderloin organizations, including with the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) and many of those residents and community members are feeling extreme anxiety right now because they're seeing the writing on the wall as to what's going to be happening with the neighborhood.

**TD:** It's interesting you mentioned SOMCAN because I actually was in a fellowship with April Veneracion, their former director. The commission just approved a grant through our Arts and Communities Innovative Partnerships model and SOMCAN is partnering and I forgot the arts organization they're partnering with, but we have that

funding arena for just this purpose. It is to explore what is the intersection of art and community look like and I know SOMCAN at one point had a Shifting Sands grant from the Ford Foundation to look at—it was a partnership with Bindlestiff Theater and with other South of Market partners and I think it was a very complex way in which arts benefit a community's health and kind of vibrancy and all these different indicators to a strong community and I think it comes down to what are the promising practices to sustaining people in the community, right? And I think it's how you invest as a government funder. I think for us let me look at the Arts and Communities Innovative Partnerships grants. We really look at what are the social change outcomes and again, I use the frame of—are more of white tablecloth of benefit to the community. Are these the indicators we want for a healthy community or is it that young people and families who live in the community for years have access to a local arts center or arts program, art education are able to kind of build their critical thinking skills through the arts because they have that access to programming. So, I think trying to define indicators of success and kind of looking at it more holistically and I think the arts we know from research provide support and growth of indicators broadly speaking and not just economic.

**MW:** Yeah. I think the fear for them is, and this is certainly outside of the Arts Commission's purview, but it is the developers ... and the Arts Commission and many art funders are working with developers and that's the fear. It's that the developers moving in and buying up property, building luxury condos, then the low and middle income communities are surrounded by luxury condos that then bring in luxury stores, luxury restaurants that they can't afford that and they see that their block might be the next one to be bought up. That's more I think the indicator of the need for the existing community ultimately, because sure you can have these great services or these great programs where there is creativity and they are being supported in that way, but if they're being forced out their homes community, then it doesn't matter.

**TD:** Well, I think it goes back to this issue of ownership because until there's actually the ownership in that community, then that—there are certainly other ways that the city can ensure through zoning and through other ways that there's responsible development to be effective, I'm kind of still learning a lot about what those...what

that looks like and obviously, the Arts Commission doesn't have purview of their zoning or of their planning code, but I think that I'm well aware that my directive and my role from the Mayor and from the Mayor's Office is that this issue of affordability is front and center and that it is a mandate for us to kind of look at how we participate. So, I have started having monthly get-togethers with John Rahaim, the head of planning, to talk about how we look at the success of arts and culture and the success of communities holistically and how can the Arts Commission be a partner in that work and it is complex in a sense that I learned recently that many of the developments we all see on Market Street were from the first boom, I mean they were in the pipeline seven years ago, leading up to 2008. So in the sense of how long it takes for changes in code to actually see that development and then you see these market forces working so much more quickly. So, I think it is also important that as government we try to find mechanisms to be responsive in a timely fashion. So, when we look at these nonprofit displacement recommendations, we are looking at solutions to try to make sure we kind of get those resources out immediately. So, we're looking at things like intermediary re-granting entities that could make it easier for people to apply so they do not have to go through the application process that the city has which has by law just in terms of indemnification and vendor status and all those things that we are required to receive funds of taxpayer dollars. By having an intermediary, I think we could expedite that and we could those resources on the ground more quickly.

**MW:** So, this leads to the Arts Commission's commitment to smaller grassroots organizations and I'll use Clarion Alley as an example because as one of the core organizers for the past 15 years, I'm very familiar with the challenges. While we're an all-volunteer run organization, we serve tens of thousands of people annually. It's probably one of the most visited art spaces in the city, which on any given day I would say several hundred people come through the alley. However, because our budget is so small, we aren't eligible for Arts Commission funding. And we're just one example. There are many others. So how can the Arts Commission be a support for these arts organizations?

**TD:** Yeah, we're looking at our grant making strategy very closely in light of the strategic plan and we've had our Committee Arts and Education investments in the cultural

centers that those non-profits receive a dollar a year lease and receive larger grants and there are cultural equity grantees, and so I will say to look at the individual artist program, the individual artist commissions that with this last year's increase of 10% we were able to fully fund and in the past we've reduced the \$10,000 awards to individual artists to 80% and this year we were able to fully fund them, so if you do apply as an individual you would be taxed.

**MW:** Yes, I've received those before and they are a great resource.

**TD:** So that's one way in which we try to differentiate so there's some access to people who don't have a 501(c)3 status. We've also been trying to connect people with fiscal sponsors.

**MW:** Clarion Alley Mural Project's is Intersection for the Arts. CAMP has been fiscally sponsored by Intersection for the past 22 years. But it still really comes down to the budget of the organization and because you can only ask for such a percentage of your budget, it's still so miniscule, yet we are contributing a significant cultural service to the city.

**TD:** Yeah. Well I think one of the opportunities that we are looking at is again is intermediary idea. Because we have started to explore intermediaries like the Center for Cultural Innovation or others that do re-granting or even looking at other non-profits as kind of hubs where they could kind of support a more diverse ecosystem and the challenge we have as a city with legal requirements that are just in place that are city policy about accessing resources and I see the benefit though because the data that we need in just telling the story about non-profit displacement and we just had this conversation as a working group. We are asking for a lot of data from grantees so numbers of volunteers, numbers of employees, the lease terms they might have, when does the lease expire, and that requires a certain amount of capacity, right?

**MW:** Yeah, exactly.

**TD:** And it's a kind of a chicken and egg game admittedly that if we don't have that data we don't have a case to make when we come up against the fire department and public safety and public health and these more established mechanisms and this is an issue for arts and culture nationally, that every one of my peers in the country faces is that if we want to be players in government and have the arts have a place in the allocation of resources in government we have to be better with data. There's just no way around it and we need to not be afraid of it. I don't think data has to diminish the kind of values we carry in arts and culture for risk taking and for innovation or thinking outside the box for a lack of a better phrase or cliché phrase and so I see the need for that data and so we are hoping and looking out whether maybe an intermediary would be allowed. They could collect that data from applicants that perhaps don't have the staffing capacity to do the California Cultural Data Project (CCDP) for instance which we hear a lot is a barrier and I used to have to do it as an executive director so I know it is.

**MW:** Yeah, me too. I've actually filled the CCDP out for a number of arts organizations and Clarion Alley could do something like that. What do you recommend for our smaller grassroots organizations as far as support from the city?

**TD:** Well, I use the analogy of a bundle of sticks and there are some private foundations that are funding explorations of multiple small entities about how you could come together to share backend services. So, I think like looking at the business model, for a lack of a better phrase again, differently and to say if we have six organizations for instance that none are large enough to kind a have the support for backend services or to have somebody to complete the California Cultural Data Project or set up your vendor status with the city or what have you that the kind of, I think, a real successful model in organizing is just a collected action. How do you form a new entity or a collective entity with a government structure that respects each individual mission but shares backend services and I know there are some arts education organizations in the small budget arena where they recently received some private foundation money to kind of explore that and kind of see how that could be structured.

**MW:** Would the Art Commission ever consider creating a fund, like a seed fund for organizations that don't have established budgets?



**TD:** It's an interesting question. We would need that intermediary in order to do it because we would need to fund some entity, right? We would need to have the grant agreement with an entity.

**MW:** You mean a fiscally sponsored project?

**TD:** Yeah, I mean it's worth throwing in the hopper. I think as we look we are going to be announcing a position. We have a fellow position open right now. It may have closed but it's a PhD. We have got ACLS (American Council of Learned Societies) to fund a two-year fellow full time to do a whole analysis of our grant-making strategy. Everything from multiyear grant making because I think making organizations go through the hoops every year or annually, it takes away from the art making or from the salaries of the people doing the work. It does fund development consultants. So your thought would be having it actually see through a fiscal sponsor like Intersection?

**MW:** Yeah, it's frustrating for us (CAMP) because we put so much work into the project and all on a volunteer basis to keep the project going, and we do the publicizing, and we do get quite a bit of press, and we're in every tour guidebook. It's high visibility for San Francisco but yet the city isn't supporting us and that feels like a slap in the face from the city we are helping to draw attention to it.

**TD:** Yeah. Well, I will say it's competitive. I mean the funding, I mean both has a bit to do with what the business model approaches and if that's the right fit for government funding and trying to explore all those options and I will say we see amazing projects come through in the competitive ecosystem and we are looking at the balance between depth of investment so to the question about seeing organizations being forced out like a Root Division or something that recently is having at least challenge in the Mission, and we've been discussing at length do we invest deeply in these organizations that have demonstrated histories like our cultural centers? We don't currently have a legacy artist grant so artists like Rene Yung, who has given so much to the city, and Rene is incredible and kind of trying to find a way in which government can have parity of access because there are a number of incredible

artists. A friend of mine, Timothy Cummings, who is a local artist, he was evicted and now lives in Albuquerque and I think just with a rich ecosystem we have to also think about what are the pathways to access and then what does parity look like?

**MW:** Right, absolutely.

**TD:** But I'm open to thoughts about what that can be, what are ways which create, I mean for the commitment of cultural equity, do we really have a core value of making the accessibility for either a merging. There is also this tension of do we create mechanisms that encourage more 501(c) 3s to develop, and I'm not sure that's the best thing for San Francisco, I mean we have over 6,000 non-profits.

**MW:** Yeah, we have the largest density of non-profits in the country.

**TD:** And that creates this kind of competitive ecosystem that I think at times also to this advocacy front it kind of differentiates us to such a degree that everybody's individual project becomes a 501(c)3 for one person. So I get a little concerned about how we perpetuate an extreme differentiation to this collective action point that kind of competes with itself. So, I mean to think about business models where projects that are established and have a real impact for the city like Clarion Alley.

**MW:** But that they are so small and for Clarion it's just because we haven't been able to establish that funding base with the city because we don't fit the eligibility.

**TD:** Have you thought about Clarion Alley incorporating together with another organization in terms of a 501(c)3 that would include various projects?

**MW:** Potentially but then it comes down to the seed funding again. Because it is a struggle and it would run so much smoother if we did have support honestly.

**TD:** Uh-hmm. Yeah, well keeping that mind as we look at our grant-making strategy and what ways can we look at alternative business models or making it more accessible for people to apply.

**MW:** Especially with these public projects that are high visibility and that have a lot more foot traffic than a lot of the gallery spaces do.

**TD:** Uh-hmm, yeah.

**MW:** So what are some of the success stories that you have seen?

**TD:** Well, it's may be not sexy because it's not new but I think our cultural centers are a great example of the community asking for government to step up or step in and at that time acquired SOMArts, Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, the Bayview Opera House, the African American Art and Culture Complex and we have these great non-profit tenants who programmed those buildings and their hubs for many other organizations. So SOMArts is home to the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center which is another funded cultural center and ArtSpan and the African American Art & Cultural Complex has a number of tenants ranging from Cultural Odyssey to African-American Shakespeare Company and they are great hubs for a number of organizations that can flourish and it was an early innovation on shared space that people get excited about and I think about these emergent ideas of shared space in the tech sector and really artists have been doing it for years and have been doing it quite well and successfully and so we can share in that idea. I think too we've been successful at the Arts Commission in the past three years of obtaining capital dollars to care for them properly which hadn't been always the case, so there is a new roof at Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts that was about a \$600,000 investment from the city that we just made. SOMArts, we have been asked before the Capital Planning Committee with the Mayor's Office on Disability for a massive ADA compliance and then also a new roof now worth a total of over one million dollars and like I mentioned the 5.3 million for Bayview Opera House and so I think the Arts Commission and as a city we are recognizing these assets and they're kind of mechanism for reduced rate rentals and other mechanisms of affordability. I think I would like to double down on those as kind of a model for how we can be effective in terms of creating space and access for art to take place. I think the Community Arts Stabilization Trust in these two new initial investments provides a new avenue and I am hopeful that that can be a mechanism for private resources to match public resources so while the city has invested in some of those projects I

would love to see a bigger investment for pathways to ownership and to master leasing and the technical assistance to support small and mid-sized organizations particularly in historically underserved communities to find a way which they too could find a pathway to ownership and to be supportive long term, so I think those are all good examples. There is a public art trust that is a new legislation that passed in May 2012 and we are looking at those guidelines. It is the trust that in essence modifies the planning code to allow a developer to voluntarily contribute the 1% for art that is required on developments in the downtown C3 district and allows them to contribute to the trust and then it would give a broader application for how the Arts Commission might distribute those resources in the community. We are looking at some of the challenges with it but right now the legislation did not include, for lack of a better frame, a carrot or a stick so it's kind of if you were the developer, you would have a choice to put the art on site or to contribute to the city - to the Arts Commission specifically and I think it's—we've been trying to help the developer community understand the benefit to that by activating community and investing in long-term organization that might our neighbor, but I think it's also kind of might be valuable to look at the structure of what incentives there are to contribute to that because I think there is real value to having those resources come and be distributed in the way that it isn't just always on the side in the private development. So, I think the Public Art Trust is a great potential success story and we are looking to try to refine it so that we can take full advantage of that as a new revenue stream.

**MW:** Increased access for the new companies moving in will be a great help (laughs).

**TD:** I leave it to the advocates to say what that should look like (laughs).

**MW:** Anything else you like to add?

**TD:** I just I want to say about our practicalizing...it's great to have—the past two weeks have been wonderful to have the press pay attention to this issue. I think it's so critical that the story is told and that we kind of have—we helped, kind of illuminate the value of artists in our communities that have existed in San Francisco for decades. It's what makes San Francisco a really special city and it is, on a personal level, it has been challenging to have close friends who are artists not be able to

afford to live here, but I do see when people say they have to move to Oakland that people should also look at Ingleside, the Excelsior, and I would love to retain people who have a long history in the city if you are forced to have to move to recognize that we have more affordable neighborhoods that have been neglected for years and I recently myself moved to the Excelsior and I find this just amazing community of people who are like, hey, we've been here for a long time and we don't have an arts and culture center in our neighborhood or this proportionally gets less funding and I think it's important that we recognize that there are these great communities that have artists living in them and are much more affordable and actually more affordable than Oakland.

**MW:** Well, thank you so much Tom. This has really been great to hear your commitment and how you perceive what the role of the arts should be and how to be working with communities.

**TD:** Yeah. If I said I was sleeping a lot at night, I'd be lying. (Laughter)

\*\*\*(END OF INTERVIEW)\*\*\*