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NAEA Position Statement on Visual Arts Education and Social Art

[Adopted March 2015; Reviewed and Revised March 2018; Reviewed and Revised April 2023]

NAEA recognizes the importance of visual arts, design, and media arts education to raise consciousness, foster empathy and respect for others, build community, and motivate people to advance positive social change.

Artists and cultural organizations often engage with the issues of their time, and some treat the creation and/or curation of art as a social practice. Art can provide a meaningful catalyst to engage and empower individuals and communities to take action around a social issue. The processes by which people create and engage with art can help them understand and challenge inequities through art education and social art.

The interconnectedness of online resources and social media has enabled art and arts-based service learning experiences to grow into global arts-based efforts. Visual art educators are encouraged to guide learners to participate in, identify, create, and/or implement their own social art/arts-based service learning experiences. These experiences can help educators and learners bring about awareness of social issues, open dialogue, and identify ways in which the arts can impact efforts to address injustice.

Defining Language

NAEA recognizes that language and terms change over time. The term 'social art' is used in this statement to refer to "artists choosing to engage with timely issues by expanding their practice beyond the safe confines of the studio and right into the complexity of the unpredictable public sphere. This work has many names: "relational aesthetics," "social justice art," "social practice," and "community art," among others. Other terms in use include socially engaged art; art activism; social justice art; and social artistry. "These artists engage in a process that includes careful listening, thoughtful conversation, and community organizing." Anne Pasternak, Former President and Artistic Director, Creative Time.

Resources:

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<https://social-art-award.org/about-social-art/>

NOTE: The Platform Working Group has created a writing committee of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee members to write a new position statement specific to Visual Arts and Social Justice with plans to adopt in the 2023-2024 cycle. The PWG and ED&I Committee felt this statement is more closely aligned to the broad curriculum topic of Social Art (which could include climate change, animal extinction, bullying, social justice, etc.)

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