Welcome to Twenty 02, a publication celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Santa Monica Arts Commission. Artists have been creating and performing in Santa Monica since the beginnings of this relaxed, oceanside community. The neighborly spirit, diversity, and tolerance for individual expression which make the city a wonderful place to live have been especially attractive to painters, musicians, writers, and performers.

The thirteen-member Santa Monica Arts Commission was formally established in 1982 to oversee the city's arts programs and to advise the City Council on cultural and arts policies. The Arts Commission's formation coincided with major economic and social changes in our community, changes that both increased the opportunity for cultural richness and imperiled the economic self-sufficiency of individual artists.

The Arts Commission uses many tools to foment individual creative expression and to protect and enhance our fragile arts ecosystem. While this book provides a comprehensive survey of the Commission's activities over the last two decades, I would like to share a few of my recent experiences working in concert with my fellow Arts Commissioners, the city's Cultural Affairs Division staff, and many passionate residents of our city.

When a thriving community of artists at the Santa Monica Airport was in danger of being displaced, we worked with the Airport Commission, City Hall, and the City Council to offer long-term, below-market leases to the artist tenants—many of whom had already invested years of sweat equity to transform unused hangars and support buildings into a vibrant hive of creative activity.

When parents of schoolchildren lamented the lack of visual and performing arts classes in Santa Monica's public elementary schools, the Arts Commission secured a grant from the California Arts Council for a pilot program to bring local artists and performers into the public schools to teach in one-on-one partnerships with the school district's existing non-arts instructors.

When local artists asked for an entry-level opportunity to gain experience with public art projects, we created the “Fresh Art” program, which enables talented painters, sculptors, and conceptual artists to compete for opportunities to design, install, and maintain six-week-long public art projects in Clover Park every autumn.

Documenting the Arts Commission's endeavors has itself become a springboard for new creative activity. For this book, a jury was impaneled to select three Santa Monica–based artists—Anne Fishbein, Anthony Friedkin, and John Humble—to be interpreters of the Arts Commission's legacy. They were asked to explore the Arts Commission's projects as a starting point for their own vision of Santa Monica's artistic heritage. Artists, past and current Commissioners, community members, and others associated with the Arts Commission were solicited to give voice to its history. The result is a collection of photographs and interviews that apply a uniquely personal vision to the city's creative heritage, honoring past contributions and inspiring future creativity in the studio, on the stage, and in the realm of public policy.

Gregory Spotts Chairperson
Santa Monica Arts Commission
My association with the City of Santa Monica and its Arts Commission dates back to 1987 when I assumed the directorship of the Santa Monica Museum of Art. The Commission and the Museum were only recently formed, and the activities and programs of both organizations had yet to have the impact and influence they enjoy today. Having just relocated from New York City, where I had been a Program Officer with the New York State Council on the Arts, I found the transition to the sunny shores of the Pacific Ocean oddly disconcerting. My frame of reference was New York's august museums and the downtown art scene. At that time, Santa Monica's artistic identity was highly idiosyncratic and narrow by the conventions with which I was familiar. Fast-forward almost twenty years and we find a far more worldly, diverse, and cosmopolitan cultural landscape. What happened?

The City of Santa Monica's association with many progressive causes made it a conducive environment in which artists could live and work. As the city evolved, a number of interests—individual, entrepreneurial, and civic—converged to give impetus to a public embrace of culture. The capsule interviews within these pages tell the story well.

The early efforts of the Santa Monica Arts Commission in the mid-1980s, while limited to just a few outdoor concerts and performances, were nonetheless instrumental in abetting the city's transformation. Likewise, the passage of the Percent for Art resolution gave the Commission the wherewithal to commission artists to create public art works as part of new building projects in the city. In both instances, the civic sanction of two entirely different types of encounters with art—one transitory and the other permanent—enriched the range of cultural experiences available to a lay audience. For artists, it provided a new opportunity to showcase work outside conventional forums.

If the strategies that governed the Commission's agenda in its early days had remained unchanged, it is likely that its impact would have been greatly diminished. Fortunately, the Commission has always been willing to examine its assumptions, change course, and respond to the shifting artistic climate; this has given their activities a kind of permeability and fitting appropriateness within the dynamic of their times. By the early 1990s, with the birth of the 18th Street Arts Complex, Highways, the Santa Monica Museum of Art, and other organizations, the cultural landscape of Santa Monica had changed. It was no longer necessary for the Arts Commission to undertake programming that competed with indigenous organizations better equipped to take on this mantle. At the same time, the Commission found a way to support the operating budgets of these relatively new organizations and thereby helped secure their futures.

For a city of approximately 90,000 residents, Santa Monica boasts an astonishing range of cultural offerings, including galleries, museums, festivals, and public and performance art. Its renowned programs are a model for an enlightened approach to art and artists, one that integrates the creative process into civic life. In no small measure, the Santa Monica Arts Commission has been a catalyst in this transformation by creating a dialogue around public support for the arts, encouraging community involvement, and honoring artistic excellence.

Tom Rhoads  Head of Administration
J. Paul Getty Museum
PAUL CUMMINS
Founding member of the Arts Commission, founder and former director of Crossroads School
I’m an educator who believes that the arts are every bit as important as academics, so when I was asked to chair the Commission in the early 1980s I immediately said yes. During that first year we spent most of our time trying to figure out what we should be doing and how to secure city funds to create public works and arts programming in the city. We laid the groundwork for the Commission by calling attention to the need for funding. One of the things we were pushing was the Percent for Art resolution, which we achieved. Without that funding there’s not much that can be done. In creating that policy the Commission gained credibility and was able to grow into the respectable force it’s become.

SUE DAKIN
Co-founder, along with Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland, of the 18th Street Arts Complex
As a longtime artist and publisher, I repeatedly observed that artists and arts organizations move into depressed areas of town and make it attractive, only to have money interests move in and raise rents to a level artists can no longer afford. So, in the mid-1980s Linda, Steve, and I decided to devote our resources and energies to securing a property that would provide artists with long-term security. We chose Santa Monica because one of the uses the city had designated for the area was arts spaces. At the time, it was a relatively new thing for a city to make that kind of provision, and Santa Monica was a real leader in terms of creating a psychological space where a project like this could flourish. We bought the property on 18th Street in October of 1988 and moved in little by little. Initially we didn’t receive financial aid from the city, but over the years it has become hugely important to the Complex in terms of funding, particularly after Highways opened in May 1989.

PAUL LEAF
Founding member of the Arts Commission
During the 1970s I spent two years in Stuttgart, Germany, and I was startled by the amount of support the arts received from the government there. When Santa Monica’s city government underwent a change in 1979, I saw an opportunity to start a city-funded program that would promote the arts as a public resource no less important than clean air and clean water. There was no Arts Commission in Santa Monica at the time, so I chaired the original group, and we arrived at a plan for how to proceed. One of our original goals was to increase funding for arts in the schools, and although this didn’t happen then [the Commission now funds many projects in the schools], the public arts program was a huge success. We initiated a series of dances on the beach, we did a year of Shakespeare on the Santa Monica Pier—we had something going on every weekend of the year, and it was exciting. In fact, the 1989 Conference of U.S. Mayors gave Santa Monica its 10th Annual Livability Award because of the city’s arts leadership.

CARL CHENG
Artist and creator of Santa Monica Art Tool: Walk on L.A., a permanent sculpture on Santa Monica State Beach
The idea for the Art Tool was to create a massive roller with a reverse image of Los Angeles on it which creates a kind of sandcastle/map when dragged across the sand. It’s one of the most popular artworks I’ve ever done, largely because kids can understand it. In fact, kids usually explain it to their parents. I often sit on the pier and watch how people react to the piece. All kinds of interesting things happen. One thing I’ve seen repeatedly is that a guy will be walking along the boardwalk with his kids and will pass right by it; then the kids will stop, call him back, and explain the piece to him. I’ve done public works that were totally retro in other communities, but the Arts Commission and Cultural Affairs Division work hard to make things happen—Santa Monica is great about supporting cutting-edge artworks.
MARIANNE BONINO  Founding member of the Arts Commission and a producer of classical music concerts for Mount St. Mary’s College

I produced a series of concerts called Chamber Music in Historic Sites, so I was asked to serve on that first Commission despite the fact that they weren’t presenting any classical music at the time. Rather, we were focusing on sorting out exactly what the Commission should attempt to do, as well as launching the Art in Parks Project, which was one of the wonderful things we achieved during those early days. In 1989 we oversaw the installation of Tony Delap’s The Big Wave, the steel arch that spans Wilshire Boulevard at Franklin Street. I’m moved by the abstract symbolism of that piece, and I always enjoy seeing it.

PAUL CONRAD  Pulitzer Prize–winning cartoonist and creator of Chain Reaction a permanent sculpture on the Santa Monica Civic Center grounds

*Chain Reaction* was the first time I’d done a major public artwork, and I thought that baby swung! The guys who actually built the thing loved it—just poured their hearts into it—and I think it shows. The idea for the piece popped into my head fully formed, and it’s more or less an omen of where we’re going. There’s a plaque on it that reads: “This is a statement of peace. May it never become an epitaph,” and I mean that. Santa Monica solicited public response to the piece after it was unveiled in 1991, and some of the comments were fabulous: “Throw it back in the ocean!,” that sort of thing. When people react like that, you know you’re on to something.

MARÍA LUISA de HERRERA  Manager, Cultural Affairs Division, City of Santa Monica, from 1990 to the present

The orientation of the Cultural Affairs Division underwent a dramatic change in 1992 when we received funding for a Cultural Arts Master Plan, the first the city had ever done. It allowed the Arts Commission to go into the community and say, “This is what we’ve been doing. What would you like us to do?” The process was very instructive. One of the most important things we learned was that Santa Monica’s arts community had changed dramatically since the Commission was established in 1982; until the time of the Master Plan, the Commission’s focus had been on programming.

By the 1990s the city had a new crop of arts organizations, including the Santa Monica Museum of Art, the 18th Street Arts Complex, and Highways, and the Commission needed to serve the community in other ways. It was decided that the most productive thing to do was to help these organizations flourish, so we shifted from being a programming agency to a supporting agency. The Commission also decided to move away from producing small events and pool resources into the annual Santa Monica Festival. Geared around the ethnic origins of Santa Monica, the festival succeeded in forging links between the City and sectors of the local community that had never been served before. We conducted oral interviews and began recording a history that was previously unknown. That’s a legacy I’m very proud of.

I’m also pleased that we’ve succeeded in integrating art into all of the city’s public works projects and that over the course of the last ten years grant funds have increased tenfold, enabling Santa Monica’s arts organizations to flourish.

TIM MILLER  Performance artist and co-founder, with Linda Frye Burnham and Steve Durland, of Highways, and a former Arts Commissioner

When Highways opened in 1989, there was a strong feeling that Santa Monica was going to be supportive—and over the years it has been. The Arts Commission has always championed Highways, and they’ve been instrumental in our being regular beneficiaries of three different grant programs. That ongoing support helped Highways become a major presenter of contemporary dance and performance in Santa Monica, as well as one of the most visible arts organizations in Los Angeles.

Anyone who followed the culture wars of the 1990s will recall that Highways was relentlessly attacked by the right wing. Conservative nuts on the floor of Congress were outraged by our programs, but the Arts Commission never flinched in their support of us. In fact, I think they were proud that we were
such an important, challenging organization. For thirteen years Santa Monica has been a good home to one of the most influential and controversial arts organizations in the country, and that’s a good sign of life for the city.

BRURIA FINKEL  Artist and founding member of the Arts Commission who served on the Commission for thirteen years

One of the first things we had to do during the early years of the Commission was to educate people that art is more than mere decoration—that it’s a crucial part of the life of a community—and that took up a good deal of time. The most important achievement during those years was policy setting, including the passage of the law that mandates that one percent of the budget for any city building project must be set aside for art. We created the Art Bank, a collecting program, so that the city has a permanent collection of works by L.A. artists. We established the Natural Elements Sculpture Park, which commissioned permanent public sculptures for Santa Monica Beach, and we launched a program that provides funding for schools to take students to galleries, museums, and artist’s studios.

LEIGH CURRAN  Writer and performer, founder and director of the Virginia Avenue Project

I came to L.A. from New York in 1991 with the intention of replicating the 52nd Street Project, a youth program established in Manhattan in the early 1980s. The first thing I needed was a youth center, so I looked in the Santa Monica phone book under “Parks and Recreation.” I called the Police Activities League, and they told me, “Great, we’ve been looking for an arts component to what we do, come on over,” and the program was officially launched.

Basically, we’re an arts mentoring program that brings kids growing up under difficult circumstances together with professional writers, performers, and directors to create original theater. Between eighty and one hundred kids benefit from the program every year. We use theater to help them find their voices, and we’re very involved in their lives. The Cultural Affairs Division championed the program from the beginning, and the Arts Commission gives us grants for playwriting, performing, and producing plays. Many lifelong friendships have been established through this program, and I’m incredibly proud of having helped children.
**RICHARD TURNER** Artist, educator, and collaborator on the Santa Monica Urban Runoff Reclamation Facility (SMURRF), opened in 2001  

As the artist on the SMURRF team, one of my primary goals was to present this facility as a process rather than a place, and to encourage people to move through it. I wanted to use architecture, signage, and graphics to give people a sense of why the facility is important and how it works. As you walk through SMURRF there are stations with explanatory graphics and various viewing sites that allow visitors to watch the water reclamation process. In the design I was inspired by an eighteenth-century observatory in Jaipur, India—a complex of buildings perfectly poised between sculpture and architecture which houses huge machines for measuring movement in the cosmos. We were housing huge machines for purifying water, so this ancient Indian synthesis of sculpture, architecture, and machinery was a perfect mirror for what we were attempting.

One of the most extraordinary things about this project is that the city wanted to showcase the process rather than hide it away. Most communities hide their water treatment facilities, so by putting SMURRF in such a prominent location, the city of Santa Monica made a clear statement: “We’re cleaning up the bay, we’re proud of it, and this is what we’re using to do it.” Ecologically, it’s a forward-thinking thing to do.

**KEN BREISCH** Member of the Santa Monica Planning Commission for eight years, professor of architectural history at USC, and director of USC’s Historic Preservation program  

The involvement of artists in projects like SMURRF transforms these facilities into something more than routine scientific exhibitions. Largely because of its design, which encourages people to actually walk through the facility and see the processes used to clean waste that was previously emptied into the bay, SMURRF is an amazingly effective synthesis of progressive ecology and public education. Programs like this are a great way to raise public awareness, and they’re a strong reflection of the city’s commitment to sustainability. Santa Monica is really quite forward thinking in this regard; in terms of sustainability, it’s one of the most progressive communities in the country.
BROWNE GOODWIN  *Founding member of the Arts Commission*

I grew up in Maine and came to Santa Monica to work for Douglas Aircraft in 1952. Santa Monica was like a sleepy little midwestern town then, but it’s grown up during the years I’ve been here. So many artists have settled here, and they’ve helped transform it into a much more cosmopolitan city than it was when I arrived. Those of us who got involved with the first Arts Commission in the early 1980s sensed that the city was changing, and we knew there was a great deal of grassroots activity in the local arts community that should be nourished and developed. We didn’t really know what our goals were when we first got together, but over the seven years I served on the Commission we succeeded in putting together a public arts program that I’m very proud of.

MANFRED MÜLLER  *Artist and creator of Twilight and Yearning, a permanent environmental sculpture installed beneath the Santa Monica Pier in 1998*

The space beneath the Santa Monica Pier has always struck me as an intensely spiritual place. Sometimes it feels like a dark cathedral; other times it’s like a cemetery. My idea was to introduce a new element into this already magnificent setting, an element that would accentuate the mass and intricacy of the underside of the pier, the turbulence of the ocean, and the ever-changing light. This is the thinking behind the three sixteen-foot boats that are vertically affixed to the concrete pillars that support the pier. Normally you see boats floating on water or resting on sand, so positioning them this way violates the romantic feelings usually associated with them—you feel a little sorry for these boats. I want them to incite feelings of concern and to disturb the natural harmony, because the piece was conceived to sound a warning about the ecology of the bay and to serve as a reminder of the elemental cycles that make all life on earth possible.

WAYNE BLANK  *Developer and manager of the Bergamot Station Arts Complex*

In 1983 the Santa Monica City Council passed a resolution declaring Santa Monica art friendly. That meant...
they’d do whatever they could to cut through red tape and help bring the arts to Santa Monica, and that’s really where the story of Bergamot begins. Cut to ten years later: I had developed some artists’ studios at the Santa Monica Airport in 1993 which were brought to the attention of the City Council; they saw how successful that project was, and I was invited to check out a piece of property at 26th and Olympic. They said, “We’d like to see something relating to art there. Got any ideas?” They weren’t offering money to develop the site, but from the beginning the city welcomed us and said, “We’re happy you’re here, and we’ll do anything we can to help you get up and running.” And together we created something that really works. Bergamot Station has around 800,000 visitors a year, which is more than most L.A. museums, and people come here from all over Southern California. There are thirty-four venues, the Santa Monica Museum of Art, a café—it’s got a national reputation and is a synergistic asset for the city.

BARBARA STINCHFIELD Director, Community and Cultural Services, City of Santa Monica

The Arts Commission exemplifies the esprit de corps of Santa Monica and is our partner in enlivening this city with art. The Commissioners have a high degree of enthusiasm, and their insights are always enlightening. People in Santa Monica see the physical representations of this spirit through the public works projects that integrate art. And the community loves the Santa Monica Festival—it exemplifies the energy of the group. There has always been a high level of activism on the Arts Commission, and unlike other advisory commissions who have a diverse set of issues, the Arts Commission has a very clear mission. I’m impressed by the Commissioners’ ability to articulate their position to the City Council. Over the years they’ve become increasingly sophisticated in raising the level of debate and highlighting significant issues in a very eloquent way. The Commission has created an important legacy and has earned credibility and respect for their tireless work on behalf of the arts in Santa Monica.

RENÉE PETROPOULOS Artist and creator of Two Hundred Fourteen Movements and a View, a terrazzo floor installed in the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium in 1997

I’ve always loved the Santa Monica Civic and had great respect for its design, and initially it seemed a bit impertinent for me to come in forty years later and superimpose an artwork on it. I thought long and hard about what I could do, and the work finally began to coalesce when I realized how impeccably symmetrical the building is. Today we live in a world of asymmetrical order, so I came up with a design that would constantly shift as you walk over it—a pattern in counterpoint to the architecture. Because this piece is integrated into the fabric of the building, I worked with the planners and city architects—who were really helpful and the Cultural Affairs Division facilitated the piece beautifully. I feel very good about the outcome.

JODY PINTO Artist and collaborator with landscape architecture firm Wallace Roberts & Todd on the BIG Project

As a child growing up in New York I spent summers on the Jersey coast, so I’ve always loved beach towns, and it was an incredible thrill to participate in the redesign of the coastal frontage of a beach city—particularly one as prominent as Santa Monica. My idea was to create a living theater of natural and human activity, with the Palisades serving as a balcony to observe the performance of nature: the rising and setting of the sun, the ebb and flow of the tides, the light dancing on water. Light is
the throughline that informed all our design decisions—from the roofs of the restrooms which filter light, to the abalone shells embedded in the walkway, which flicker and dance as shadows move across them.

It's extremely unusual for an artist to be an equal member of the team on a project of this scale, and the Arts Commission deserves a great deal of credit. BIG won the 2002 National Honor award from the American Society of Landscape Architects, and I look forward to working on the second phase of the project, which includes refurbishing the Santa Monica Pier, widening the auto and pedestrian bridge onto the pier, and rebuilding the California Incline.

TOM PATCHETT Writer, collector, founder and director of Track 16 Gallery, and chief financial investor in the development of Bergamot Station

The idea of helping transform a piece of derelict real estate into something vibrant and alive interested me, and work began late in 1993. I opened Track 16 as part of the grand opening of Bergamot in September of 1994. It was exciting—the city was enthusiastic, and supportive too. The making of art seems like a courageous thing to do, and I derive strength from having it around. Art also inspired me to read more and to involve myself with provocative ideas and social concerns. Santa Monica was the right place for me to be. In fact, it's probably the best place in Southern California for art. People in Santa Monica are friendly, and they aren't afraid to ask what might be perceived as a stupid question. The art audience here is open and interested—and if you have parking, they will come.

SHEILA GOLDBERG Central facilitator of the Venice Art Walk for twenty-two years and a member of the Arts Commission for eight years

The greatest achievement of the Arts Commission has been their success in integrating artists into every public works project. It often happens that when a new building goes up developers pay lip service to art by sticking a sculpture on the lawn. You won't find much "plop art" in Santa Monica, however, because it's the law in this community that the design team for any public works project must include an artist from the very first day of planning. I was on the Commission when this piece of legislature was being developed, and it took a long time to figure out how to get artists and architects to work together and to persuade city officials to see the wisdom of letting an artist have a voice in how a public project comes together. It comes down to people trusting people, and trusting artists to lead us.