

FIGMENT 2008: Background Information

JUNE 27-29, 2008
GOVERNORS ISLAND

WHAT IS FIGMENT?

FIGMENT is an annual participatory arts event on Governors Island, New York. The mission of FIGMENT is to provide a forum for community-based participatory art and creative experience. The creators of FIGMENT strive to build community among artists and their audience, to foster the participatory arts in New York City, and to demonstrate a vision for the future of Governors Island as an arts destination.

We launched FIGMENT in 2007 as a one-day cultural event on July 8. Our efforts resulted in more than 60 participatory arts projects and the honor of hosting more than 2,800 participants. For the 2008 event, we are planning a three-day event for approximately 10,000 participants.

ARTS AND COMMUNITY

New York is a place where the arts are bought, sold and memorialized in museums, but also a place where few artists can afford to live or to have their work shown. The creators of FIGMENT strive to lower the high barriers to exhibiting art and, significantly, to creatively interacting with the public on a large scale.

At the same time, many New Yorkers lack a sense of community. Many of the inhabitants of our city enter a transitional period in their lives upon moving to New York, coming here to pursue a career but, subsequently, relocating elsewhere when family or economic pressures become too great. Our objective for FIGMENT is to provide a community-based experience that is open to everyone, providing even the most temporary of residents a place to belong.

ABOUT FIGMENT

The event draws its name from New York's artistic heritage. Andy Warhol once commented that he would like his tombstone to display only one word, "Figment." Although Warhol never got his wish, for he has a traditional grave marker, this event—as part of its mission to celebrate the artistic vibrancy of New York—can stand as an epitaph to Warhol and other visionary New York artists, while promoting the future of the arts in New York.

ABOUT GOVERNORS ISLAND

Governors Island is the ideal location for a major cultural event. Upon New York City acquiring Governors Island from the Coast Guard in 2003, the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation (GIPEC) initiated a public process to imagine a future for the island that is economically sustainable and that serves the community. There are no residents on the island; Governors Island belongs to all of us. What better way to create a new identity for this public resource than through a participatory cultural event that builds community and draws participants from around the world?

ABOUT PARTICIPATORY ART

Because of its interactive nature, participatory art can be a vehicle for personal and social transformation. Participatory arts include any works of art that require interaction from participants, such as installation art, costuming, interactive performance, and games. These activities bring together artists and community members in ways that build relationships and encourage individual creativity.

OUR OPERATING MODEL

FIGMENT is a community-based event organized and run by volunteers. The success of the event is dependent on community participation. The scope of FIGMENT will be scaled according to the degree of enthusiasm and energy exhibited by our community. Our objective is to enlist the services of a volunteer organization to administer the event utilizing as flexible and as open a process as possible, while still providing for a basic decision-making structure.

CURATING THE EVENT

We will solicit art projects for FIGMENT through a curatorial process, based on artistic merit, ambitiousness and interactivity. Because Governors Island offers an abundance of space to fill with art, our goal will be to approve as many projects as possible. We intend to utilize the networks of artists in New York City and around the world. We seek art projects that demonstrate an ability to transform environment and the perception of participants.

FUNDING STRATEGY

As a community-based organization, we want to create the maximum possible impact at the lowest possible cost. In 2007, FIGMENT featured over 60 arts projects for the one-day event attended by 2,800 participants. The budget for this event was under \$1,000. In 2008, we are planning a three-day event, for approximately 10,000 participants, with a budget of \$5,000 - \$10,000. These funds will come from a combination of individual donations and government and institutional grants. We are not considering one specific source of funding, corporate sponsorship. We are fundamentally opposed to compromising FIGMENT as a vehicle for advertising a product or service. No corporate logos or names will be associated with FIGMENT.

OUR PRINCIPLES

The creators of FIGMENT draw their inspiration from other community-based arts events. We have created 10 principles that guide the development, production and experience of FIGMENT.

Participation

Our community is committed to the spirit of participation. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. Everyone is invited to work, and everyone is invited to play.

Decommodification

Our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation, for we resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.

Inclusion

Anyone may be a part of FIGMENT; we welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

Self-expression

Self-expression is the result of individuals making unique contributions, enabling the event to happen. No entity, other than the individual or a collaborating group, can determine content. Art is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.

Self-reliance

The creators of FIGMENT encourage the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.

Giving

FIGMENT is devoted to acts of gift giving and volunteering. A gift is given without conditions. Gifting does not encompass a return or an exchange for something of equal value.

Communal Effort

Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.

Civic Responsibility

Each participant is responsible for helping to create a civil environment for all participants. We assume responsibility for producing this event in a way that is socially responsible and helps foster a civil society.

Leaving No Trace

Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities, wherever we gather. We clean-up after ourselves and, whenever possible, leave such places in a better state than when we found them.

Immediacy

We seek to overcome barriers that stand between a greater understanding of self, the reality of those around us, active and conscientious participation in society, and contact with a natural world.

PARTNERSHIPS

In order to achieve the maximum possible impact, the creators of FIGMENT seek to partner with the widest possible spectrum of arts and community groups. We encourage the participation and contributions of other non-profit organizations to assist in bringing artwork and participatory activities to FIGMENT. We are open to dialogue with organizations and individuals about how to increase levels of participation and resources.

LEADERSHIP

FIGMENT is a project of Action Arts League (www.actionartsleague.org) and is produced by a coalition of volunteers in partnership with The Pure Project (www.thepureproject.com). The production team has experience leading community-oriented arts projects, such as the Tompkins Scare Park Halloween Festival and the annual Decompression events in New York City. (Note: the 2007 Decompression event occurred in November at the Queens Museum of Art.) The production team for FIGMENT includes professionals with significant experience in event production, arts administration, community outreach, and event marketing and public relations.

Action Arts League develops art to strengthen communities and inspire individuals to explore their inner artists through participatory events, educational programs, and public-private partnerships. Action Arts League, Inc., is a New York City based 501(c)(3) arts organization that originated from the Costume Network community arts project (www.costumenetwork.com), an ongoing effort since 1999. Action Arts League has a progressive, business-minded leadership team and an extensive creative resources network capable of executing ambitious, dynamic projects.

PUREPROJECT is an idea incubator directed by a visionary collective of creative art enthusiasts whose goal is to influence social, environmental and economic sustainability through the vitality of its numerous projects and programs. The group focuses its efforts on interdisciplinary working methods, participatory art projects, network development, and working with individuals—with the ultimate goal of developing and sustaining both physical and online communities that serve as nexus points to promote creative sustainable practice.

For More Information:

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