



# LESSON PLAN: PLACEMAKING THRU PUBLIC ART & ARCHITECTURE

## Topic/Theme:

The Inglewood Civic Center

## Class Level:

Adult

**Duration:** 1-1/2 hours

## Learning Experience

**Brief Description:** The 60's were a period of tremendous optimism. Many cities were rebuilding their civic cores into more pedestrian centered experiences to reinvigorate their downtowns in the age of the automobile. Inglewood too undertook a similar development. Now 40 years later, as the city is being transformed by development, gentrification, its burgeoning arts community and public transit, this is an excellent time to look back at the history of Inglewood's downtown, its Civic Center, the integration of art with architecture and public engagement in the planning process. What does it mean to make places with public art? What worked? What didn't? What can be learned for the future? How should the City move forward as it faces the next century?

## Format & Methodology

- The Class can be either a lecture / discussion in the Civic Center or a tour
- If it is at a remote location, then the class should begin with a powerpoint showing the buildings and the artwork so that there is common ground for discussion. It is likely that most of the people are Inglewood residents and will have some familiarity with the buildings and artworks, but might probably not know about all of them. It is envisioned that there be a 30-45 minute presentation.
- This program should lead to a discussion about what Inglewood is and whether the Civic Center reflects that then and now. It should examine the wide range of public art found at the Civic Center. The discussion should look at what a successful piece of public art is and establish some attributes that are characteristic of public art that 'works'. From that they could begin to think about how to assess whether all of the pieces including the memorials are successful as individual artworks. Do they work together as a grouping to knit the whole complex into a unified whole that 'expresses Inglewood'?

As the city moves ahead into the future, it is also important to assess where it's been. It might also be an opportunity to capture oral histories as many of the older residents will



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probably remember the construction of the complex and parades and events that happened at the Civic Center.

### Specific Learning Objectives

- 1. Historical:** Inglewood's development that led to the Civic Center, its construction
- 2. Context:** 'Read' the civic, cultural and historical context and begin to understand how the circumstances surrounding the commissioning of a work impacts the final product. Most people are also not very familiar with the political process involved in creating and installing artworks as well as the technical one of fabrication.
- 3. Artwork:** Artwork of all types is at the Civic Center: commissioned to community
- 4. Restoration:** Preservation of art and architecture and about some of the choices that are made in the process.

### Resources

#### Inglewood Artworks:

- *The History of Transportation*, Helen Lundeberg
- *The Written Word*, Tom Van Sant
- *Skedans*, Tony DeLap
- *Inglewood Stories*, Michael Massenburg
- *Incomplete Conch Shell*, Jack Zajac
- *Untitled*, Gene Davis

### Brief Description

**Background:** The Civic Center has always been the heart of Inglewood. When it was incorporated a century ago, downtown was where people congregated. They shopped on Commercial and Market Streets, went to Inglewood High School and paraded along Manchester Boulevard. Frequent streetcars could take people to LA or along the coast. In the 60's cities throughout the country were building new urban complexes, reinventing the concept of creating urban spaces in the age of the automobile. The Santa Monica Mall had been completed in 1965 as one of the earliest dedicated pedestrian spaces; Century City was well underway. Charles Luckman, the Civic Center's architect had just completed the Prudential Center in Boston so he was very interested in incorporating all of the current state-of-the-art urban planning concepts prevalent during that era where the notion of creating a civic place blending art and architecture.

The Civic Center proper is actually 29 acres encompassing a collection of public buildings from police headquarters to public health facilities. But the heart of it are the 3 blocks between City Hall and Grevillea Park. The cars are buried below the 'people space' which is abundant and filled with works of art. Buildings are concrete which was considered the most advanced building material of the era suitable for the permanence of civic structures. There are sunscreens, tinted windows, and



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air conditioning throughout. On the outside pedestrian ramps link the two major buildings: City Hall and the Public Library. Three of the signature pieces of the City's Art Collection are located there: *The Written Word*, *Skedans* and *Incomplete Conch Shell* all commissioned for the Civic Center. The fourth major piece, *The History of Transportation* commissioned at the dawn of jet travel is a snapshot of how people moved in the 30's before Los Angeles became the 'City of the Automobile' and before a section of Inglewood's farmland became LAX. Even though it wasn't initially designed for the Center, its placement at the end of the Plaza in Grevillea Park serves to frame the garden as an artspace.

In addition to setting the standard for the city's aspirations, the Civic Center also functions as a reflection of the community itself. It is appropriate to have the War Memorial commemorating the local Veterans on the Plaza. Inglewood also has a thriving arts community the evidence of which is reflected in the 4 artworks created by Inglewood artists and residents.

### Issues to be addressed:

#### 1. **The role of the Civic Center in the Community.**

Much development is happening in the City of Inglewood, which will impact its residents and visitors. Discussing the Civic Center provides a framework to overlay some of the many design issues Inglewood faces as it moves into the next phase of its development.

#### 2. **Integrating Art into architecture.**

One of the major challenges of incorporating artwork into architecture is choosing the artist, finding a suitable location, timing the commission so that the artist is engaged in the project at the appropriate phase, and integrating the artwork into the building. Artwork in the Civic Center area has taken every approach from commissioned works to community murals. It has been deeply merged into the building such as the *Written Word* which addresses the programmed use, designed to complement the architectural features such as *Skedans* which marks the entry or acquired for a specific place such as *Incomplete Conch Shell*, or *Untitled* or designed for a specific location such as *Inglewood Stories*, or created independently such as *Inglewood Genesis*.

#### 3. **What is Placemaking?**

As more art is being planned and cities throughout the country are addressing placemaking thru Public Art, it is important for residents to evaluate which of these approaches are the most successful and establish metrics for how you measure success and what might be done to enhance the works already there.

#### 4. **Preservation of Art and Architecture-over Time.**

The Civic Center was built with state of the art materials and technology nearly 50 years ago. Planning principles have changed. There are newer and better materials available. Repairing industrial materials from that era has become not only expensive but sometimes requires a high level of cus-



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tom craftsmanship because the materials are no longer made the same way. Building codes, earthquake and energy requirements have changed. Before these structures and artwork are repaired it is important to evaluate why they were designed and built the way that they were, whether that is still appropriate and how they might need to be modified to meet current needs. Inglewood faces a challenge as it moves forward. It has already undertaken a significant art preservation endeavor with the Helen Lundeberg mural; how should it proceed with works like *Skedans* which need additional maintenance efforts?

### Some Supplemental Material & Resources

**Preservation:** LA Conservancy <https://www.laconservancy.org>

DoCoMoMo <http://www.docomomo-socal.org>

**Placemaking through Public Art:** ArtPlace America <http://www.artplaceamerica.org>

### Specific Questions for Teachers / Docents:

What kind of civic presence should Inglewood's public buildings have? What makes a building look 'important'? How does it reflect Inglewood? How does it reflect Charles Luckman, the Architect? Should you know when you are near City Hall that that is the function of the building? The Library is designed in the same architectural vocabulary so that the two buildings become a sculptural composition. Do you feel it is successful?

Both of the artworks are highly integrated into their buildings. Both of the artists speak about how they collaborated with Luckman to create them. Tony DeLap's *Skedans* is a freestanding sculpture set in front of City Hall in a fountain. It is meant to integrate the lower level parking and entry to the building with Manchester Boulevard a level above. But it is also an independent work of art. In many ways, the piece functions as the portal to the Civic Center; how does it do that?

Tom Van Sant's *The Written Word* is a hieroglyphic carved into the building itself which speaks to the library's primary function as a repository for books and learning. How is this building different than the City Hall?



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*The History of Transportation*, Helen Lundeberg:

This mural is the largest freestanding Federal Art Project Mural. It was made of Petrachrome, a terazzo-like substance made of cement, pigment, and crushed stone. Panels were made by attaching the material to masonite boards. The mural was originally situated along Florence Boulevard, one of Southern California's most traveled commuter arteries. How was this an appropriate space for the mural? Since the mural was moved, does that affect it?

For information about the restoration of the mural, see: "The History of Transportation" PDF: [http://inglewoodpublicart.org/pdf/About\\_The\\_History\\_of\\_Transportation.pdf](http://inglewoodpublicart.org/pdf/About_The_History_of_Transportation.pdf)

Recent public artworks are more community based such as *Inglewood Stories* and have reflected the artist's interpretation of Inglewood's history and culture. Are they singular visions or do they depict a more universal understanding of the artistic community and the City?