



**Office of the Mayor  
City of Los Angeles**

**ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA**

**Remarks delivered to LA Arts Town Hall  
As prepared for delivery  
June 16, 2007**

Good morning.

I want to thank Cora, all the organizers and the sponsors for inviting me to this important event.

What a turn out! I don't know if anyone expected quite the number of folks here. But I think the response speaks directly to the relevance and urgency of the mission today.

And it's my pleasure to open a session about taking charge of our future, because I believe we are on the cusp of a new direction for the arts in LA.

Friends, I know the outlook hasn't always been rosy. I know there are perpetual concerns about funding for our smallest organizations; about the City's role in the art community; and how much a priority the arts are for the City.

We have heard the challenges. We acknowledge that things haven't always run so smoothly on our end. But believe me, the future has never held more promise.

I often tell visitors that I envision Los Angeles as the Venice of the 21st century: As a metropolis of almost 200 nationalities, thriving at the crossroads of culture and trade.

We are the gateway to Asia and to Latin America, and our hills harbor dreamers from across the world. And together Angelenos are pushing the envelope in music, in the visual arts and on stage.

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Friends, the future is happening today throughout Los Angeles. And like with Venice, history will remember this city not only as an economic powerhouse, but for its cultural innovation, too.

For its experimental architecture amid breath-taking terrain. For its incubating of vibrant young painters and graphic designers. For its unabashed pursuit of edgy, modern composers and commissions. And for its rich tapestry of ethnic enclaves, from Leimert Park to East LA.

Our creativity defines us as a city. Los Angeles is the Creative Capital of the United States. It's that simple.

Our cultural wealth is no secret. Three million U.S. residents visit LA every year just to sample our cultural offerings. A high percentage of these tourists attend live theater shows and symphony concerts.

In fact, the Getty Center gets a higher percentage of tourist visitors than Universal Studios.

The economists tell us that more than any other city in the nation, LA's economy is driven by its creative industries – that creative industries account for 445,900 jobs in LA and \$140.5 billion in revenue generated per year. Movies, music, art, fashion and design, are an integral part of life for all Angelenos.

Now, I want to reassure you that the City remains a committed and active partner. One that believes strongly in supporting all our organizations and artists, no matter what size.

I am proud that we are one of the last few cities in the country providing unrestricted grants to individual artists. Improving the quality of life in our communities relies so much on preserving independent, local voices.

And I strongly believe these kinds of fellowship and residency grants should continue to form the foundation of the more than \$3 million in grants that the Department of Cultural Affairs allocates per year.

I am proud of the department's unwavering stance on artistic freedom. The restoration and preservation of the Siqueiros mural at Olvera Street is just one example of my support of free speech in the visual arts.

Now, I can promise you this today: You will see the City and this administration taking a leadership role in the arts as of now.

It begins with a visionary leader. A woman I've called an internationally recognized dynamo. If you don't already share my absolute delight at her appointment, I know that after you catch just a glimpse of her passion and expertise, Olga Garay will win you over, too.

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Olga has accepted an incredibly daunting mission with gusto. I have no doubt she has the persistence, pluck and patience to see it through.

She understands the great challenges and even greater opportunities awaiting her here. She knows that we absolutely must make the arts accessible and equitable through the diverse communities that make up Los Angeles. And she's already rolled up her sleeves for her first task: fashioning a new cultural master plan - a blueprint for encouraging arts and culture through out the City.

It's been a long time in coming. And it will take more than one woman, or one department. We invite you all to engage in this exciting dialogue that will shape our cultural landscape for the next decades and beyond. And we will actively seek out your opinions and views with every step of the process.

Of course, Olga will find herself supported by a strong Cultural Affairs Commission... and its Commission Chair, Al Nodal, whose reputation and current work in the arts are a perennial boon to the City and this community.

As we move forward on the master plan, I will push for us to carve out a more substantive role for the commission - both in arts policy and Departmental program oversight.

Together they will have an immediate opportunity to seize. While the City as a whole will face a tough budget year ahead, the Department of Cultural Affairs finds itself in an excellent position. On top of the \$10.1 million already approved for the Department's regular budget, \$1.4 million have also been allocated for public arts projects.

These are "1 Percent for the Arts" dollars paid for by developers.

I am sure they will be a welcome shot in the arm for expanding the Department's programming. But this is just the beginning of a new era at the Department.

Now, it's my great pleasure to turn the program over to Olga Garay, who begins her tenure as General Manager of the Department of Cultural Affairs in August. And not a moment too soon.

Please join me in welcoming Olga to Los Angeles.

Thank you very much.

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