

Art Spaces in Northeast Los Angeles

A qualitative study on their perceptions of their role in gentrification and how they
engage their community



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Spring 2022

Abstract

This research concerns the relationship between art and gentrification and the relationship between art spaces and the communities surrounding them. Within this topic, this study poses and answers two questions: how do art spaces in Northeast Los Angeles perceive the role of art in gentrification and how do art spaces engage in anti-gentrification efforts and in benefitting their communities? While there is a plethora of research debating whether art causes gentrification and the process of art contributing to gentrification, there is a lack of research concerning the perspectives of art spaces themselves. In order to answer these research questions, I interviewed twelve people who represent various art spaces in Northeast Los Angeles and used the transcripts to code data based on common themes. Gaining perspectives from art spaces can add to the research about art and gentrification and can provide art spaces with ideas to further integrate and benefit their community. This research can also be a starting point of discussion for art spaces and community members to talk about the space's implications on the neighborhood and its residents. Additionally, this research indicates the need for more affordable housing and additional policies that help to relieve the affordable housing shortage in Los Angeles.

Acknowledgements

I want to first thank Professor Matsuoka and Professor Cha for their guidance and advice during this research project. Thank you to all the UEP Professors I have had during my time at Occidental who have supported my growth in this field. I want to give a big thank you to all the participants I spoke to who took an hour out of their busy days to talk with me made this research possible. Thank you to my friends and family for their love and support throughout my time at Occidental, and especially during this process.

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Introduction

Urban planners and activists alike have long grappled with the question: How can an area be improved through public amenities and other means without causing displacement.

Unfortunately, introducing amenities like parks or bike lanes can encourage people to move into neighborhoods which can raise the cost of rent and displace long-time residents. Art in all of its forms is one such amenity. Arts organizations and businesses, especially those in lower-income areas and areas experiencing gentrification have been criticized for accelerating gentrification. Northeast Los Angeles, which has seen a rapid increase in home prices in the last 10 years (Lin 2019) is an area that can be impacted by amenities like art spaces. Organizers in Northeast Los Angeles, especially in the neighborhood of Boyle Heights (Hamidi, 2020), have protested certain art spaces and their positionality in Northeast Los Angeles in an effort to slow gentrification and maintain the core of the neighborhood they call home (Hamidi, 2020). At the same time, the practice of art-making, using art to build community, and the presence of art has substantial benefits for both individuals and communities (Rhodes and Schechter, 2014).

The tension between art as a harbinger for gentrification and as a beautiful practice for personal and communal development motivated this research. This project aims to answer two primary research questions: how do art spaces in Northeast Los Angeles perceive art's role in gentrification and how do art spaces engage in anti-gentrification efforts and in benefitting their communities? To answer these two questions, a qualitative methods approach was implemented through twelve interviews with individuals who represent four types of art spaces in five neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles.

From these twelve interviews, the paper unearths a series of findings answering the aforementioned research questions. These findings include: a) developers take advantage of art spaces; b) arts' role in gentrification varies depending on the neighborhood; c) larger galleries and businesses focused on profit are larger contributors to gentrification than other art spaces; d) community-focused spaces comprised of locals do not gentrify; e) those involved with art spaces may feel a sense of frustration, apathy, or fatigue towards the perception that art spaces lead to gentrification; f) art spaces engage in local political and planning issues to improve their communities; g) community involvement in the identity of the space and reflecting the existing community back to themselves can improve community engagement and benefit community members; h) creative uses of the physical art spaces can benefit individuals and groups in the community; i) accessibility is important to many art spaces to include all community members; j) introducing local youth to art and art making is integral to many art spaces' programs; k) art spaces support their communities as well as the larger Los Angeles area through giving. This paper fills the gap of perspectives and initiatives of art spaces in the research about art and gentrification. The findings can be used by art spaces in Northeast Los Angeles and the world to inform their future initiatives in order to meaningfully involve community and promote neighborhood stability. They can also be used to help facilitate conversations about the arts and gentrification between art space representatives and community members.

This research paper begins with a background on Northeast Los Angeles and relevant subtopics relating to the area. Next, a literature review provides historical context to the issues of gentrification, arts positive capabilities, and various perspectives involved with the debate of art and gentrification. Then, the methods section details how the research was conducted and the findings section goes into concerning the findings listed above. Finally, various policies are

recommended on both the city and state level that would alleviate the pressure and stress of gentrification on thousands of Angelenos.

Background

Profile of Northeast Los Angeles

According to the LA Times, Northeast Los Angeles comprises the neighborhoods Atwater Village, Glassell Park, Eagle Rock, Highland Park, Montecito Heights, Mount Washington, and Cypress Park. In other classifications, Northeast Los Angeles is comprised of these seven neighborhoods along with Boyle Heights, Lincoln Heights, and El Sereno. The seven neighborhoods are nestled between Glendale and Pasadena to the North and the Arroyo Seco Parkway to the East. Data from the 2013-2017 American Community Survey found that Northeast LA (NELA) had 237,256 people. Northeast LA's Hispanic or Latino community makes up 64% of residents (LA City) compared to 48.5% of all of Los Angeles (US Census). The renting rate in Northeast Los Angeles is 56 percent (Chiland, 2017), which is slightly above the 2015 Los Angeles County rental rate of 54 percent (Chiland, 2017). According to LA City data, the median household income in Northeast LA is \$54,672, about \$7,500 less than the LA County median household income of \$62,142.

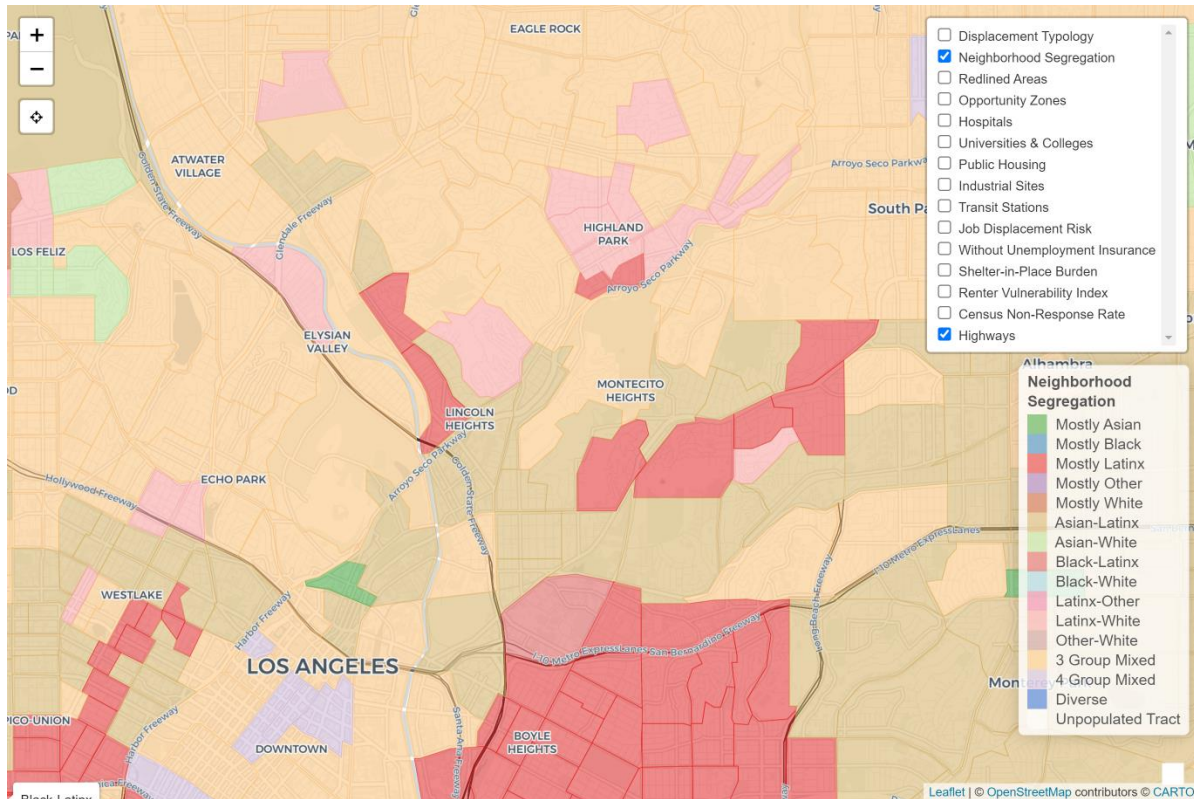


Image Courtesy of the Urban Displacement Project based on 2018 data

Neighborhoods in Northeast LA, as has been discussed, have a high population of Latinx residents, and this figure displays there are also sizable populations of Asian and white residents. It also shows how some areas, like Eagle Rock and Atwater Village, are more racially integrated than other neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and Lincoln Heights.

History of Gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles

Two economic factors are primarily responsible for the gentrification of the Highland Park neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles. First, previously relatively affordable neighborhoods for young creatives, like Echo Park, Silver Lake, and Los Feliz, saw a dramatic rise in home and rent prices (Chandler, 2019). After the 2008 recession, lower housing prices enticed parties looking to profit from new development or new uses of existing developments

and aspiring homeowners or renters who could no longer afford nearby “trendy” areas. One Glassell Park resident who grew up in Eagle Rock explains that since 2008 “a lot of cool coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and vintage shops popped up in [Highland Park], making it basically a less expensive and cooler version of Echo Park” (Staff, 2015). Cafe de Leche, a coffee shop that opened in 2009, is considered ground zero for gentrification in Highland Park (Lin, 2019). Other shops linked to gentrification and Highland Park’s new white hipster neighbors opened their doors in the following few years.

Although Highland Park is often the most extreme example of this trend, other neighborhoods in Northeast LA feel similar effects. Those in the market to rent or own a home look to these neighborhoods, like they do for Highland Park, as the new affordable option. Due to the saturation of the housing market in Highland park and adjacent neighborhoods, rent and housing prices have risen. Now, Boyle Heights and El Sereno are regarded as potential areas for young creatives to find cheaper rents.

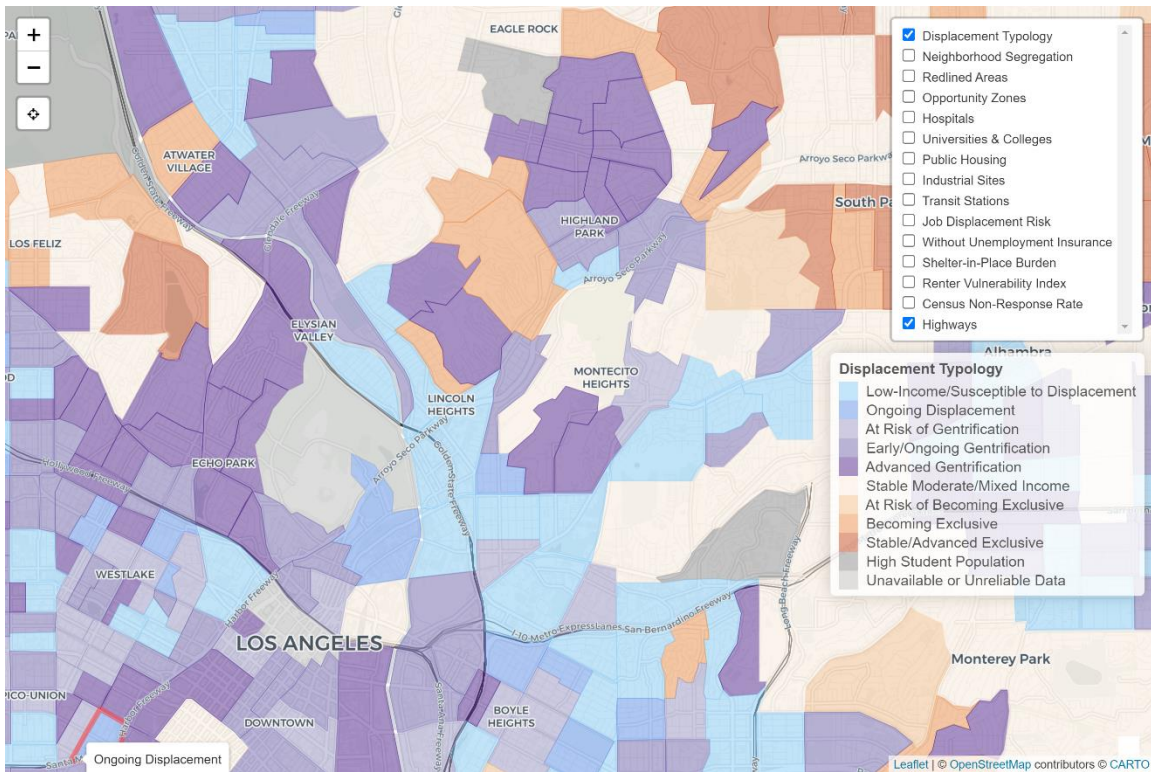


Image Courtesy of the Urban Displacement Project Based on 2018 Data

The Urban Displacement Project shows which areas in Northeast Los Angeles are experiencing exceptionally high levels of displacement. These areas include Atwater Village, Highland Park, Mount Washington, and Eagle Rock. Glassell Park and Montecito Heights are relatively stable, while Cypress Park is labeled as susceptible to gentrification (Urban Displacement Project, 2021).

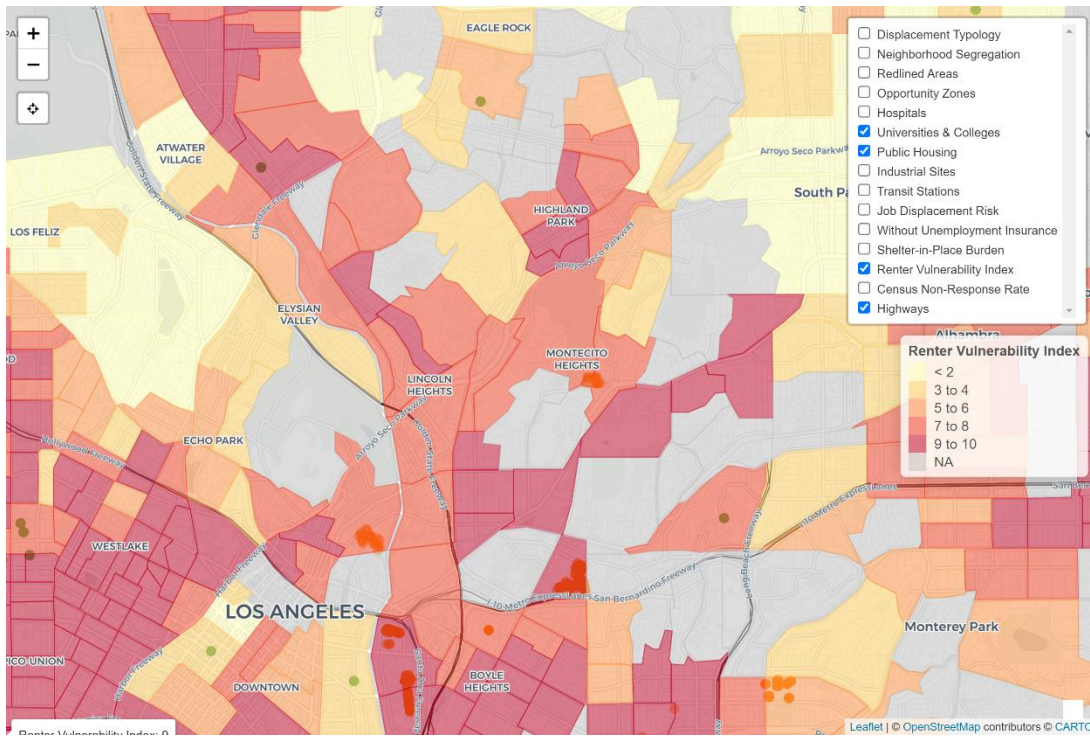


Image Courtesy of the Urban Displacement Project Based on 2018 Data

This graph displays the vulnerability of renters, which is often an issue linked to gentrification because gentrification increases rent prices. As shown, there is high vulnerability among renters in many neighborhoods of Northeast LA. When landlords sense an increase in the value of their area or property and realize they could gain a higher profit from new renters, they are more likely to evict those who have been in the community for a long time and are unable to pay higher rents.

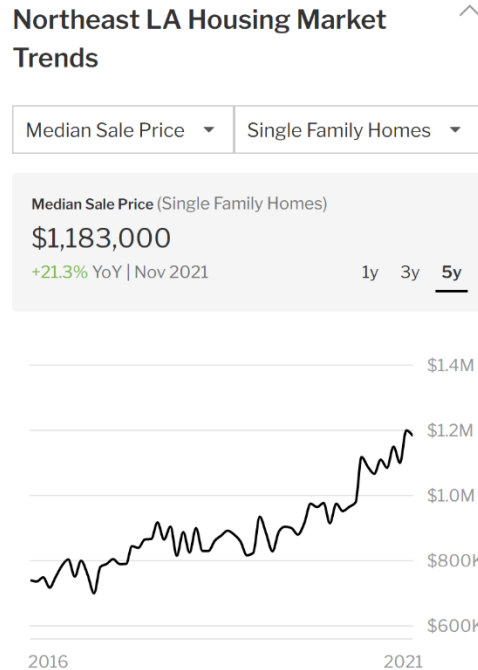


Image Courtesy of Redfin*

*Note: This data does not include Boyle Heights, El Sereno, or Lincoln Heights

Another sign of gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles is the astronomical rise of home prices. Redfin found that the median single-family home price in Northeast Los Angeles has increased 21.3% since 2020, and has risen from 695K to 1.183M.

History of the Arts in Northeast Los Angeles

The Arts Scene in Northeast Los Angeles was first characterized by the Arroyo Culture, which celebrated hand-craftsmanship and other art forms and worked towards progressive issues. As white residents moved out of the area towards the suburbs as part of the nationwide phenomenon known as ‘white flight,’ this scene declined (Lin, 2019). With the influx of Latino/a

residents, the arts scene in Northeast LA was enlivened and grew to reflect both its original Arroyo culture and the culture of its new residents (Lin, 2019). Some of the earliest known art collectives are the Mechiano Art Center, Centro de Arte Publico, and the Arroyo Arts Collective, all founded in the 1970s and 80s.

Muralism was a fundamental art form in the Latino/a revival of the NE LA Art scene. Artists embraced the Mexican art form associated with social justice and political statements. These murals “evolved into representations of urban icons, cultural heroes, and Aztec symbols conveying political messages for equality and social justice for minorities and Third World peoples” (Lin, 2019). Ten of these murals were created on the walls of Boyle Height’s Romona Gardens Housing Project through a grant received by the Mechiano Art Center.

In 1989, the Arroyo Arts Collective was founded. This collective involves artists of all mediums, and through an annual dues, members receive access to opportunities to show their work. Eagle Rock Center for the Arts, originally Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center, was formed in 1998 with a focus on education and youth development. Avenue 50 Studio was established in 1999, centering the empowerment and visibility of Latino/a, specifically Chicano/a artists (Lin, 2019).

Arts in Northeast LA has proven to be a lucrative business, as many art galleries have closed throughout the years. These include Gallery Figueroa, Rock Rose Gallery, Galleria Mundo, and Gallery Ophelia (Lin, 2019).

Literature Review

Examining literature related to art and gentrification will provide context situating my research on art establishments in Northeast Los Angeles. This literature review will discuss how art spaces can benefit communities, arguments surrounding art's relationship to gentrification, and responses to art's perceived influence on gentrification and gentrification in general.

How Arts Spaces can be Beneficial to Communities and Individuals

One way art can benefit people is through its relationship-building capabilities. A study discusses how free community art galleries can provide low-stress environments optimal for creating relationships. Featured art starts conversations, and activities related to art can produce a shared experience community members bond over (Connal et al., 2020). Additionally, just as other public spaces such as urban parks and community gardens, community art spaces can add a spark of joy into a passerby's day.

Older community members who experience dementia can benefit from art activities in unique ways (Mondro et al., 2020). One study recruited duos of caregivers and care recipients experiencing dementia in which art facilitators taught an art project to care recipients each week for four weeks. Caregivers taught the same project to their care recipients. The study found that these workshops resulted in communication discoveries, insights into partners' abilities, and personal creative realizations (Mondro et al., 2020). Even outside of a caregiver care recipient partnership, this study shows how art can provide insight into oneself and act as a way to get to know someone else better based on how they approach their projects.

Younger generations can also benefit from exposure to a space where they can make their art. Rhodes and Schechter (2014) outline the impacts an Artist Collective had in the North End

of Hartford, Connecticut, an area that has high poverty rates. They argue the Collective's physical space creates a haven from outside threats and spreads positive "alternative messages" that differ from those participants see while outside the space. Additionally, the building provides a sense of pride and is a space where Black art and culture are celebrated without devaluation from the outside world. Another critical role of the collective is the social capital participants gain from interacting with the space. They form relationships and gain opportunities they benefit from outside the collective. Time spent at the collective can promote self-esteem, self-awareness, and ethnic pride. Rhodes and Schecter (2014) argue that employing these strategies can help prevent youth from potential risks and increase their likelihood to thrive.

Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program (MAP) has programming dedicated to youth facing similar struggles. In addition to this, they have a program called The Guild in which justice-impacted individuals, often those who have been incarcerated, are paid to learn the skills of mural-making and use them to collaboratively contribute to the city's visual identity for nine months. The core objectives of this program are to reduce recidivism and increase employment and educational opportunities for guild participants. According to Joshua Sanchez' *A Study on Murals, Artists, and the Guild's Community Impact* (2020), The Guild has been successful in these objectives, as the recidivism rate from the Philadelphia Prison System cohort (PPS) averaged at 6% from 2015-2019, while the overall recidivism rate in Philadelphia is 46%. Additionally, the employment rate for Guild graduates stands at 83% as of 2019. The Mural Arts Program provides evidence that art, community, and education can be powerful tools for restorative justice.

In the Barrio Logan Neighborhood of San Diego, Chicano Park exemplifies how art can transform a space. Like many parks, Chicano park has playgrounds, a skatepark, a dance

pavilion, and restrooms. What makes it extraordinary are the approximately 40 murals painted onto towering concrete pillars supporting the highways above. (Rosen and Fisher, 2001)The park itself was born from activism when community members, asking the city for a park for years, occupied the area and did not leave until officials agreed to meet with them (Rosen and Fisher, 2001). The murals adorning the park reflect these ideals of activism, social justice, and Mexican culture and identity. Along with the park they inhabit, they are monuments to the community's ability to define and architect their neighborhood.

Gentrification

Ruth Glass, an Urban Planner turned Urban sociologist observed her formerly working-class neighborhood Islington transform through the influx of middle-class and upper-class residents (Slater, 2013). Their presence led to the displacement of long-time working-class residents through rent increases and redevelopment. Glass coined the term “gentrification”, derived from the word “gentry” which means of high social class, to describe this phenomenon in her book *London: Aspects of Change* (Glass, 1964).

Since then, gentrification has been used to refer to the process of poor and working-class communities being displaced by wealthier middle and upper-middle-class people throughout the world. In the United States, gentrification occurs most acutely in large cities and is rare in less developed areas (NCRC, 2020). The NCRC study categorizes a census tract as eligible for gentrification if tracts “are below the 40th percentile in median household income and house value”. Potentially gentrifying tracts “were in the top 60th percentile for increases in both median home value and the percentage of college graduates from 2000-2013” (NCRC, 2020). These median home values are then adjusted for inflation to improve accuracy. If census tracts

meet these requirements, they are identified as undergoing or undergone gentrification (NCRC, 2020). Census Tracts are a small area of measurement created by the U.S. Census Bureau to study trends. The average population of a census tract is 4,000 inhabitants, with the minimum being 1,200 people and the maximum being 8,000 people.

The National Community Reinvestment Coalition found that between 2000-2013, nearly half of national gentrification, or 501 gentrifying tracts out of 1,049, occurred in just seven cities; These cities are New York City, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Baltimore, San Diego, and Chicago (NCRC, 2020). Throughout these cities, gentrification disproportionately affects Latinx and especially Black residents.

In order to measure these trends, the NCRC used two criteria to determine census tracts with significant Black and Latinx population loss. The racial group's population percentage had to decline by more than two standard deviations from the mean of all census tracts, and the absolute number of residents had to decline by at least five percent (NCRC, 2020). Nationally, Black population loss occurred in 187 tracts experiencing gentrification, with an average loss of 593 Black Residents. Nationwide, Latinx population loss has occurred in 45 tracts experiencing gentrification, with an average loss of 542 Latinx residents per tract. The nationwide total of Black residents displaced between 2000-2010 was 110,935, while the nationwide total for Latinx residents displaced was 24,374. Though Black population loss in gentrifying areas is more prevalent than Latinx population loss nationwide, the issue of Latinx displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods is more likely in Los Angeles due to its sizeable Latinx population.

Gentrified tracts in Los Angeles make up 14% of the total census tracts, with 73 tracts being gentrified out of 512 eligible for gentrification (NCRC, 2020). In Los Angeles, five

gentrifying tracts experienced Black population loss with an average loss of 280 Black residents per tract. Latinx population loss in Los Angeles occurs in 8 gentrifying tracts with an average loss of 477 Latinx residents per tract.

Relationship Between Art and Gentrification

In some communities, the positive effects of art are undermined by the perceived influence of art on gentrification. In *Taking Back the Boulevard* (2019), sociologist Jan Lin theorizes that Northeast LA's Arts scene and other amenities cultivated by the largely Latinx population of Northeast LA made the location desirable to white middle-class hipsters. Lin's theory suggests that an art scene can contribute to gentrification even if it is not catered to audiences capable of gentrification. He argues that Northeast LA's neighborhood development is an example of the stage model of gentrification. Unlike areas that rapidly change due to new developments of massive infrastructure such as a sports center or mega mall, neighborhoods experiencing the stage model of gentrification change more slowly due to economic forces and neighborhood characteristics.

On the contrary, one study claims that an arts presence does not strongly affect gentrification and that its findings disprove the stage theory of gentrification Lin discusses. Their research focused on the metro areas of Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, and New York. They found fine arts and commercial establishments are least common in gentrifying neighborhoods and areas with the potential to gentrify and are most common in affluent areas and regions with no potential to gentrify (Grodach et al., 2018). Authors argue this research disproves the stage model of gentrification. By their understanding, the stage theory of gentrification suggests arts establishments move into low-income areas and encourage increasingly powerful forces of gentrification and displacement (Grodach et al., 2018). However, in his discussions of the stage

theory, Lin stressed the significance of the kind of art scene that attracted higher-income residents rather than the quantity.

Public art has been scrutinized for how city governments, corporations, and real estate developers can use it to accelerate the process of ‘urban renewal,’ which can ultimately lead to the gentrification of surrounding areas (Kwon, 2002). A case study of the Hollywood and Vine subway station, where multiple large-scale public artworks celebrate the glitz and glamour of old Hollywood, supports this theory (Reynolds, 2012). Since the artwork’s installment, the plaza is no longer suitable for the anti-war protesters who regularly gathered outside the station. Additionally, the pieces replaced bus shelters used by residents of the area. The presence of this public art branded the site in a certain way, allowing the city to more easily attract people who fit this brand and ostracize those who do not.

Concerns that public art may hasten the displacement of people are prevalent in other neighborhoods of Los Angeles as well. In Downtown LA’s “Arts District,” the second wave of urban renewal commenced with the introduction of many new public art projects and cafes, galleries, live-work loft development, and film sets. It is believed that these changes increased rents in the Art’s District to the point that the underground artists who initially characterized the area as an Art’s District could no longer afford rent. In her 1982 book *Loft Living*, Zukin analyzes a similar trend in New York City. The lofts of SoHo, like those in the Arts District, were attractive to artists. Once developers and corporations found they could capitalize on the hip SoHo environment cultivated by its artists, the area transformed, and artists who created the scene were priced out of it (Zukin, 1982).

Witnessing this change in the Arts District, residents of the nearby neighborhood Boyle Heights became unsettled when new galleries were introduced in their communities. This wave created a “gallery row,” which one study refers to as a site of artwashing (Hamidi, 2020). Artwashing is the process of making negative actions and consequences more palatable and acceptable through the arts. The study theorizes that this artwashing is a way to entice members of the Creative Class to move into an area, displacing long-time residents in the process (Hamidi, 2020).

The Creative Class is a term coined by Richard Florida to describe people compensated for “use[ing] their minds.” Florida posits that creative class members drive regional economic development because creativity spurs new technologies, industries, wealth, and jobs (Florida, 2014). Florida stresses the importance of cultivating a city that creative people would find attractive; These amenities for creatives include fancy bars, art museums, and coffee shops (Florida, 2014). All these amenities are thought to be harbingers of gentrification. Throughout this book, the word ‘displacement’ appears just once. Florida’s sparse mention of displacement suggests that while he may claim it is a serious issue, he still believes the revitalization and economic growth created by the Creative Class outweigh its drawbacks of potential displacement.

In *The New Urban Crisis* (2018), Florida walks back on some of these claims. He now states the economic development provided by the Creative Class, who have higher average incomes, serves to make only the creative class and others in the upper class even richer (Florida, 2018). He stresses solutions opposite to his previous ones, like more affordable housing, more investment in infrastructure, and higher pay for service jobs (Florida, 2018). These claims align more closely with what anti-gentrification activists have campaigned for; However, Florida’s

writing contributed to literature touting the benefits of ‘revitalization’ and acted as a form of justification for revitalizing policies within urban planning strategies.

In line with Florida’s earlier work, Stern and Seifert argue that cultural clusters of commercial and non-profit establishments “can revive urban economies” based on a case study of Philadelphia. They use the cultural asset index (CAI), which comprises cultural participants, resident artists, nonprofit cultural organizations, and commercial cultural firms, to examine its effect on geographic areas in Philadelphia at the census block group level (Stern et al., 2010). They posit that an increase in the CAI improves the housing market because a higher CAI is correlated with a higher median sale price (Stern et al., 2010). However, many believe that an improved housing market would be more affordable housing below the market rate, as increases in housing prices can lead to displacement. Stern and Seifert defend the presence of cultural assets by pointing to their finding that 40 percent of stable clusters remained diverse during 1990-2000.

Responses to Art and Gentrification

In response to the rise of galleries moving from the Arts District into warehouses near affordable housing complexes in Boyle Heights, activists created a coalition named Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement (BHAAD). Activists from Defend Boyle Heights, Union De Vecinos, community artists, and the LA Tenants union members formed the coalition in 2016 (Hamidi, 2020). BHAAD’s actions include protests on gallery row and in front of other establishments perceived as gentrifying, like Weird Wave Coffee (Hamidi, 2020). The alliance ran social media campaigns to spread awareness about the potential effects of gallery row and

lead boycotts on establishments and events perceived as gentrifying, such as the Boyle Heights Beer Festival (Hamidi, 2020).

One individual's response to this phenomenon in Boyle Heights was anti-gentrification graffiti. The graffiti wrote "f*** white art" and was met with an increased police presence and was even categorized by some as a hate crime (Guardian, 2016). Xochitl Palomera of Corazon Del Pueblo, an arts organization focusing on culture and justice, explains that "The walls in my neighborhood are the people's newspaper. That's people expressing themselves. You're talking about someone spray-painting a wall with the truth" (Guardian, 2016). The effects of this spray paint may not be immediately apparent. Still, it was a buzz-worthy event that led to many headlines. This increased awareness of the contention surrounding the new galleries and the potential harm they may inflict.

Another field of research in anti-gentrification focuses on the potential for community-driven policies to minimize the effects of displacement. In his article *Fair Housing and Zoning as Anti-Gentrification*, James Jennings (2021) focuses on how the strategies of Fair Housing can be anti-gentrification strategies in Boston, MA. Jennings focuses on the significance of the community's and Fair Housing organizations' input into the fourteen fair housing recommendations developed by the Assessment of Furthering Fair Housing Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and ultimately adopted by the city government (Jennings, 2021). As a result, new development cannot be approved unless it meets the Fair Housing Criteria (Jennings, 2021). While Jennings acknowledged this win, he stressed the importance of the recommendations' implementation and enforcement.

Howell elaborates on this research by arguing for the importance of multiple strategies in the face of gentrification in her case study of the Columbia Heights neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Tenants in Columbia Heights benefit from affordability covenants, the strength of tenant organizers, and the lawyers who work with them (Howell, 2018). Additionally, community voices are represented in DC Preservation Network (DCPN) meetings where tenant organizers, non-profit housing developers, pro-bono attorneys, policy advocates, and government staff discuss solutions (Howell, 2018). Howell argues that these strategies have resulted in multiple wins for long-time renters in Columbia Heights and suggest a robust model for other areas experiencing gentrification (Howell, 2018).

Conclusion

Art's relationship with gentrification has long been debated; some scholars argue that art contributes to gentrification, others maintain that it is independent of gentrification or that this change is a net positive for neighborhoods and cities. Various approaches have been taken as the gentrifying or renewing implications of an arts scene have become known to communities, government officials, and individuals. Missing from this literature is the response of art organizations regarding the perceived effect of art on gentrification. My research will seek to fill this gap.

Methodology

The goal of this study is to find out how visual arts spaces in Northeast Los Angeles perceive art's role in gentrification and how they address gentrification and involve their communities. To gather this information, I conducted interviews with twelve individuals who have an instrumental role, whether that be executive director, owner, or other role, of the art space they represent. Gathering information through these qualitative interviews is important to my study, because it is meant, among other uses, to be a way for art spaces in Northeast Los Angeles and beyond to learn from their peers and potentially adopt new practices or initiatives based upon them. The in-depth nature of interviews allows these art spaces a deeper understanding of how and why their peers are involving community. Additionally, the in-depth perceptions of art's role in gentrification allows for community members and public officials to better understand the arts' perspective on gentrification, which could potentially inspire change in policy and or a furthering of dialogue between these parties.

I interviewed representatives from five different types of art spaces. For the purposes of my research, an art space is defined as a person or a group of people who work towards goals that involve people unaffiliated with the establishment and concern the visual arts. Additionally, an art space takes up a physical place to achieve these goals. For example, neither a private artist studio nor an exclusively online artist collective would be considered an art space in my research. The five types of art spaces represented are non-profits, non-profit art galleries, for-profit art galleries, businesses, and art spaces within academic institutions.

Originally, I tried to interview at least one representative from each of the seven neighborhoods used in some cases to define Northeast Los Angeles. I chose a smaller group of

neighborhoods in the hope that this would make it more likely that I could find one interviewee from each area. These neighborhoods were Highland Park, Cypress Park, Montecito Heights, Eagle Rock, Glassell Park, Mount Washington, and Atwater Village. However, I was unable to find any art spaces in the neighborhoods of Mount Washington and Montecito Heights. Further, these neighborhoods were absent in any discussion of gentrification in Northeast LA that I read because they are established as higher-income neighborhoods. In response to this, I omitted these two neighborhoods from my research and, based on a wider definition of Northeast LA, included Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights, and El Sereno in my research. I was not able to achieve my goal and set up an interview with one representative from every neighborhood. Ultimately, I got perspectives from the five neighborhoods of Atwater Village, Boyle Heights, Cypress Park, Highland Park, and Lincoln Heights.

I found art spaces to reach out to by using google maps and by consulting an artist and activist who is from Northeast Los Angeles and lives there today. To keep track of these art spaces, I created a color-coded spreadsheet that included key information about each art space like their location, type, website, and contact information. I found this information through the art spaces' websites, and I used the emails provided by the space to reach out to executive directors of art spaces and owners of art businesses. I chose these positions because they have the most decision-making power within organizations and businesses, and they will likely be most knowledgeable about the goings-on of the establishment. Because some art spaces define and create roles in a different way, not all my interviewees hold one of these two roles, but the majority do.

I reached out to potential interviewees in December and January of 2022, and I held interviews with these participants in January of 2022. The interviews were primarily conducted

over zoom. Due to technical difficulties with zoom, three interviews were conducted over the phone. One interviewee had to cancel and instead provided written responses to the questions I provided. With consent, the spoken interviews were recorded using zoom and a computer recording app for note-taking purposes. In order to prepare interviewees and ensure they fully consent to answer my questions, I provided them with the questions I was going to ask in advance of our interview. The majority of the interviews lasted between 38 minutes and 52 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 23 minutes and the longest lasting 1 hour and 5 minutes. To make sense of the information, I listened back to the recordings and took detailed notes. Then, I analyzed the data using an inductive coding method, meaning I identified common topics and categorized them to better compare various interviewees’ thoughts on the subject.

One flaw in this methodology is that because some questions are about how art spaces perceive gentrification and how they address gentrification in the area, interviewees may feel pressure to exaggerate anti-gentrification efforts or community-based practices to maintain a particular image. It is my hope that by anonymizing my interviewees this issue is not as prevalent.

Table 1. Art Spaces Interviewed and Reached Out to Within Eight NELA Neighborhoods

Neighborhood	Number of Art Spaces Interviewed	Number of Art Spaces Reached Out to
Boyle Heights	4	10
Highland Park	3	9
Atwater Village	2	3
Lincoln Heights	2	7
Cypress Park	1	5
Eagle Rock	0	6

Glassell Park	0	3
El Sereno	0	1

Table 2. Demographics of Interviewees

Latinx Interviewees	White Interviewees	Asian Interviewees
6	5	1
Female Interviewees	Male Interviewees	Unknown
8	3	1

Table 3. Prevalence of Different Types of Art Spaces Represented by my Interviewees

Non-profit Art Organization	For Profit Art Gallery	Non-profit Art Gallery	Arts Business	Arts Space within an Academic Institution
4	3	2	2	1

Findings

Perceptions on the Association Between Art and Gentrification

Developers Take Advantage of Art Spaces

Six art spaces brought up developers as key players in the role of art in gentrification.

They discussed how developers tend to take advantage of art spaces and artists by using them as a selling point to increase the value of surrounding properties. A representative from Space J, a non-profit organization in Boyle Heights, explained that

“What [artists] do is make a formerly slummy looking place look cool and developers ride in and take advantage of that”

An employee at space C, a ceramics business in Highland Park, recalled a realtor who waited specifically for an arts space to take over a property. She believes the realtor did this because they had other properties in the area and hoped an art space would increase the values of these properties. She believes “massive mega developers” in particular are a large threat to an increase in gentrification and displacement. A representative from Space H, a non-profit organization in Lincoln Heights, shared a story about a developer as well. A developer visited artist loft housing and interviewed the residents on what they liked about the space. Then, once the developer had bought the space and kicked them out, they used the artists’ answers to help them sell the property and increase their profit.

A representative from Space G, a non-profit organization in Atwater Village, believes that rather than art leading to gentrification, “the bigger factor is that there are developers, who have cash who are buying up properties”. Her comment brings to light the advantage wealthy developers have on others looking to own land, as cash is very appealing to sellers. Cash deals are preferred because the deal closes faster and there are fewer risks involved (Better). She goes on to explain these developments typically lead to “businesses that can pay higher rent and

housing developments that have very little affordable [units]”. This comment displays the issue of an abundance of at-market or above-market-rate properties, but a shortage of below-market-rate properties (ACCE). Developers are less likely to create below-market-rate units due to their lower profit margins.

Two interviewees mentioned the failures of public officials to manage these developers and the rate of development. The representative of Space C believes that “the city council and mayor have sold themselves to the developers” and specifically mentions Councilmember Cedillo who represents Council District 1. She believes Cedillo is actively using his power to accelerate gentrification and shared her frustration that “he has so much money behind him”. A representative from Space H, a non-profit organization in Lincoln Heights, has a similar issue with Councilmember Kevin de Leon who represents Council District 14 and is currently running to be the Mayor of LA. The representative from Space H shared his frustration that “Kevin de Leon opened the door for tons of luxury developments”. He shared that he believes when councilmembers allow this rampant development, it results in a complete lack of vision for a neighborhood and creates an entryway for the process of gentrification.

Arts role in gentrification Varies Depending on the Neighborhood

Neighborhoods may share a city name but vary in their histories, peoples, and culture. It makes sense then that every process, including that of gentrification, would look slightly different in each neighborhood. Two interviewees touched on the fact that in Northeast Los Angeles, art plays a larger or smaller role in gentrification depending on the area code. They all agreed that art played a larger role in the gentrification of Boyle Heights than it did in Highland Park.

The interviewee from Space F, a non-profit organization in Boyle Heights said that in Boyle Heights there was a large amount of land speculation about the large warehouses that were relatively cheap. She believes that the clear face of gentrification in Boyle Heights was art and artists not of the community. She adds that these artists felt like Boyle Heights was the

“Wild West of like there's nothing here we're bringing our culture to this area, and I think that's also Why is met with such defiance and activism.”

Contrarily, she believes that in Highland Park, the face of gentrification was the transformation of York Boulevard and the appeal of beautiful Spanish-style homes.

The representative from Space I, a community arts-based gallery connected to a college, generally concurs with this assessment. She believes the first wave of gentrification in Highland Park consisted of coffee shops and trendy stores. She mentions that new galleries have opened up, but because they were not a part of this first, impactful wave, she does not believe they played a large part in the gentrification of Highland Park. She states:

“In other places, artists can settle and make the neighborhood more attractive. It doesn't feel that's how it is in Highland Park”.

Larger Galleries and Businesses Focused on Profit are Larger Contributors to Gentrification than Other Art Spaces

While most interviewees agreed that art can play a role in gentrification, many interviewees had opinions on which kinds of art spaces gentrify or otherwise negatively impact their communities. One interviewee felt it was a different kind of business altogether in the form of shops like fancy candle stores that primarily cause gentrification. Another stated businesses that hyper-monetize each piece of their establishment contribute to gentrification and make the neighborhood more comfortable for new potential residents. Four interviewees discussed the peculiarity of larger, wealthier galleries located far away from where the buyers of their

expensive paintings live. These interviewees also discussed the failure of these galleries to integrate or become involved with the communities they have inserted themselves into. Two interviewees specifically mentioned the tendency for these kinds of galleries to utilize shrouded or frosted windows to maintain mystery and separation from the community. Unfortunately, I was unable to interview representatives from larger galleries or from art spaces that hyper-monetize services, so the opinion of these spaces will be absent from these findings.

A representative from Space E, a gallery in Boyle Heights, said of these high-end galleries:

“Right now they’re showing a lot of Black Art, but I don’t know if a Black person would feel welcome if they walked in.”

He adds that when he, a Latino man, visited one of these galleries he was met with hostility. The employees gave him the impression that they did not want to talk to anyone unless they looked like they could buy an expensive painting. He notes the hypocrisy in the act of displaying and profiting from Black artists and artists of color, but denying visitors of color and any visitors they perceive as non-wealthy the respect of being welcomed warmly.

A representative from Space C, a ceramic business in Highland Park, said

“We now have in Highland Park two new art galleries that use Latino words as the title of their gallery. They have frosted windows up and nobody knows when they open and when they don’t. It’s for their crowd and then they sell a ton of work to who? It’s got to be somebody wealthy outside of the community.”

She went on by stating that by using Latino words as their titles these art galleries are taking advantage of the Chicano Art Movement and Highland Park’s existing culture without providing anything of value to community members.

An interviewee from Space K, a non-profit organization in Boyle Heights, feels similarly towards these larger galleries and said:

“You have arts organizations or artists who are opening galleries in Northeast LA who don’t necessarily have a connection to the community, whose audience is probably not the community and are looking to bring in folks from the Westside. That can be very alienating to the community. On top of that, there’s always the risk when something like that opens up the rent increases in neighboring properties because there’s this new population coming in here.”

This representative touches on the issue of introducing wealthier populations to lower-income neighborhoods at risk of gentrification. When populations with means enter neighborhoods, developers and business owners may look for ways to appease them with higher-end shops, restaurants, and luxury apartments. This can lead to altering a neighborhood’s DNA and displacing existing community members.

The interviewee from Space I, a community-based art gallery connected to a college in Highland Park, shared these sentiments and said:

“Art spaces can be more thoughtful in how they are bringing in audiences and be more mindful of who their direct neighbors are. Take a litmus test and think ‘Is the work I’m presenting here relevant to the person who lives two blocks from here who’s been here for 20 years? If they come into my space who is going to greet them, how will they feel, and what will they find here?’ If a commercial gallery plops in and sells 10,000 dollar paintings they need to ask themselves ‘Who am I selling these paintings to and why am I in this neighborhood.’”

Like the interviewee from Space K, the interviewee from Space I feels that bringing in audiences from higher-income neighborhoods can affect existing communities. She also urges larger galleries to examine their role in certain neighborhoods, and potentially rethink either their location or how they interact with the community.

However, not everyone believes galleries like this negatively impact communities. Speaking specifically of the galleries in Boyle Heights, an interviewee representing Space J, a non-profit organization in Lincoln Heights, said:

“The galleries weren’t in living spaces they were in warehouses. Just like [Space J], we didn’t displace anybody. The whole property was defunct.”

Unlike the interviewees from Space K and Space I, this interviewee feels that if galleries enter neighborhoods through warehouses, it should not be an issue because they are not directly affecting people. An interviewee from Space D, a studio and gallery in Cypress Park, defended the art spaces 356 Mission and PSSST that tried to open in Boyle Heights. She shared her disappointment in the failure of PSSST due to community pushback. PSSST, she said, tried to engage the community and be integrated within it. She alludes to the many galleries in Boyle Heights that remain open but are closed to the community and wishes there was a way to bridge the gap between community members and art spaces that genuinely want to make a positive impact. The interviewee from Space E, a gallery in Boyle Heights, said he too feels frustrated by what he feels is a “shoot first, ask questions later” strategy towards art spaces. He has been called a gentrifier, though he feels that because he is Mexican and his gallery is smaller and focuses on the work of Latinx artists, this label should not apply to him.

Community Focused Spaces Comprised of Locals do not Gentrify

Just as Interviewees had ideas about which kinds of art spaces gentrify the most, they had thoughts about which spaces did not gentrify. In contrast to the galleries that do not have a connection to the community, a representative from Space K, a nonprofit arts organization in Boyle Heights, said:

“Then there are the local artists and local arts organizations who have played a vital role in organizing against gentrification and telling the story of the community in ways that honor and uplift the community voice and help people take a stake in their community.”

This interviewee explains the value that an art space with a genuine goal to help the existing community can bring to a neighborhood. She goes on to further categorize what art spaces do not gentrify and says:

“Sometimes there’s this blanket view of all artists and all art galleries who are coming into the space are gentrifying the area but I don’t think that’s necessarily true. It’s who is part of these art galleries and who are these artists and how are they working with the community. Are they local artists? Are they the comm members themselves who are opening these galleries? I don’t think it does justice to local artists to just throw this blanket thought that art galleries are gentrifying communities without actually investigating if these art galleries and artists are actual community members.

This philosophy towards art galleries mirrors that of the interviewee from Space E because he frequently showcases the work of Latinx artists from Los Angeles and he has lived in South Los Angeles and East Los Angeles for decades.

An interviewee from Space J had a different idea about what kinds of art spaces do not gentrify. Like other interviewees, she brought up how developers can take advantage of an art space by using it to increase their profits on properties. She believes this trend does not apply to her art space because:

“[The Space] improved the neighborhood without gentrifying it at all because we’re not beautifying it. That’s the key. We just kind of slithered in like little mole rats.”

Those Involved with Art Spaces may Feel a sense of Frustration, Apathy, or Fatigue Towards the Perception that Art Spaces lead to Gentrification

Although all but two interviewees acknowledged the impact art can have on gentrification, three interviewees felt all or most of the responsibility in the process of gentrification is with developers rather than the art spaces they use for profit. One interviewee felt the responsibility lay with larger “blue chip” galleries rather than smaller studio space galleries like hers. This same interviewee felt gentrification was inevitable and that while it has negative effects, it is not without positive effects. Many of these same interviewees felt the connection between art spaces and gentrification was small, and in some cases, overblown. Two interviewees expressed frustration that their passion for running their art space has this unintended consequence. Another interviewee detailed the emotional toll that this association can

have on her as someone who works in an arts organization to provide for the community and who has experienced gentrification firsthand.

A representative from Space L, a gallery in Boyle Heights, is one of the three spaces that fault developers and not art spaces. He believes:

“Art spaces themselves do little to gentrify neighborhoods, it is the developers who rent art spaces that use art as a tool to raise the value and stature of their properties.”

The Executive Director from Space G, a non-profit in Atwater Village, feels similarly. She believes that “art is just one small factor in the equation of gentrification”, and the only role in this factor that she sees is that the art may make the neighborhood look more attractive to developers.

A volunteer for Space J, an arts non-profit in Lincoln Heights, agreed with these sentiments and used this metaphor to express her point:

“I think blaming artists for that is like blaming the rain. It rained and grass grew and people showed up. It’s ridiculous!”

In this case, it can be presumed that the ‘rain’ symbolizes beautification or art as an amenity, and people showing up refers to audiences from different neighborhoods in the city coming into this new beautified or amenity-filled neighborhood. She expanded on this thought by touching on the power dynamics in gentrification:

“I don’t think art has very much to do with gentrification at all because artists are generally broke and they have no power.”

Due to these beliefs, she does not appreciate that the neighborhood council president implied that the artist-loft space took something from the neighborhood to exist. She further argues that because the buildings were not being used, it did not negatively affect the existing community.

An interviewee from Space A, a nonprofit in Atwater Village, acknowledged the potential art has to gentrify. They also expressed frustration that there appears to be no viable location for an art space like theirs in Los Angeles that would not contribute to the process of gentrification. On this topic, they stated:

“At the end of the day, we only have so many places to live and so many places for businesses.”

They suggest that although they do not like the unintended consequences art spaces like theirs may have on neighborhoods, they do not want to feel so constrained by the potential art has to gentrify that they do not create their business at all.

An interviewee from Space D thinks gentrification is inevitable, and even mentioned that some locals she has spoken to are happy about the decreased gang activity, though they are not happy about the prices.

The executive director at Space F, a non-profit organization in Boyle Heights, shared the unique and difficult experience of people like her who have gone through gentrification and are now working in a field associated with contributing to that process. She explained:

“Arts organizations that are led by and in service of communities of color have an added challenge in that we are the staff members of those organizations and part of the communities that are served by the organization. I work with the added layer of being somebody who has been priced out of the neighborhood that I grew up in. Working within a sector that does have this association, however superficial or not, certainly is a very personal emotional experience.”

She went on to discuss the effect gentrification can have on community members’ imaginations for their neighborhoods’ future. She believes it is unfortunate that amenities are being associated with gentrification because:

“Communities who are at risk will then not want to see these things even though they should also have really beautiful and amenity-filled places to live”

These comments get to the central question this research paper explores; Can amenities exist in communities at risk of gentrification without negatively affecting existing residents? If so, what should this look like? In the next section, interviewees share potential answers.

Efforts Relating to Anti-Gentrification or Contributing Positively to the Community

Art Spaces Engage in Local Political and Planning Issues to Improve their Communities

Three art spaces are involved with political and planning issues in their neighborhoods. One art space engages with broader city-wide issues like defunding the police. Two art spaces help facilitate conversations and discussions about what the community envisions for their immediate neighborhood and they play a part in realizing these ideas within the community.

The co-founder of Space C said that before the pandemic, the ceramics business in Highland Park would host an art activity to encourage people to attend political events like rallies or protests. She explained that one of the activities they offered would be for children so that children would stay occupied while the adults participated in the event. This allowed parents with children to attend these events without having to arrange childcare, which could be an extra cost and barrier to their attendance. Since the pandemic, the business has been unable to host these activities. In their place, they turned to fundraisers. For one fundraiser, employees made medallions and the profits from their sales went towards supporting the no cash bail measure Prop. 25, which ultimately failed (LA Times). This measure would have required people in jail for misdemeanors to be released within 12 hours without having to pay cash bail (LA Times).

She explained the impact of art spaces putting their names behind initiatives like affordable housing when she stated:

“[Community-based art spaces] do have a certain in with the politicians because they always want to say ‘Oh look we gave money to this community center.’”

She encourages art spaces to be more assertive towards politicians and embrace the attitude “you can’t just use me for your rubber stamp”, implying that the politicians must deliver tangible positive changes to their constituents if they want to use art spaces for personal promotion. She also talked about how art spaces can endorse specific candidates and explain why they received this endorsement. Additionally, she believes artists can contribute by making signs and other graphics for initiatives and candidates at no cost to them.

The founder and senior advisor of community and government partnerships of Space G talked about Space G’s partnership with other community organizations to push back against a luxury apartment development in Space G’s neighborhood. Like the co-founder of Space C, the founder of Space G talks about how art spaces can use relationships with public officials. The founder of Space G believes art spaces should help public officials understand how their constituents and how art spaces are affected by their actions. Regarding the facilitation of planning conversations, Space G has been working with community members to collect their wants and needs and with California State Parks to create these ideas. Additionally, Space G participates in door knocking to gather residents’ opinions on various neighborhood changes.

According to Space F’s website, their non-profit organization in Boyle Heights is one of the partners that make up the Eastside LEADS (Leadership for Equitable and Accountable Development Strategies). Discussing the coalition, the executive Director of Space F states it:

“is focusing on ensuring all development in our neighborhood actively includes community voices at the planning stages and beyond”.

The organization’s website also details an action against a lack of community involvement in a major new housing development within Boyle Heights which garnered the attention of Metro representatives and developer’s office employees. According to their website, “this action is part of a larger effort to affect Metro’s policy on the amount of time that developers must plan for

community outreach and engagement”. They also saw the action as a way to show public officials strategies they could implement to engage community members. The action served as an example because it prompted community members to share what they want to see on the lot.

Community Involvement in the Identity of the Space and Reflecting the Existing Community Back to themselves Can Improve Community Engagement and Benefit Community Members

Incorporating community in their efforts, either through direct impact on the spaces or by intentionally creating programming relevant to the existing community, was important to half of the twelve art space representatives I interviewed.

Four art spaces reflect the community in their exhibits and events. Examples of these exhibits include showcasing incarcerated artists, discussing topics of immigration, the meaning of shelter, land use, and elements of a city. Two galleries focus heavily on promoting Latinx artists who are the historical and present majority demographic in their respective neighborhoods of Boyle Heights (Space E) and Highland Park (Space B). A non-profit art space in Lincoln Heights is planning a show featuring the artists in a former Lincoln Heights studio complex who were kicked out by the owner to honor the artists and celebrate the history of the space. Two spaces ensure their events speak to the existing community. In Highland Park, the non-profit gallery Space B hosts a Dia de Los Muertos event every year to honor and celebrate residents’ Mexican heritage and facilitate community connections. In one event, Space B brought poetry to different spaces community members frequent like laundromats, home depot workers centers, and taco stands. There, they read poetry and invited community members to share their poems. The Executive Director and Founder of Space B felt that some community members had the idea that art was not ‘for’ them, so this event was a way to challenge that belief and invite community members into the physical space in the future. The Executive Director of Space K stated that all of their events are community-centered and added:

“We always made sure the logistic items were also rooted in community. If we were catering the event it was a local restaurant or sometimes we’d have street vendors come by and sell at our gallery.”

She talked about how inviting community members to sell at their events can be a kind of mutual aid through uplifting and supporting their neighbors. During their annual event, the nonprofit in Boyle Heights decided not to go the traditional non-profit route of throwing a big, fancy gala because the event would have no value to the community they serve. Instead, before the pandemic, they had an annual event called Viva la Mujer, dedicated to women artists, musicians, and vendors.

Two Spaces regularly have employees attend neighborhood council meetings to get a sense of the current events within the area and maintain a pulse on the community’s wants and needs. These council meetings led to a partnership between Space H and another community organization where Space H provides workshops to the youth connected to the partner organization. To include community members in the initial planning of their space, two spaces reached out to them and either asked what they wanted to see in future renovations (Space F) or introduced the idea of the space before its conception and ask what they wanted from it (Space I). Community members’ responses to Space I’s inquiries included free art lessons for kids, after-school programs, time for community use of the physical space, and exhibiting artists that reflect the community. Space F specifically engaged the youth in their Boyle Heights community about these renovations by working with the high school across the street. Ultimately, the non-profit’s efforts reached over 200 people. Similar to Space F’s action with community responses to the housing development, both Space I’s and Space F’s efforts serve to practice the level of community engagement these spaces want from public officials and the city as a whole. To ensure they maintain this level of engagement, Space I, a community-based arts hub and gallery connected to a college, has a dedicated coordinator of community engagement who attends

council meetings, learns about community needs, and thinks creatively about how to translate these needs into Space I's actions and programming.

Creative Uses of the Physical Art Spaces can Benefit Individuals and Groups in the Community

Another way art spaces can benefit their community members is by opening their doors to community groups in need of a physical place to meet or conduct an activity. Three of the 12 interviewees I spoke to discussed how they have opened their doors for a variety of reasons, many of which do not directly relate to art and art-making.

The Executive Director and Founder of Space B, a nonprofit gallery in Highland Park, became connected with the tenants union after they partnered with a group of local artists and together created a performance piece of handing out eviction notices to businesses that were perceived by the groups as contributing to gentrification. Now, tenant meetings are held every other week at the gallery. They also worked with the Health Department to host a one-day vaccination center at the gallery which encouraged community members to protect themselves and others while providing them with a convenient way to do so. Space E, a gallery in Boyle Heights, worked with an organization that provides support for immigrants with disabilities and in one instance used the gallery space for a Telemundo interview.

In Highland Park At Space I, there is a name for the act of sharing their space. The community-based arts hub connected to a college holds "Community Halls" for school groups, activist groups, local organizations, people who want to put on a workshop, and artists who need to rehearse. On this practice, the Executive Director said:

"We feel that our space if it is not being utilized by us should be fully engaged because space is at a premium right now. Cultural spaces are not easy to find and rents are very high, so whatever we can do to offer our space to community members we are really happy to do."

As she notes, opening up gallery space to community members can be a great way to provide support especially because it is difficult to find affordable physical space. She added:

“I feel like especially gallery space is more or less empty. Galleries have things on the walls and then there's a lot of floor space, so what are you doing with floor space at 9 in the morning? What are you doing with it at 6 pm when you close?”

Accessibility is Important to Many Art Spaces to Include All Community Members

Five art spaces discussed practices relating to accessibility. For some spaces, this looked like scholarship programs for classes memberships or events. Others applied the concept of accessibility by putting on free events for the public.

Space A, an arts education center in Atwater Village, says they have a very flexible scholarship policy and want to ensure that anyone who wants to take a class can join them in the studio. Since they do not have a large number of people applying, they are working on outreach. Additionally, they talked about their goal to invite guest teachers to instruct classes in different languages. They are especially interested in having classes in Spanish, due to the high population of Spanish speakers in Los Angeles. Space C, a ceramics business in Highland Park, tries to keep prices lower. They also invite those who do not have the financial means to be members to do studio work in exchange for a membership, giving them access to the ceramic studio. They also participate in the free annual Lummis Day event and engage community members with free ceramic activities.

Space D, a gallery and studio space in Cypress Park, hosted some free events and the events that were ticketed had a sliding scale to create wider access. Two art spaces, Space G a non-profit in Atwater Village, and Space J a non-profit in Lincoln Heights throw large annual community events. The Founder of Space G notes the sense of community large public events can create.

Introducing Local Youth to Art and Art Making is Integral to Many Art Space's Community Programs

Involving local youth in their efforts was mentioned by eight out of twelve interviewees. Six of these eight interviewees hosted workshops for youth, and many of them are free. Other art spaces decide to incorporate children by reaching out to students and have them learn about and discuss the gallery shows.

Some art spaces host scheduled and consistent art programming for students, like the art education business Space A in Atwater Village, the non-profit Space K in Boyle Heights, the arts space connected to a college Space I in Highland Park, and the non-profit Space H in Lincoln Heights. Space A focuses their programming on providing a space for LGBTQ+ teens to socialize and learn artmaking techniques in an environment that is safe and affirming. Space K also focuses on the teen population, offering free photography instruction and mentorship to girls and gender-expansive youth. The interviewee representing Space K notes when they ask students to take photographs about issues affecting them and their community, topics like gentrification and a lack of green space have been used. They are currently in the process of creating a new backyard space and their “vision is to be able to display [their] student artwork out in the space and have community gatherings that could use [their] student images as talking points and conversation starters”. Space I has free after school art programs for fourth and eighth graders both in their space and at nearby public schools. Through work with a neighboring organization Space H began to offer free art workshops as well.

Other art spaces engage in youth involvement through occasional workshops and lessons. Space B hosts walk-in events tailored towards families like making pinch pots. The interviewee from Space B thinks it is important for kids to be exposed to art because they can discover a potential path for themselves in life. This sentiment is shared by the interviewee from Space J.

Space F, a non-profit in Boyle Heights, art education promotes art education equity through their mobile art studio. The mobility allows Space F to reach populations that may not be able to commute to Space F's location, allowing more students to enjoy the arts.

Some art spaces involve local organizations, schools, and artists to further deepen the experiences of the students. Space B involves youth by working with schools to bring classes into their galleries and learn about the art that is currently on view. At Space B, they are working with the forest service and planned parenthood for two future gallery shows. They are especially excited to incorporate youth with these shows by facilitating discussions about the artworks and their relevancy in today's world. Space H's art program is connected to a neighboring organization, which increases the awareness of the programs and keeps students and their families knowledgeable about the services both organizations provide. In Space K's programming, they often partner their students with local organizations working to create positive change. Students at Space K have done photography and videography in partnership with a wide range of organizations that are not strictly arts-focused. At times, Space K will also have young artists come in to talk to students about potential careers, jobs, and their passions in the arts.

Art Spaces Support their Communities as well as the Larger Los Angeles Area through Giving
Five art spaces spoke about their commitment of giving either to their immediate community or to the to a larger Los Angeles community, and in one art spaces case, to a cause abroad.

Space E, a for-profit gallery in Boyle Heights, had a show in which the proceeds went towards wildfire relief in Argentina.

Three art spaces have efforts that specifically benefit their neighborhoods. These are Space B a non-profit gallery in Highland Park, Space G a non-profit in Atwater Village, and

Space K a non-profit in Boyle Heights. Each of these art spaces have initiatives to provide free food packages to their community, either through partnerships with produce and food non-profits or through community donations. Space B has other programs to provide their community with resources such as toy giveaways and a little free library in front of their space stocked with books in Spanish.

Two art spaces work to support people experiencing houselessness. Before the pandemic, Space B had an annual day of giving for people experiencing homelessness. Space D, a for-profit gallery in Cypress Park, uses creative minds to raise funds for youth experiencing houselessness. They also participate in clothing drives and snack pack making for the houseless community and work with an organization that focuses on supporting the houseless community.

Analysis

Interviews conducted with twelve representatives from art spaces helped answer the research question: How do art spaces in Northeast LA think about art and gentrification, and how are they addressing gentrification and/or otherwise working to benefit their community?

Many interviewees speak of gentrification outside of the art spaces interviewed to place responsibility on other parties. Though ten out of twelve interviewees acknowledged the role that art can play in gentrification, no interviewees stated that their space contributed to gentrification. The tendency of interviewees to avoid associating their spaces with gentrification could be in part because half the spaces were non-profit organizations, and three more view their space as community-based and focused. These spaces and may view their work outside of this issue because of their community efforts. However, the interviewees from the two for-profit art galleries, both located in Boyle Heights, did not associate their space with gentrification either. According to the executive director of Space F in Boyle Heights, their neighborhood had a clear face of gentrification, and the face was art. Her comments, along with one of the space's representatives sharing that he has been called a gentrifier, suggest that while these interviewees may not view their spaces as gentrifying, community members might. All of the interviewees may be uncomfortable thinking about how the efforts they work towards every day and are passionate about may contribute to something so sinister as gentrification.

On the topic of what specific art spaces contribute to gentrification, the consensus among the spaces was that larger galleries with shows that do not reflect or welcome the community the gallery is located can contribute more to gentrification than other kinds of art spaces. This is particularly relevant in Boyle Heights, as these kinds of galleries are common due to the neighborhood's close proximity to Downtown LA and the Arts District. I agree with the majority

of my interviewees who question the purpose of these art galleries in lower-income neighborhoods. Art galleries with high price points in these neighborhoods should relocate into wealthier areas more likely to have residents able to buy the expensive paintings they sell. Fancier art galleries that are just starting should take the issue of gentrification into serious consideration and evaluate their positionality in each neighborhood they are considering settling in.

In contrast to these galleries, some art spaces work to reflect the community back to itself, which is an excellent way to discourage gentrification. If an art space is speaking to existing community members, they are the people who are most likely to attend their events. People who already live in the neighborhood are the ones who benefit from their events, shows, and further programming. In marginalized communities, these art spaces can serve as a way to showcase and celebrate cultures, peoples, and traditions that much of the media leaves out. People can come together and celebrate what their neighborhood *is*, instead of what it *could be*. Conversely, people of means in different neighborhoods are less likely to attend the organization's events. This group is widely believed to spur gentrification due to their financials, and introducing new people to a neighborhood through art could one day cause them to start looking around in that same neighborhood for housing. Even if they just came back for a cup of coffee, their presence encourages other people like them to explore the neighborhood as well, with the same potential consequences.

Some art spaces act as the middle figure to facilitate between community members and public officials. This is a fantastic way to give community members a voice in an encouraging environment and models the participatory planning practices heralded by activists. Space F found a way to engage in these practices without needing the support of public officials. They

encouraged community members to write their wants about a new metro line to demonstrate the ideal community-engaged process for decision making. This showed planning officials what they should have done and what they can do in the future, potentially contributing to tangible change in their community. Even if events like these did not end up directly contributing to a tangible change, they still encourage community members to use their voice and speak up for their wants and the wants of their community, which is invaluable and can build a strong organizing base. Community based organizations should keep these strategies in mind, especially if public officials plan to do something the community is not in favor of.

As discussed in the literature review, youth engagement in art-related activities can have an instrumental impact on children's growth and wellbeing. It was encouraging that two-thirds of my interviewees had thought about how to involve children in their efforts. Additionally, as shown by the feedback from community members during community discussions with the community-based arts hub connected to a college in Highland Park (Space F), there is a great need for arts education in Highland Park. This is likely true for other neighborhoods in Northeast LA as well, especially the lower-income neighborhoods that may not have as much public school funding for arts-centered programs. I encourage all art spaces, especially those that are located in lower-income communities, to have some kind of art programming. Art spaces could start by building relationships with local elementary schools and inviting teachers to bring their classes on a field trip to the space. Once this has been established, they could consider expanding their programming from there. If possible, I urge art spaces engaging in youth programming to make the events and classes free. If this is not possible, art spaces should still implement a scholarship program so that every student who wants to participate can.

Art spaces opening their doors to parties in the community that are not part of their establishment is a concept that was not covered in the literature that was reviewed on this topic. It is intriguing because it seems like something that could be relatively low-budget and easy to replicate. Some interviewees talked about the challenges of getting more involved with local political and planning issues due to their budget and time constraints, so this strategy could be an alternative. It would not require much extra funding because the outside parties bring what they need or much planning time, because that too is being taken care of by the outside party. One issue that may arise could be that galleries, especially larger galleries with more expensive artwork, may be hesitant to invite strangers into their space to conduct activities so as to not risk harm to the artwork. Two compromises to manage this could be for art spaces to open up a smaller room without art on the walls to community members, or only open up their space during transition periods between shows when there is no artwork in the space.

Another low-cost way art spaces can get involved with their communities is by creating spaces where the community can provide resources to their fellow neighbors, as implemented by the non-profit gallery Space B. Their initiatives to set up both a food pantry and a little free library outside their space were at very little cost to them, but it greatly helps their community. All they had to pay for were the materials to set up the boxes, a few books, and some food products to start the mutual care boxes off, and their community takes care of the rest. Not only do these boxes meet community needs, but they also strengthen the sense of community by allowing people to add to a collective project and caring for one another. Projects like this are especially beneficial if completed by an art space that is established in the community as it would have especially high foot traffic and could serve as an anchor point for community needs, though

its effects would be felt in any art space. Further mutual care box themes art spaces may wish to consider could be birth control products, menstruation products, or products for new mothers.

Space B also organized a toy giveaway around Christmas time with the leftover toys from councilmembers' donations to neighborhood councils. Other art spaces could try variations of this low-cost effort by reaching out to local officials, neighborhood councils, or even businesses and asking if they have any resources left over from events or excess inventory that could be beneficial to their community. They could also reach out to local non-profits that seek to provide resources to groups like those involved with the art space. During the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the nonprofit Space K partnered with Pollos Pantry to provide grocery bags for their students' families. This helped to alleviate the financial and emotional strain of the pandemic. Some art spaces cited the limitations of their mission statement and their donors as a reason to refrain from community involvement initiatives like this that lack an art component. Although they may not technically fall within an arts non-profits' mission statement, it is still crucial not to ignore these needs and instead try to meet them. I urge the art spaces that cited this reason to speak with their donors and push the boundaries of the statement so there is room for resource distribution for community members. Art spaces could even tell their donors these initiatives can help build the name and presence of the art space, which could further the existing mission statement.

One gap in this research, which was touched upon in the methods section, is that it only presents one side of the issue of gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles. For example, an art space that benefits the community through free events and free educational programs may, from the community members' perspective, still ultimately negatively affect their neighborhood. This research could be expanded upon by interviewing anti-gentrification organizers in these

neighborhoods about their perspectives on art's role in gentrification, and how they think art spaces could best exist in their community. Because of this, these findings should be read with the knowledge that they do not create a complete picture of the story of art and gentrification in Northeast LA.

Policy Recommendations

One way to conceptualize gentrification is through economic terms. Put simply, there is more demand for housing than there is supply for housing in LA's gentrifying neighborhoods. However, there is a crucial distinction between luxury and above market-rate housing, which can be secured relatively easily, and affordable housing and middle-income housing, both of which are difficult to find in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, developers have a larger incentive to build luxury housing than they do to build below-market-rate housing, as luxury and above-market-rate housing yields a higher profit. According to the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), 97% of rental units under construction in Downtown LA are in the 4-star and 5-star category, with rents averaging \$2,800 per month. Trends like this result in a shortage of 500,000 affordable units in Los Angeles County (ACCE). In this same vein, landlords have the same incentive to increase rent at rates that are unsustainable for their tenants. To combat these market forces and prioritize people over profit, the city and state should implement policies that create more affordable housing and make it more difficult for landlords to overcharge on rent and displace their tenants.

Tax Vacant Properties

One way to discourage higher rents for tenants is for the city of Los Angeles to implement a vacancy tax on vacant properties. This policy would be following in the footsteps of advocacy by community organizers (ACCE) as well as other major U.S. cities including Oakland and Vancouver (Quartz). It would also address a staggering problem in Los Angeles as there are 93,500 vacant housing units and about 36,300 residents experiencing homelessness (ACCE).

Landlords often list properties at unreasonably high rates and wait for these units to be rented out by tenants with means. Property speculators may also buy large amounts of property at relatively cheap rates and wait to bring these units to the market until their market value has risen to a rate that they are satisfied with (ACCE). This gives a large amount of power to individuals and corporations capable of buying these properties, and it denies Angelenos much-needed housing. However, if a vacancy tax were imposed on their vacant units landlords would have the incentive to fill up their vacant units as quickly as possible, likely leading to a decrease in the rental prices. Additionally, speculators would no longer have the incentive to buy properties and keep them vacant until the value increased because the cost of a vacancy tax without the payment of renters would not be profitable. A vacancy tax would result in units at lower rates, benefitting Angelenos who are searching for affordable housing and it would decrease property speculation and preemptive purchasing, benefiting those who are currently tenants.

Expand Rent Control

Currently, rent control in Los Angeles is stifled by the outdated Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act of 1995. Under this act, Los Angeles' Rent Stabilization Ordinance of 1979 is only applicable to units built before 1979 (CA Gov). The Rent Stabilization Ordinance of 1979 restricts landlords by capping yearly rent increases at 3 to 8 percent. Landlords who own buildings after 1979 are only beholden to California's restrictions on rent gouging. They limit yearly rent increases to 5 percent plus inflation which average at 2.5 percent, and cap yearly rent increases by 10 percent (LA Curbed). Additionally, Councilmembers in Los Angeles county say these laws prevent the implementation of the California statewide Rent Control Law of 2020 (LA Curbed). Repealing Costa Hawkins, amending the Rent Stabilization Ordinance so yearly rent

increases are capped at 4 percent or below, and establishing more units as firmly rent-capped spaces would greatly ease the strife placed upon residents at risk of eviction.

Repeal the Ellis Act

The Ellis Act, a piece of California legislation passed in 1986, allows landlords to evict residents if they are planning on going out of business. According to the Los Angeles Tenants Union, more than 20,000 rent-stabilized apartments housing over 60,000 residents have been lost due to the Ellis Act since 2001. Proponents of the Ellis Act argue that it protects small “mom and pop” landlords by allowing them to retire, but the LA Times found that 51 percent of properties removed using the Ellis Act were bought within a year before the eviction occurred (KCET). Further, they found that 78 percent of evictions occurred within the first 5 years of owning the property (KCET). These patterns suggest that landlords do not use the act to retire, but rather investors use it as a property speculation tool to further their own capital, displacing residents in the process (KCET).

Ultimately, it would be most beneficial to tenants and lower to middle-income residents of Los Angeles if the Ellis Act was overturned completely. However, this is a much longer process and is unlikely in the near future. An alternative to overturning the Ellis Act has been proposed by State Senator Alex Lee through Assembly Bill 854 (CAL Matters). This bill would prohibit landlords from filing an eviction notice using the Ellis Act until they had owned the building for at least five years (AB854 Third Reading). Exemptions are made in order to protect smaller mom-and-pop landlords, which is what the initial bill set out to do. This bill died in 2022, but the author of the bill has talked of re-introducing a nearly identical piece of legislation next year.

Both acts of limiting the power of the Ellis Act and repealing it completely would greatly benefit the tenants of California. These measures would limit the rapid escalation of gentrification in neighborhoods where property value may have increased in a short amount of time. Additionally, it would provide tenants with more peace of mind and security in the place they call home.

Discussion and Conclusion

Though my findings detail productive ways art spaces can involve and better their communities, it is crucial to remember that art spaces can still be harmful presences. Galleries selling higher priced paintings in lower income areas are doing a disservice to the communities where they are located. Even art spaces that seek to do good in their communities can still cause harm if they are not in tune to the needs and the implications of their existence in a particular area. This is why it is important for all art spaces to critically evaluate their role in any given neighborhood. In addition to this, through firsthand community feedback and learning from their peers by reading this research, art spaces can implement initiatives that benefit their communities and speak to the existing residents of the neighborhood they are in instead of. While these efforts are critical to provide quality arts spaces, they are not nearly enough to prevent gentrification from occurring in Los Angeles as it is a highly desirable place to live with a shortage of low income and middle income housing. In order to combat this, the city of Los Angeles and the State of California should implement policies like the ones I have detailed above. If acted upon, these changes undertaken by art spaces, the city of Los Angeles, and the state of California would result in an LA arts scene with a larger focus on people than profit, and where the pressures of gentrification would be decreased due to the high volume of affordable housing and rent stabilization. This could create a thriving arts scene for all, and I sincerely hope this comes to fruition.

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Appendices

Questions for Employees of Art Organizations:

1. What brought you to this neighborhood, and how did you come to this specific space?
2. What does a typical event look like at [Organization/Art Space Name]?
3. Who do you think your audience is? Has it changed over time?
4. Does your organization engage members of the immediate community? If so, how?
5. Has your rent increased? Do you feel as if it is more difficult for new art spaces to join the area?
6. Have you seen any notable building developments since you first joined the neighborhood?
7. What role do you think art plays in the process of Northeast LA's gentrification?
8. What do you think art spaces can do to address gentrification and the potentially gentrifying nature of art spaces?
9. Does your organization feel a responsibility to give back to the community?
10. Has your organization participated in any anti-gentrification efforts? If so, could you give me an example of one of these times?
11. Are there any areas in which you think your organization could improve its efforts in anti-gentrification?
12. Do you know about any strategies that other art organizations use to combat gentrification or promote community stability?
13. Are there any contacts you have who work at art organizations or art spaces in Northeast Los Angeles that may be interested in talking with me?