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Turnout NYC Pilots New Venues for Equitable Arts Access Across New York City

Led by the Design Trust for Public Space and SITU, supported by a $2-Million Grant from the Mellon Foundation

New York, NY, May 2, 2022 – The Design Trust for Public Space and SITU today announced the launch of Turnout NYC, a community-oriented initiative that will provide infrastructure support for New York City-based arts and cultural organizations while expanding access to the arts across the city. Supported by a $2-million grant from the Mellon Foundation, the venture aims to help small arts organizations produce public programming despite the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. It will feature flexible and semi-permanent outdoor venues—one in each borough—in collaboration with cultural partners from within each community. This two-step approach will give arts organizations and artists greater agency in defining programming and activating public spaces in neighborhoods city-wide.

By hosting 150-200 events and featuring up to 1,500 artists from throughout the city upon the completion of its 2022 season, Turnout NYC will affect long-term change and advance a new model of community-driven cultural production. Programming will be continuously announced and updated at www.turnoutnyc.org.

Beyond hosting a summer of creative events for New Yorkers, the five sites will support equitable access to the arts and provide infrastructure for artists, especially Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized peoples. The initiative will purposefully seek to advance these venues as part of a larger effort to distribute open-source design knowledge, encourage structural changes in the city’s cultural policies, and to build a connected cohort of emerging arts and design professionals.

Turnout NYC is being led by Design Trust for Public Space, a nonprofit organization dedicated to activating and transforming shared public spaces to create a more just, equitable, and sustainable city, and SITU, an architectural practice centered on social and creative impact.

“Prior to the pandemic, people living in vulnerable areas already had limited access to cultural opportunities. Today, those scarce opportunities are at a higher risk of disappearing,” said Matthew Clarke, Design Trust for Public Space Executive Director. “Building on Design Trust’s experience in activating and transforming underutilized public space throughout the five boroughs, Turnout NYC will create a replicable strategy for place-based interventions that advance equitable access to the arts.”
“This initiative demonstrates how, in being flexible and creative in how we think about traditional performance venues, we can design our public spaces in ways that enrich New York City’s artistic and cultural life, across all neighborhoods,” said Basar Girit, Founding Partner at SITU.

Guided by an Advisory Committee of NYC cultural leaders, such as National Black Theatre CEO Sade Lythcott, Performer Alphonse Gonzales, Queens Theatre Executive Director Taryn Sacramone, Poet Shanelle Gabriel, and other New York based creatives, Turnout NYC recognizes that arts organizations and artists, outside of Midtown-Manhattan cultural districts, are critical anchors in the city’s recovery and long-term health. In each borough, Turnout NYC will engage a local Community Cultural Partner, connect local cultural and artistic practices to create place-based interventions and performances, host design workshops and trainings, and lift up community networks.

Partner Sites include:
- Brooklyn: Brownsville Community Justice Center with Artwell Creative
- Queens: Queensboro Dance Festival
- Staten Island: Alice Austen House
- Manhattan: Uptown Grand Central with National Black Theatre
- Bronx: The Point Community Development Corporation

“Turnout NYC centers community members in designing the spaces and opportunities that artists have to present their work,” said Taryn Sacramone, Queens Theatre Executive Director and NYC Cultural Institutions Group Chair. “Access to arts and culture is critical for making the well-documented benefits of cultural experiences available for all. We are creating stronger infrastructure to expand the City’s rich arts ecosystem, empowering artists and opening new avenues for partnerships.

“Turnout NYC will enable hundreds of NYC-based artists to collaborate and co-design with their communities,” said Emil J. Kang, Arts and Culture Program Director at the Mellon Foundation. “We are pleased to support this dynamic group of partners engaging in a process of true collaboration and deep listening in order to keep artists performing in their communities.”

Turnout NYC cultural community partners and spokespeople are available for further comment. Please contact Alexa Mauzy-Lewis (amauzy@designtrust.org) to coordinate.

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About the Design Trust for Public Space
The Design Trust for Public Space is a nationally recognized incubator that catalyzes change and transforms New York City’s shared civic spaces—streets, plazas, parks, public buildings, transportation, and housing developments—to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable city. Established in 1995 by Andrea Woodner, the nonprofit brings design expertise and systems thinking to the public realm to make a lasting impact. Founded on the tenet that New York City’s cultural and democratic life depends on viable public space, the Design Trust focuses on social justice and equity, environmental sustainability, design excellence, and public engagement. Its innovative model brings together government agencies, community groups, and private-sector experts, utilizing cross-sector partnerships to deliver creative solutions that shape the city’s landscape.
About SITU
SITU is an unconventional architecture practice composed of three divisions—Studio, Research, and Fabrication—that leverage innovative technologies and adaptive methodologies for creative and social impact. The interdisciplinary practice encourages collaborative solutions while providing services that address a multitude of unique challenges in the fields of design, construction, and human rights. SITU was founded in 2005 and currently resides at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The practice has received numerous awards and honors, including grants from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Oak Foundation, the 2018 President’s Citation Award from The Cooper Union, Interior Design Best of Year in 2016, 2014, and 2011, as well as an award for Excellence in Design by the Art Commission of the City of New York.

About J. Ember Design
As Public Space Design Advisor and member of the core design team, J. Ember Design leads the site design and advises the team and site partners on design, placemaking, programming, and operation. J. Ember Design creates playful, empathetic, and collaborative public space design, intrinsically linked with public space management, and strives to bring people together in play and joy, in all communities.

About The Mellon Foundation
The Mellon Foundation is the nation’s largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.