



*You are here*

*exploring art  
in  
the suburbs*

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Produced by  
The McKnight Foundation  
[www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org)  
and  
FORECAST Public Artworks  
[www.forecastart.org](http://www.forecastart.org)



This sourcebook and map are intended to be springboards for your own suburban public arts adventure; neither is in any way comprehensive. To be eligible for inclusion in this map, destinations had to be places where visitors can readily see artworks or attend regular events and performances. To tell us about your own must-see or must-do suburban arts recommendations, go to [www.mcknight.org/youarehere](http://www.mcknight.org/youarehere).





# Foreword

by Rip Rapson, President, The McKnight Foundation

Greetings. *You Are Here* is this foundation's second book about the development of the arts in Twin Cities suburbs. The first book, *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs*, was meant to spur local dialogue about the emerging trend of suburban cultural development. It achieved that, and much more.

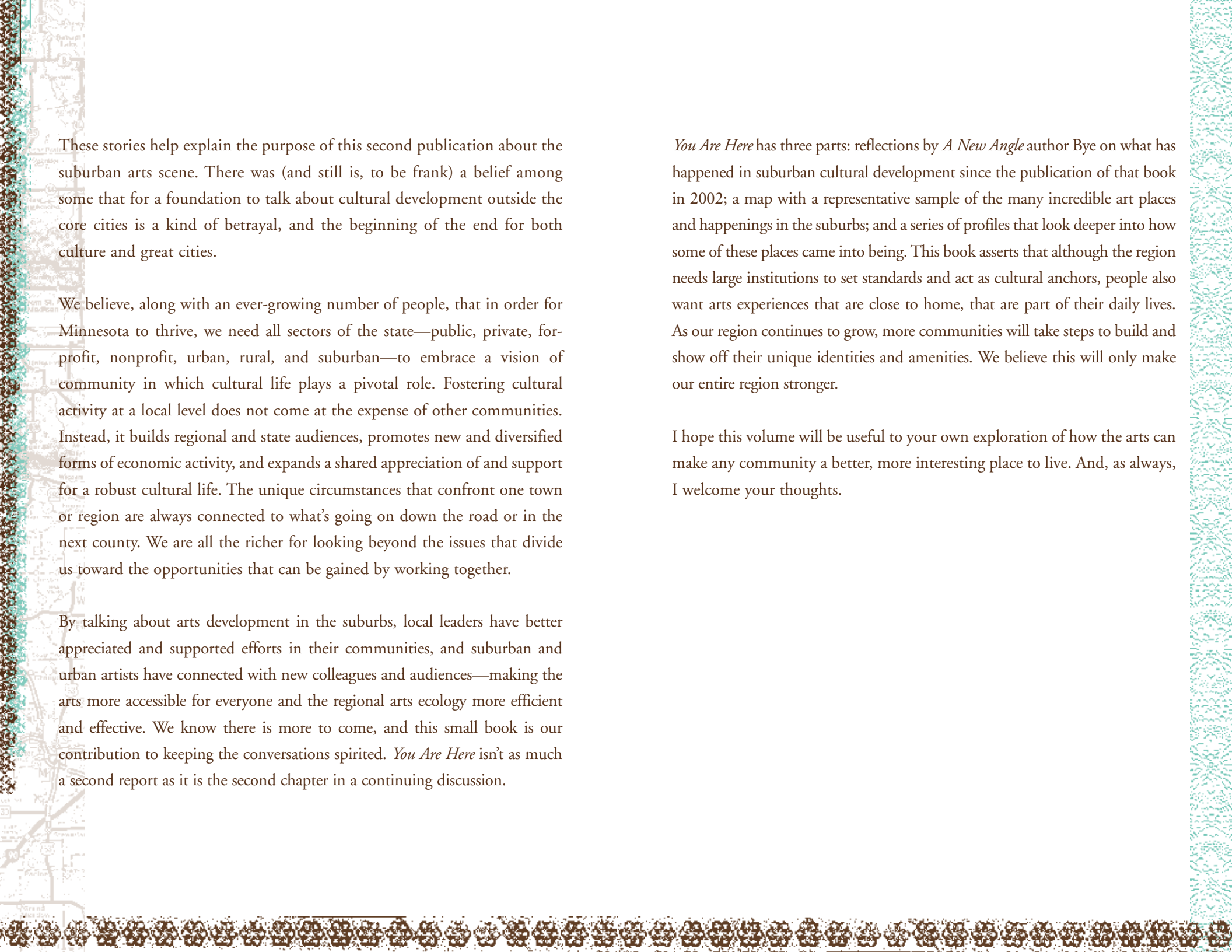
We received a huge wave of interest from *A New Angle*—locally, regionally, and from across the country. The response was mostly positive and productive: the book has been a starting point for countless community discussions and plans from Florida to Washington State. In Minnesota, it has stimulated new art activity and partnerships, all the while making the arts more accessible and integrated into our region's daily life.

So why publish a second book, especially less than three years after *A New Angle*? As Carolyn Bye, executive director of the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council and the author of *A New Angle*, acknowledges in her *You Are Here* commentary, there have been no “monumental changes” since the first report “but, rather, many small steps . . .”

Those small steps are taking us further on a remarkable journey. The discussion sparked by *A New Angle* is reflected in the decisions and actions of patrons, funders, performers, organizations, and communities throughout the metro region. Consider:

- Despite the enormous financial pressures facing Minnesota communities in recent years, the commitment to the arts in many suburbs has never been stronger. Caponi Art Park, in the rapidly growing community of Eagan, struggled to gain traction for years. But in 2002, Dakota County residents approved a tax increase to acquire and preserve open space. Now, with citizens' renewed commitment to arts and open space, Caponi Art Park will be preserved for future generations to enjoy.
- The Excelsior and Grand/Park Commons East project in St. Louis Park is just one example of public art being integrated into community projects. The redevelopment of the first-ring Minneapolis suburb's main street includes significant displays of public art. Notably, this commitment was finalized in December 2003—again, at a time when communities and developments faced tremendous financial pressure to justify expenditures.

Both of these stories are profiled in *You Are Here*. But there are many more decisions made every day as an outgrowth of the conversations started by *A New Angle*. North Star Opera, Thursday Musicale, The Loft Literary Center, and many other organizations are for the first time scheduling performances and classes in suburban venues. Partnerships are being created with suburban arts centers and school districts. The MacPhail Center for Music, a long-time downtown Minneapolis institution, is building a new facility downtown while it expands programming via access sites around the Twin Cities.



These stories help explain the purpose of this second publication about the suburban arts scene. There was (and still is, to be frank) a belief among some that for a foundation to talk about cultural development outside the core cities is a kind of betrayal, and the beginning of the end for both culture and great cities.

We believe, along with an ever-growing number of people, that in order for Minnesota to thrive, we need all sectors of the state—public, private, for-profit, nonprofit, urban, rural, and suburban—to embrace a vision of community in which cultural life plays a pivotal role. Fostering cultural activity at a local level does not come at the expense of other communities. Instead, it builds regional and state audiences, promotes new and diversified forms of economic activity, and expands a shared appreciation of and support for a robust cultural life. The unique circumstances that confront one town or region are always connected to what's going on down the road or in the next county. We are all the richer for looking beyond the issues that divide us toward the opportunities that can be gained by working together.

By talking about arts development in the suburbs, local leaders have better appreciated and supported efforts in their communities, and suburban and urban artists have connected with new colleagues and audiences—making the arts more accessible for everyone and the regional arts ecology more efficient and effective. We know there is more to come, and this small book is our contribution to keeping the conversations spirited. *You Are Here* isn't as much a second report as it is the second chapter in a continuing discussion.

*You Are Here* has three parts: reflections by *A New Angle* author Bye on what has happened in suburban cultural development since the publication of that book in 2002; a map with a representative sample of the many incredible art places and happenings in the suburbs; and a series of profiles that look deeper into how some of these places came into being. This book asserts that although the region needs large institutions to set standards and act as cultural anchors, people also want arts experiences that are close to home, that are part of their daily lives. As our region continues to grow, more communities will take steps to build and show off their unique identities and amenities. We believe this will only make our entire region stronger.

I hope this volume will be useful to your own exploration of how the arts can make any community a better, more interesting place to live. And, as always, I welcome your thoughts.

# Notes

by Jack Becker, Executive Director, FORECAST Public Artworks

This survey of arts in the seven-county metropolitan area—and to some extent the regions just beyond the seven counties—proves that the urban core is no longer the only place to experience the arts. In fact, urbanites are beginning to realize that they may have to travel outside the urban core to experience the full benefits of the metro arts community.

Cultural development is one indicator of suburban evolution, the maturing of communities that once consisted of roads, strip malls, big school buildings, and cul-de-sacs with cookie-cutter homes. Gaining ground now are town centers, gathering places, signature landmarks, and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.

Suburban residents young and old want a sense of character and identity for their communities. The process of getting there, though, is a gradual one, and art is one way to prime the pump. As a public art consultant here for more than a decade, I've seen an increased interest in the arts among suburban city managers, developers, county commissioners, library directors, and school district superintendents. Many are seeking help in their efforts to plan, find artists, raise funds, and organize citizens.

Seeing this growth from the ground gave rise to my desire for another perspective—a bigger picture of the arts landscape beyond the boundaries of Minneapolis and St. Paul. What was needed was an arts map of the region, coupled with a collection of essays examining particular projects and how they came about.

Neal Cuthbert, the arts program director at The McKnight Foundation whose interest in suburban cultural development led to McKnight's publication of *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs* in 2002, was quick to respond to the idea. Beyond its generous support for this new study, McKnight offered to publish the map and collection of essays.

This guide is intended to inform, illuminate, and encourage the exploration of all seven counties—and beyond. The essays and map present stories and case studies about different venues, artistic expressions, geographic locales, and trends in suburban taste. For, if variety is the spice of life, the taste buds of the suburbs are tingling. Here's to whetting the appetite for cultural growth regionwide.

Jack Becker is executive director of FORECAST Public Artworks. FORECAST, the co-sponsor of *You Are Here*, is a St. Paul-based nonprofit organization offering facilitation services, grants to Minnesota artists, and a national journal called *Public Art Review*.



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# a WIDER Angle

The 2002 report, *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs*, was intended as a wake-up call for Minnesota artists and policymakers. To artists I wanted to say: “There are *audiences* in the *suburbs*. Why continue to focus all your audience development resources and energy on the same frequently saturated markets that most other Minneapolis/St. Paul organizations are targeting when there are audiences to be mined—if only you will dispense with your outdated beliefs about how to deliver programming?”

I had also hoped that *A New Angle* would change the way funders, particularly public funders, considered requests from suburban arts organizations. However, with the market crash, there wasn’t a lot of traction for arts groups that wanted to develop new suburban audiences, or with funders interested in working with them.

In the two-and-a-half years since the report’s publication, there have been no monumental changes but, rather, many small steps, and I am hopeful as I hear much “discourse in the commons.” The range of dialogue has been fascinating:

- Many arts organizations in the greater metropolitan area have said they felt “legitimized” or “validated” when their stories, dreams, accomplishments, and struggles reached a public forum.
- Responses from urban arts organizations have been as varied as the organizations themselves. Some clutched their organizational pocketbook—“Oh, no! Now McKnight is going to reallocate part of its already diminishing arts funding pool to yet another group of organizations” (which didn’t happen). Others made some genuine attempts to capture a larger share of suburban audiences through changes in marketing, partnerships, and venues. There was even the occasional epiphany (see page 13, The conversion of Jack Becker).
- More suburban lawmakers have come to understand the great appreciation for the arts in their districts, and some have an increased awareness that arts support is a good investment. Suburban arts activists continue to shore up the support of target legislators.
- Language has changed around the Minnesota State Arts Board’s table, and the board’s 2005 strategic plan has devoted more “ink” to the recognition of suburban audiences than it has in the past.

## Bricks, mortar, and blueprints for change

Since the publication of *A New Angle*, we’ve seen some interesting new buildings, infrastructure planning, and suburban public arts projects, including the Bloomington Fine Arts Center, the City of Ramsey’s comprehensive development plan that includes arts in its infrastructure, and St. Louis Park’s street-design project. (Two of these projects are described in more detail on the following pages.) In spring 2004, Dakota County’s economic development agency hosted a well-attended conference for its communities that focused on the arts and economic development.

Contrary to the stereotype that suburbs are only about new building construction, we’ve also seen the creative reuse of buildings, including:

- Orono Discovery Center, an empty elementary school transformed into a multiuse, multigenerational arts center with a dedicated teen art center;
- Mainstreet School of Performing Arts in Hopkins, once a parochial school, now a charter school; and
- The Depot Coffee House, a city-owned train depot converted into a teen-run coffeehouse/arts venue/gathering space in Hopkins.

What I haven’t seen is an increasing share of public and foundation resources being directed toward greater-metro organizations; perhaps things will change when funding portfolios rebound. However, greater-metro communities and organizations are not waiting for grants from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, The McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board, or other funding sources to help them move ahead with projects. They are figuring out how to get the work done now.

One unexpected outcome has been the interest in *A New Angle* outside Minnesota. College professors have called for copies to distribute as assigned reading to their arts management classes. Communities developing cultural plans have given everyone on their planning committees a copy to read and have asked me to make keynote presentations. And when I attend a national conference of grantors or arts folks, invariably someone will come up to me to say thanks for capturing what their regions or communities are grappling with as they attempt to serve all audiences and build unity.

## The conversion of Jack Becker

My last—and best—example illustrates what’s happening in our region and in metropolitan areas across the country. I call it “The conversion of Jack Becker.” Jack, the executive director of FORECAST Public Artworks and the force behind

this publication, had heard about arts activities in suburbs, but he admitted that he had never stepped back to see what was really happening there until he read *A New Angle*. “I didn’t know there was a reason why artists would work in a suburb,” he says.

In the past few years Jack has worked to connect artists and suburban communities and, where work is in the planning stages, he’s seeing art and artists being integrated from the start. “The potential impact for artists in a community-building process can be tremendous,” Jack says. “If I likened it to a building, it would be about artists having the opportunity to get in on the design phase, helping to shape the vision rather than retrofitting [it].” At the same time, he still perceives subtle and not so subtle biases about the suburbs. Even yet, for some artists, working in the suburbs is considered “selling out,” as if serving *those people* is anathema for any *serious* artist.

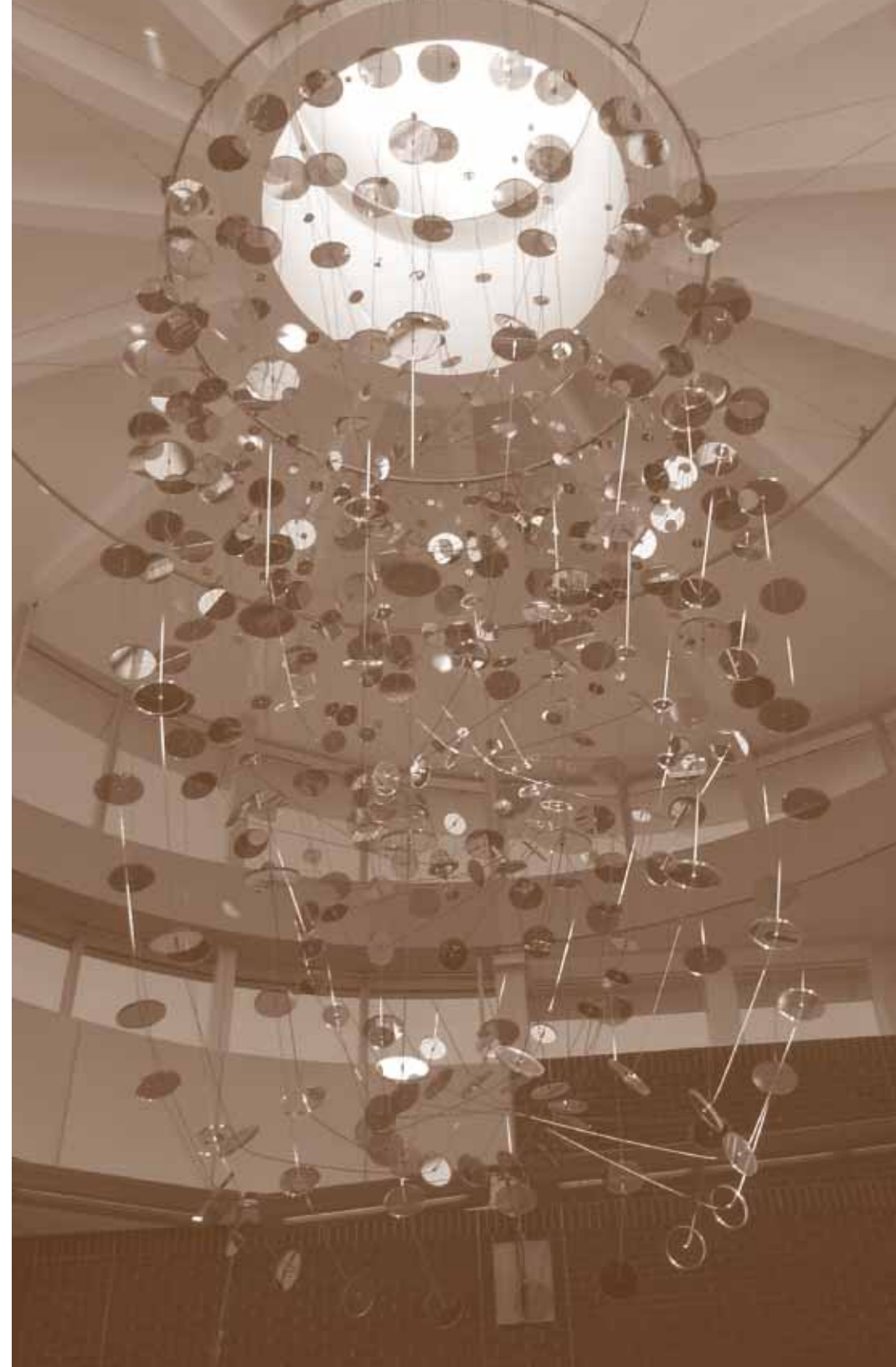
What about my viewpoint? Has my thinking changed? I continue to believe that suburban residents are underrepresented in the majority of audiences of the publicly funded arts organizations in Minneapolis/St. Paul, and that opportunities in many suburban communities are limited. That a generation of suburban youth is growing up without regular access to theater, dance, music, opera, and art galleries is heartbreaking and a shared failure of arts organizations and policymakers. Moreover, it’s going to come back to haunt arts institutions when their audiences, donors, and volunteers dwindle as today’s young people reach adulthood (“season-ticket buyer” age) without having experienced the arts as part of their lives.

In the September 7, 2004, edition of the *New York Times*, National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Dana Gioia said, “If I represent anything in American culture it’s the necessity for the arts to have public engagement. I’m a populist elitist. Some art is better than other art, but without an audience, it’s all diminished.” As a funder working with public (taxpayer) money, I, too, have become more comfortable with my own populist views.

Gioia continued, “The current problem [of the arts] in this country is not with the supply of art but with the demand.” I would amend this statement to say, *The current problem of the arts in this country is not with the supply of art but with the art makers’ unwillingness to create and distribute art to all communities, including suburbs, where there are untapped audiences to be developed and served.*

Carolyn Bye has been executive director of the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council since 1993. She is also the author of *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs*, published by The McKnight Foundation in 2002.

*“Northern Cascade,” by Roy King, 2005,  
glass and cable  
photo by Michael McConnell*



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"North St. Paul Family Centennial Portrait"  
photo by Ellsworth Erickson

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