Marion County Announced as Home of Nation’s Largest Public Art Equity Census

Researchers inventoried and analyzed more than 3,000 public art works within Marion County through an equity lens. Their findings in this first-of-its-kind census are set to impact the future of public art in and around Indianapolis, and serve as a model for communities nationwide.

INDIANAPOLIS (July 7, 2022) – Rokh Research & Design Studio partnered with the Arts Council of Indianapolis, City of Indianapolis Bicentennial Commission, Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF) and Arts Strategies to inventory public art within Marion County, Indiana. Rokh analyzed the findings to generate an understanding of the relationship between public art and equity in a first-of-its-kind research study. While there is a bountiful selection of public art within the County, questions around accessibility, equity, and inclusivity arose and several recommendations for improvement were made in the final report released July 7, 2022 online at publicartforall.com.

“This report seeks to explore the opportunities for Marion County’s public art sector to engage more comprehensively with community members, artists, and visitors to co-create a public art landscape for all,” says Danicia Malone, Principal Urban Planner of Rokh Research & Design Studio. “Public art has the ability to host a full range of human experiences and invigorate the quality of life for all, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, or ability. With this as a guiding light, the need to reassess the inclusivity of our public spaces is paramount.”

This report inventoried all of the visible artwork from the public right of way within Marion County, IN. Researchers used a broad definition of public art and monuments to tag the entries then analyzed the metadata to uncover trends relating to accessibility and equity.

Key Findings:
- Of the 3,090 works uncovered, only 537 or 17% were marked with an artist signature, hampering our ability to further study equity, inclusion, and representation.
- Murals account for nearly half of Marion County’s public art landscape but this art form receives the least amount of financial investment.
• Black, Latino/a/e, Asian, and Indigenous residents as a global majority account for 47.2% of the Marion County population but as creatives, collectively, they only account for 26.5% of the attributed works found.

Overall, the study suggests two distinct recommendations:
1. Enact policies that seek to hire local creators who are caretakers within these areas.
2. Develop guidelines that support the incorporation of a public art system that acknowledges the history and heritage of a neighborhood.

"Research like this provides the context and background necessary to engage and empower artists of diverse backgrounds," said Deputy Mayor Judith Thomas. "Thank you to Rokh Research & Design Studio and the Indy Arts Council for undertaking this landmark study. We look forward to working with our community partners to support a more equitable public art ecosystem in Indy."

"The results of this census will guide how the Arts Council invests its public art dollars in artists and communities going forward, and how we will encourage our civic partners to prioritize their investments as well," said Julia Muney Moore, Indy Arts Council's Director of Public Art. "By reflecting different stories and cultures, public art helps make public space more equitable."

The census is the second phase of the County's efforts to build towards a public art equity audit. Future phases include public art tours, a campaign to credit artists, community conversations about the findings and more actions to increase equity and spatial justice for public art. To learn more about the other phases of the comprehensive public art equity audit, visit indyarts.org. You can read the full Public Art Census at publicartforall.com.

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About Rokh
Rokh is a multidisciplinary, cultural equity, research & design studio. Founded in 2016, our work encompasses identity, communications, and critical race theory. Our partners are scholars, researchers, creatives, and practitioners who work collaboratively and independently towards rooting tactical and somatic equity & liberation in the civic sphere.

About Indy Arts Council
Indy Arts Council is an arts advocacy and services organization whose mission is to foster meaningful engagement in the arts by nurturing a culture where artists and artists organizations thrive.