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Why 'Public Art Matters'

Woodbury University exhibition makes the case

By [Alex Zaragoza](#)

"Star Cluster" by Christopher Puzio is on view at San Diego County Operations Center

Public art matters. It's a simple notion that, lately, carries a lot of weight in San Diego. After the Port of San Diego drastically cut its public-art program from \$1.2 million to \$600,000, with additional cuts to a reserve fund, two major projects-in-progress, by Margaret Noble and Randy Walker, were cancelled completely. Other approved projects were left at a standstill until further notice.

It's not surprising, then, that local artists, particularly those affected by the cuts, are rallying to raise awareness of the importance of public art with the exhibition *Public Art Matters* (publicartmatters.wordpress.com, facebook.com/publicartmatters) at Woodbury School of Architecture (2212 Main St. in Barrio Logan). An opening reception will begin at 5 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 8; the show will be on view through Sunday, Aug. 11. Among those exhibiting mock-ups and models of their cancelled or in-progress projects are Noble, Christopher Puzio, Miki Iwasaki and Roman de Salvo. There will also be drawings, photographs and models of existing public-art pieces. Arts organizations such as Agitprop and Art Produce will have displays explaining their missions and projects.

"The port's decision was the initial catalyst for the show," says San Diego Architectural Foundation Executive Director Leslee Schaffer. "But, since, we've been talking to so many wonderful artists, not just in the port domain, and since we came up with this name, what we really want to do is talk about why it matters to any region, city or culture."

Schaffer says that a strong public-arts program can have a huge impact on a city's cultural, social and economic vitality. While the cut in the port's art program was bad news, Schaffer's

confident that other public-art endeavors—the San Diego Commission for Arts & Culture, the San Diego International Airport Art Program, to name two—are still alive.

She adds that she doesn't want the exhibition to "force feed" people the value of public art. "Hopefully," she says, "the art will speak for itself."

Ideally, *Public Art Matters* will "stimulate dialogue and make people think" about how they feel about the state of public art," she says. "If some projects can find funding from this exhibition, that would be a double win.

"I love the idea of projects finding funding elsewhere," Schaffer adds. "That would be the best outcome, if some of the projects got funded in other ways and came into fruition."

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