

Packard Foundation Grantee Profile

Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana

In the mid-1980's, during San Jose's redevelopment boom, the city drafted a cultural master plan to ensure a thriving arts scene in the downtown area. Unfortunately, the plan exclusively prioritized mainstream arts institutions and most of San Jose's prominent Latino artists fled to other cities more supportive of artistic diversity.

But a major metropolis like San Jose with a huge Latino population lacking space and opportunity for Latino artists was simply unacceptable to a small, but dedicated group of community activists and artists from this community. So in 1989, they launched Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA) as an inclusive, neighborhood-oriented organization in a modest downtown space originally built as a car dealership. It was important for MACLA's founders that the organization was located in downtown San Jose, along with the mainstream arts organizations as part of the arts and entertainment district.

These artists never intended for MACLA to be just an art gallery or performance venue. They knew rebuilding San Jose's Latino arts community would mean providing opportunities for youth education *and* professional artists; for innovative visionaries as well as cultural traditionalists; a place for supporting new talent from within the community and for attracting well-known Latino artists from around the world to exhibit and teach.

Like many grassroots organizations, MACLA had many ups and downs during these early years, as it worked to develop a solid infrastructure and develop capacity. In spite of these growing pains, MACLA gained a reputation for excellence. It was MACLA's focus on community involvement and youth arts education that first attracted the attention of The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

The Packard Foundation first reached out to MACLA in 1996 with an \$8,000 grant to cover general expenses. Packard's commitment soon expanded to helping MACLA further build capacity and internal leadership by funding projects to help MACLA strengthen its annual fund drive, collaborate with other local arts organizations, find a new executive director and other strategic planning initiatives. To date these grants total nearly \$500,000 and The Packard Foundation continues to provide general support and staff development funds to MACLA.

Since their relationship with Packard began, MACLA's impact on the Latino and broader community in San Jose has grown significantly. Annually, MACLA now reaches more than 30,000 people through 50 different programs. In addition to shining its spotlight on countless young and local artists by commissioning new work and hosting exhibitions, MACLA continues to sponsor events featuring big name talent, such as Pulitzer Prize-winning author Junot Díaz.

Remaining true to its vision of serving as a community hub, MACLA incubated the first charter school in San Jose, Downtown College Prep, which serves primarily Latino youth without a family history of college attendance. More recently, MACLA created and distributed 10,000 copies of what the *San Jose Mercury-News* called “a beautifully illustrated directory with information on more than 60 businesses and organizations that call [the] William/Reed [neighborhood] home” to promote the “wonderful, eclectic mix of restaurants, art galleries and family-owned stores in the southwestern tip of downtown.”

Despite the lack of diversity in San Jose’s original cultural master plan, the artists and supporters behind MACLA have been successful in making sure that the downtown culture represents the people that actually live there. As MACLA continues to grow in its role as a community hub for Latino artists, students and families, The Packard Foundation remains committed in its long-term support of this vibrant organization.