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L.A. River a Finalist for \$1M Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Project

Carren Jao | March 24, 2015

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Public art at Glendale Narrows Riverwalk | Photo: Justin Cram

Art allows people to see possibilities even in the bleakest conditions. In the last decades, Los Angeles River has transformed from a derelict, ill-remembered storm drain into a place of promise -- seen not only by Angelenos, but even beyond.

Last week Bloomberg Philanthropies, which runs former mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's charitable activities, announced the 12 cities out of 230 applicants who are in the running for up to \$1 million in funding for **public art projects**. The finalists included a proposal to start a public art biennial along the Los Angeles River.

"At a time when imaginative ideas are redefining every industry, cities

Michael R. Bloomberg in a statement.

"There was a great response to the challenge we issued, and we hope these projects spur new excitement about the ways public art can strengthen neighborhoods, inspire residents and fuel local economies."

Because Bloomberg Philanthropies invitation was originally directed to mayor's offices in cities with 30,000 residents or more, the Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti partnered with the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) in drafting the letter of intent for consideration.

The shortlisted proposal, "CURRENT: LA River," would commission five large-scale art works (and smaller commissions and educational programs) that would focus on river topics such as water conservation, ecology and drought. "We felt the L.A. River is the perfect place to investigate these topics," says Felicia Filer, (DCA) Public Art Division Director.

"Simultaneously, many Angelenos are unaware that the city has a river that runs through it. So the opportunity to bring awareness of the river to L.A. residents, and to discuss the subject matter of water and the drought through socially engaged art practices, is ideally situated along the River."

The art works would be curated by **Marc Pally**, an independent curator who helps put on Glow, Santa Monica's biannual dusk

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"Since Marc is an independent curator and not tied to a specific organization interested in the development along the river, we felt his objectivity to this project would be an additional strength," said Filer.

No specific plans are yet in place; "We are now in the planning phase," said Filer. Rebecca Carriero of Bloomberg Philanthropies says that the final three cities will be announced by May. Winning cities can expect site visits from Bloomberg Philanthropies. Cities should also be ready to execute their proposals within 24 months.

Funds from Bloomberg's Public Art Challenge grant might be significant, but DCA also points out that it would not be enough to cover 100 percent of the costs. It would only be a good start that will hopefully attract more funding.

Apart from the Bloomberg grant, the city is also looking to use the **Arts Development Fee** collected from commercial property owners in the affected districts. The development fee costs a maximum of

Council voted unanimously on a motion by councilmembers Jose Huizar and Mitch O'Farrell to update the guideline and expenditure plan for the Arts Development Fee, which had been languishing in fragmented city accounts for the past twenty years.

If selected, CURRENT: LA River will be the latest in a line of ambitious art projects that have found inspiration in its [namesake waterway](#), and Filer says this isn't an issue. "We are aware of, and are excited about, the many different art projects focused on the L.A. River at this time. Our hope is that Current: LA River will join forces with, complement, and amplify the important work of these other projects."

COMMENT



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Carren is an art, architecture and design writer and an avid explorer of Los Angeles. Her work has been spotted on Core77, Dwell, Surface Asia, and Fast Co.Design. You can find her [online](#) and on [Twitter](#).

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