

# Press Release



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## ROTTEN CITY-EMERYVILLE CULTURAL ARTS DISTRICT AMONG FIRST NAMED AS CALIFORNIA CULTURAL DISTRICT IN NEW CREATIVE STATEWIDE PROGRAM

*Newly launched program celebrates the state's diverse and abundant cultural treasures*

SACRAMENTO, CA – The Rotten City-Emeryville Cultural Arts District has been selected as one of California's premier state-designated cultural districts, the California Arts Council announced today. The City of Emeryville's "Rotten City-Emeryville Cultural Arts District" is located in the San Francisco Bay area where it joins 13 other districts that will launch the innovative new program highlighting thriving cultural diversity and unique artistic identities within California, home to the country's leading creative economy.

A cultural district, as outlined by the program, is a well-defined geographic area with a high concentration of cultural resources and activities. The 14 districts that comprise the program's first cohort were selected with variety in mind, intended to help tailor the program to meet the complex needs of a state kaleidoscopic in nature.

Located across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco, this "big little city" has been a historic center of industry. After the turn-of-the-century, Emeryville also became known for their gambling establishments. This led former California Governor/Federal Chief Justice Earl Warren to name them the Rotten City. The arts colony began in the early 1960's when guerrilla art known as "Mud Flat Art" started appearing on the Emeryville shoreline. As they transitioned from heavy industry to the modern economy, artists moved into available warehouses, and the City underwent significant redevelopment. They have seen a significant renaissance and are now considered a destination for shopping, business, and art production.

In addition to the many artists and other community members who contribute to this vibrant city-district of Art and Innovation, the following partners are instrumental in creation of the district and the

extensive production-oriented arts programming that occurs within this urban village. Partners who helped form the district include:

- The City of Emeryville (dedicated to municipal support of the arts)
- Pixar Animation Studios (bringing their contemporary art form to an international audience)
- Emeryville Celebration of the Arts (produces annual month-long juried art exhibit)
- Wareham Development (supportive of STEAM education, which recognizes the nexus between the arts and the creative mindset needed for science/tech industry) and
- Bullseye Glass (provides artist workspace and serves as an artist incubator).

Even the city's mayor is a well-known artist — sculpture artist Scott Donahue. The Mayor has been quoted as saying about the district:

I am proud to be an elected representative of a city that promotes the work of the creative class and celebrates our city's unique cultural history through the arts. The art we produce here in Emeryville is distinct; it is an authentic representation of who we are as a community and it defines our character as a people.

Our outreach efforts to promote our public art program far exceeds anything that you will find in one of our larger neighboring cities. On a per-capita basis, Emeryville is a leading investor in public art production. We also participate in an annual purchase award program that, for artists that live or work in our city, is both competitive and highly sought after by artists all across our city. The Artists-in-Schools program we support extends our leadership on public art for students beyond our borders, touching young people in the adjoining communities of Oakland and Berkeley...the District designation will not only raise the awareness of our city as an art community, but will help provide the additional leverage and support needed to build out the larger vision we have for our community as a haven and incubation hotspot for artists in the Bay Area.

Emeryville and San Francisco front the San Francisco Bay on its eastern and western shores. It is evident that this beautiful region has inspired these two cities to develop their arts communities and be among the first to obtain the State Cultural District designation. Rotten City-Emeryville Cultural Arts District participants represent a wide cross section of the community and join Emeryville-based artists in making the district a dynamic catalyst for art production. For example, the development community and the district's multiple colonies of artists work together in efforts to support STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) education connecting the creative process to innovations in industry. District members were thrilled to hear about the designation as they feel it will help the general public to understand this "other city by the bay" is more than a center of regional retail development, but also a center of art and innovation with an inclusive attitude toward its art community and priority of public investment in art, community livability, social equity and advancement through the arts.

Emeryville represents a different type of district devoted to art production and including a wide variety of modern art forms such as animation, digital/video mapping compositions, and light as a medium. California is often seen internationally as a progressive innovator; Emeryville is one of the State's best innovators in support of its artists. The district is the heart of this center of art and innovation where an active artist colony produces art enjoyed locally and internationally. The Rotten City has become fertile ground for art.

By way of background on this new designation...

"State-level designation of Cultural Districts, with California's diverse geography and regional variety, allowed for an entirely new and comprehensive look at our deeply valued cultural assets," said Donn K. Harris, California Arts Council Chair. "Rotten City-Emeryville Cultural Arts District's personal and generational commitment to these assets speaks of a state deeply invested in the places and people that celebrate local traditions and creativity. Our goal with the pilot launch of this new program was to support a group of districts that met high but broad standards of coherence, vision, and purpose – ones that could set an example for districts that will follow as the program develops and grows."

"These Cultural Districts showcase California's cultural diversity and vibrant experiences," said Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of Visit California. "The districts are one more way to highlight the one-of-a-kind places throughout our state that inspire residents and visitors alike."

Originating with the adoption of Assembly Bill 189 in 2015, authored by Assemblyman Richard Bloom, the California Cultural Districts program aims to leverage the state's artistic and cultural assets. Aligning with the mission and values of the California Arts Council, the districts will celebrate the diversity of California while unifying under an umbrella of shared values—helping to grow and sustain authentic grassroots arts and cultural opportunities, increasing the visibility of local artists and community participation in local arts and culture, and promoting socioeconomic and ethnic diversity. Districts will also play a conscious role in tackling issues of artist displacement.

Rotten City-Emeryville Cultural Arts District will receive the designation for a period of five years, per state legislation. Designation, under this pilot launch of the program, includes benefits such as technical assistance, peer-to-peer exchanges, and branding materials and promotional strategy. The California Arts Council has partnered with Visit California and Caltrans for strategic statewide marketing and resource support.

Rotten City-Emeryville Cultural Arts District and 13 other pilot districts will offer feedback to the Council to ensure the subsequent launch of the full program will be supportive, accessible and appropriate for all types of cultural centers. The pilot cohort program will run until 2019, after which additional new districts will be eligible to apply for a state designation through the finalized certification process.

Selection for the California Cultural districts was conducted through a multistep process, including an open call for initial letters of intent, a peer panel review, site visits for semi-finalists, and an invited finalist application. The program was highly competitive and received interest and submissions from dozens of communities across the state.

**Learn more about the California Cultural Districts program at [www.caculturaldistricts.org](http://www.caculturaldistricts.org).**

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The mission of the California Arts Council, a state agency, is to advance California through the arts and creativity. The Council is committed to building public will and resources for the arts; fostering accessible arts initiatives that reflect contributions from all of California's diverse populations; serving as a thought leader and champion for the arts; and providing effective and relevant programs and services.

Members of the California Arts Council include: Chair Donn K. Harris, Vice Chair Nashormeh Lindo, Larry Baza, Phoebe Beasley, Christopher Coppola, Juan Devis, Kathleen Gallegos, Jaime Galli, Louise McGuinness, Steven Oliver, and Rosalind Wyman. Learn more at [www.arts.ca.gov](http://www.arts.ca.gov).