

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Houston Grand Opera Receives ArtPlace Grant** **First award in Texas; Grant supports HGOco collaborative initiatives**

**[Houston, TEXAS, September 15, 2011]** – In an innovative development that is affecting Houston as well as some two dozen other cities and towns across the nation, National Endowment of the Arts Chairman Rocco Landesmann today announced that Houston Grand Opera has received a grant of \$250,000 from a new private-public collaboration, ArtPlace ([www.artplaceamerica.org](http://www.artplaceamerica.org)).

The grant supports Houston Grand Opera’s Home and Place program, a collaboration with Houston Independent School District and Neighborhood Centers Inc. Houston Grand Opera is the only Texas company to receive this national recognition.

As reported in *The New York Times* today, [\*Consortium Views Arts as Engines of Recovery\*](#) ArtPlace is an initiative of 11 of America’s top foundations working in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts and seven federal agencies. Its aim is to drive revitalization across the country by putting the arts at the center of economic development. ArtPlace has now announced its first round of grants, investing \$11.5 million in 34 locally initiated projects in cities from Honolulu to Miami. Each project supported by ArtPlace has been selected for developing a new model of helping towns and cities thrive by strategically integrating artists and arts organizations into key local efforts in transportation, housing, community development, job creation and more.

ArtPlace grants are given through the combined support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Ford Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, Rasmuson Foundation, The Robina Foundation and an anonymous donor. In addition to the NEA, federal partners are the departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Education and Transportation, along with leadership from the White House Office of Management and Budget and the Domestic Policy Council. Federal partners do not provide funding to ArtPlace but participate in the ArtPlace Presidents’ Council and Operating Committee meetings, ensuring alignment between high-priority federal investments and policy development and ArtPlace grants.

Sandra Bernhard, Director of HGOco said, “We are honored and delighted to be partnering with ArtPlace. The Home and Place project will foster a strong sense of community identity in three very different Houston neighborhoods. By expressing the stories of community members through art and culture, Home and Place will facilitate communication, strengthen bonds, and support the vibrancy of these communities.”

Mayor Parker said, “Congratulations to Houston Grand Opera on receiving an ArtPlace award. Since establishing HGOco in 2007 and launching its innovative approach to engaging our citizens with art on a daily

basis, Houston Grand Opera has been providing hands-on, meaningful service to people throughout our city; it's exciting to see them reach into more neighborhoods to help bring vitality through creative thought, opportunity and activity to people of all ages, in schools, community centers, and even parks.”

HGOco's Home and Place project will include programs in three Houston neighborhoods, Northside/Second Ward, Gulftown/Sharpstown and the Greater Hobby area. HGOco will train teacher and community leaders who will help to facilitate the project. Participants at each site will record oral history interviews of community members, and use them as a basis to create a variety of artistic projects including song, visual arts, dance, photography and writing. In the spring, each participating site will showcase and celebrate the art created by community members.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Terry Grier commented, "At HISD, building a powerful sense of community is a crucial part of our strategic plan to become the best school district in the nation. Our students and teachers will benefit from participating in these unique neighborhood-based programs with Houston Grand Opera and Neighborhood Centers, Inc. We are excited that ArtPlace is providing support and investing in innovative programs here in Houston for our students, their families and communities.”

Anita L. Lundvall, Principal of Neff Elementary School added, “Since our collaborations with HGO began in 2008 through Arts Centered Teaching, our students and teachers have been exposed to opera in a school setting and in a theatre setting. We are so looking forward to participating in Home and Place with HGO because this will provide us with an opportunity to continue and expand the fine arts integration with our classroom teachers, and to engage everyone in the surrounding community.”

The approach being taken by ArtPlace, known as “creative placemaking,” has emerged over the past twenty years as a promising way to increase the vitality of communities and help them grow. In 2011, the National Endowment for the Arts built on its two decades of work in creative placemaking by announcing the first grants in its new Our Town program, designed to support public-private partnerships to strengthen the arts while energizing the overall community. ArtPlace takes this movement a step further, as the first major public-private partnership to encourage creative placemaking across America.

“ArtPlace is accelerating creative placemaking, where cities and towns are using the arts and other creative assets to shape their social, physical and economic futures,” said Rocco Landesman, Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts. “This approach brings new partners to the table to support the arts and recognizes the arts as vital drivers of community revitalization and development.”

“Economic development historically has been about bagging the buffalo—competing for the big employer to move operations to your city,” said Carol Coletta, President of ArtPlace. “But now we know the economic development game is all about how you deploy local assets to develop, attract and keep talent. So why would you not deploy every asset you have—including artists and the arts—to do that? That’s what ArtPlace is all about.”

“ArtPlace represents a new paradigm,” says Luis A. Ubiñas, President of The Ford Foundation and Chairman of the ArtPlace Presidents’ Council. “It brings to the arts the kind of economic development thinking that has long been pursued for attracting and developing businesses, big and small, across the country. ArtPlace’s integrated, interwoven approach has the potential to kick-start local economies and transform communities. The arts can play a central role spurring local economic activity.”

Concurrent with announcing its first round of grants, ArtPlace has initiated its second funding cycle. A Letter of Inquiry has been posted on [www.artplaceamerica.org](http://www.artplaceamerica.org) as of September 15, 2011. Submissions may be made through November 15.