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## CULTURAL GRAVITY - TRICKLE DOWN OR PERCOLATE UP?

I remember well the 1980's—Rubik's Cube, the Madonna-inspired underwear as outerwear trend and Reagan-era "trickle down economics." Trickle, trickling...Noun, verb—sounds like potty training to me. But apart from the sophomoric jokes that this top-down economic theory has inspired over the years, it got me thinking about the directional movement of our cultural environment here at home. As an artist, do I rely on others (i.e., gallerists and curators) and hope that fame and fortune will be bestowed upon me from on high (i.e., Portland, Seattle, New York...you get the idea). Or, do I create that success for myself where I live? After decades of spinning the art equivalent of a Vegas roulette wheel and enjoying the occasional hit, I got to thinking—could there be another way, one that allows for personal agency, community engagement and satisfaction? Maybe...

It's a dynamic time to be an artist in Eugene with so many artist-generated initiatives percolating up and populating our creative landscape. I just completed an art-writing workshop presented by the ever-erudite Vicki Krohn Amorose and sponsored by Eugene Contemporary Art and City of Eugene Cultural Services. I'm going to use a prompt from the workshop that describes the creative space, rather than any specific artwork, for four artist-driven alternative projects in our community.

It's a beautiful summer evening in Downtown Eugene and I feel welcomed by the snippets of conversation, music and laughter that surround me as I move through the crowd. The lack of a traditional art-viewing venue accomplishes ArtCity's intention to bring art to the people where *they* live and work. At ArtCity's recent Studio Without Walls event there were no walls—literally and figuratively, no walls.

I enjoy the generous proportions and upscale industrial vibe of Ditch Projects, a member run gallery located in a warehouse complex just south of Main Street in Springfield. When I close my eyes, I can imagine being in New York, L.A. or some other urban area. Which, when I open my eyes, makes sense because Ditch Projects brings work by artists from across the country here, as well as creating national recognition for its university-associated members.

Let's travel a few miles to West Eugene and enter a non-descript door that leads one through a small, dark entryway that opens up into a comfortable version of a

post modernist “white box” and the collective-run space, Tropical Contemporary. I’ve only taken a few steps, but my perception has shifted. I feel embraced by Tropical’s viewing space and included in the essentially collaborative experience of art. Permission is given...always.

No permission is needed for a 6’ x 6’ x6’ steel and plexiglas cube on the move. The physical placement of the Gray Space Project cube influences my perception of whatever is inside of it, whether that location is a rest stop along I-5, the top of Skinner’s Butte or the Hult Center Plaza. There’s a fluid relationship between the interior art installation space and the context in which it, and we, exist. Full disclosure—I am a founding and current member of Gray Space Project.

Exercising creative agency doesn’t mean that patronage and external support—both private and public—isn’t sometimes necessary and appreciated because, believe me, it is. But artists aren’t waiting around for that big break to come along. They’re exercising creative determination, broadening the cultural conversation and making things happen in their own unique way—check it out...

[www.artcityeugene.com](http://www.artcityeugene.com)

[www.ditchprojects.com](http://www.ditchprojects.com)

[www.tropicalcontemporary.space](http://www.tropicalcontemporary.space)

[www.grayspaceproject.com](http://www.grayspaceproject.com)