

First Steps To Organizing Art Walks



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A Jane's Walk can highlight what the arts contribute to the life of your city. You can plan a walk that looks at public art, murals, and graffiti, or you can work with local artists to incorporate studio or gallery visits into your walk. There have been beautiful walks that revealed the history of dance in a city, and walks exploring theatre and cinema. If your city's walks so far have focused exclusively on urban planning or history, art walks can add a lively new dimension to your festival!

You don't need to be an artist, or any kind of art expert, to lead a Jane's Walk about art. Like Seleneah More, below, you might simply love a particular art form and want to research and talk about its importance to your city. A Jane's Walk is a walking conversation, and a passionate non-expert can do a great job of getting a conversation going on public art, music clubs, filming locations in your city, etc. However, if your goal is to get more people in your city walking and talking with you, bringing your local arts community on board is a good step to take.

Walk Story 1: Kurilpa Quick Step: Dancing across the Peninsula

Brisbane, Australia

Seleneah More works in urban planning, but for her Jane's Walk, she wanted to pick a less obvious topic. "I didn't want to see Jane's Walk become a promotion tool of this profession rather than an opportunity to engage and inform people about urban issues." She decided to go with something more personal. "Pick a theme that resonates for you," is her advice to would-be walk leaders. "Have your own style." What did that mean for her? "I am not a dancer, but I love to dance! So touring the dance venues (formal and informal) of my neighbourhood suited me."

As a topic, dance turned out to be a natural fit for a Jane's Walk: "Dancing is associated with celebration – it's a feel-good topic. So it creates a light-hearted atmosphere for discussing some heavy subjects, like overdevelopment, or the loss of cheap places of cultural production."

What did she learn about planning a walk? "I think seeing your topic, and the information you present, as a stimulus for discussion and debate is useful. I was affirmed and challenged by the discussions during and after the walk—in between laughing!"

Walk Story 2: “What’s Happening Back There? Studios, Studies, and Creative Spaces Tucked Away”

Ann Arbor, MI, United States

“We started in Ann Arbor with a group of artists and architects,” notes Nick Tobier, city organizer in the Michigan college town. “That was my favourite walk from the first year. We were walking through alleys I had never seen—tiny places, really, that gave you a sense of a creative place without the notion of being in a museum or designated public forum for art.”

Tobier has worked to expand this notion of place by developing more walks based around highly-focused topics, such as one on 19th-century terra cotta tile reliefs which often go unnoticed by pedestrians, or one designed for 8-to-11-year-olds (“Walk Talk and Sketch”) where an architectural historian pointed out details above street level for children to draw. “You can approach it thematically from a small detail rather than making it, say, a public art walk.”

Some Ways To Get Started

- If you’re not familiar with the arts scene in your city, find out about it! Check local listings for theatre and performance festivals, art gallery shows, etc.
- Reach out to local arts networks and organizations. (If you don’t really know of any in your city and a Google search isn’t helping, you can start by contacting the arts office of your municipal or regional government, and asking them for leads. We’ve provided some helpful links at the end of this guide.) Talk to people at these organizations who work on outreach and programming. Explain to them what a Jane’s Walk is, and ask them if they’d consider organizing one as a way of engaging the public with their work.
- Your City Hall most likely has a staff person or office responsible for commissioning and promoting public art. Find out who it is, and get in touch – they’d probably love to lead a Jane’s Walk to show off art in public spaces.
- Most art galleries will host free opening receptions for new exhibitions. Galleries are often clustered in one neighbourhood, and many hold their openings on the same night. Find out when this happens in your city, grab a friend, and go on a gallery crawl! See if you can talk to the artists or curators at the openings. Tell them about Jane’s Walk, and ask them what they think an art-focused walk in your city should cover. See if any are interested in leading a walk or speaking on one, or if they know people who would be.
- If you’re already familiar with your city’s arts scene, reach out to several of your favorite creators and performers, explain what the festival is, and invite them to get together for a Jane’s Walk brainstorming session over coffee or lunch. A bunch of creative minds, bouncing ideas off each other, are bound to come up with some fun and original walks!

Something to Bear In Mind

- Artists hate being asked to work for free! Their work is valuable, and they need to make a living. Don't ask them to create or donate original work for the walk, as (like all walk leaders) they will be participating on a volunteer basis. Instead, make it clear that you're offering them a platform to tell a new audience about their work and that of their friends, to share some stories and show off their favorite landmarks, and to get into dialogues with the public about what art can contribute to the fabric of city life.

How Can People In The Arts Benefit From Leading A Jane's Walk?

- A Jane's Walk is a fun way for artists and arts administrators to raise awareness in the community about the work they do, and to show how the arts enrich city life.
- Artists have found inspiration in Jane's Walks. In New York City, in 2012, Stacey Anderson was working for artist [Mary Miss](#), whose project *Broadway: 1000 Steps* was about urban sustainability. Anderson found out about Jane's Walk, and organized a walk about Miss's project. Miss found the walk to be a useful visioning exercise; walking her project's sites with others, and talking with them, gave her ideas about what could be, beyond what was already there. She began to see how walking itself intersected with her project.

Links

Canadian Council for the Arts

<http://canadacouncil.ca/council/resources>

Global Street Art

<http://globalstreetart.com/>

National Endowment for the Arts (U.S)

<https://www.arts.gov/partners/state-regional>

British Arts Council

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>

European Cultural Foundation

<http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/>

Jane's Walk is a movement of free, citizen-led walking tours inspired by Jane Jacobs. The walks get people to tell stories about their communities, explore their communities, and connect with neighbours. Find out more at janeswalk.org

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With thanks to Stacey Anderson, Nick Tobier, Seleneah More, Javier Burón García, and William Drew.

Photo by Magdalena Sánchez Mora