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Top 25 Arts Destinations: From Sea to Shining Sea

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Image courtesy Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau

From the Lincoln Tunnel to the Golden Gate Bridge, from the sunny shores of the Florida Keys to the windy streets of Chicago, 2007's top arts destinations can be found in nearly every corner of the United States.

AmericanStyle readers cast a record number of votes in this year's readers' poll for their favorite U.S. arts destinations, selecting 75 cities and towns divided into three categories.

In the Big Cities category, perennial favorite New York City once again tops the list. The remainder of the Top 25 contains last year's favorites, most of them in new positions. The biggest climber was Phoenix, Ariz., jumping from No. 15 in 2006 to No. 8. This year, Charlotte, N.C., made the list, replacing San Jose, Calif.

The Northern Rust Belt staked its claim on the top of the Mid- Sized Cities category, with a large number of Pittsburgh citizens casting ballots for their hometown. The more temperate Southwest proved a reader favorite with Albuquerque, N.M. (No. 2), Scottsdale, Ariz. (No. 4), and Tucson, Ariz. (No. 9).

But the Southwest's appreciation for art truly stood out on the Small Cities and Towns category, topped by Santa Fe, N.M., and Sedona, Ariz., followed by Taos, N.M. (No. 4), and Tubac, Ariz. (No. 19). New towns on this year's list included the much chillier Brattleboro, Vt. (No. 24), and Portsmouth, N.H. (No. 25).

For lists of all 25 winners in each category, see below. Continue reading for profiles of the top three cities in each category.

BIG CITIES

New York City

Just when the thrill of the new Museum of Modern Art was beginning to wane, visitors to New York can now look forward to the anticipated 2011 opening of the Whitney Museum of American Art's twice-as-large satellite location in the city's trendy meatpacking district. If you can't wait that long, the New Museum of Contemporary Art opens its new building in the Bowery later this year.

In readers' own words: "How can you top NYC? It's my favorite art city in the USA. ... Maybe they should not be included and given top billing overall!" -*Sue Frause, Langley, Wash.*

Not to miss: "Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years." This retrospective runs June 3-Sept. 10 at the Museum of Modern Art.

Chicago

Since the 1999 "Cows on Parade," the origin of the nation's obsession with fiberglass art animals, and culminating with the 2004 opening of Millennium Park, which features artworks by Anish Kapoor and Jaume Plensa, the Windy City has made a name for itself in the public art arena. Another effort, the International Sculpture Exchange Program, is bringing vast outdoor sculptures by artists from Chicago's sister cities to a variety of "gateways" into the city, including O'Hare International Airport.

In readers' own words: "Chicago's art museum with Grant Park and the lakeshore museums makes an awesome scene." -*Bill Lands, Berkeley Springs, W.Va.*

Not to miss: The Renegade Craft Fair. This homespun fair features a wide range of do-it-yourself craft artists. Organizers anticipate the 2007 show will take place in Wicker Park in mid-September.

San Francisco

You can read elsewhere in this issue about the more traditional venues for art in San Francisco. But a city with a program that allows homeowners to donate part of their property tax payments to an arts fund clearly has an appreciation for the arts that goes beyond museums and galleries. To wit, the city's art commission runs an Art on Market Street Program that brings contemporary artwork to kiosks, as well as other temporary installations along the busy downtown street. The current project, by artists Amanda Hughen and Jennifer Starkweather, explores various natural and man-made systems in the city.

In readers' own words: "San Francisco's diverse population demands consistently changing contemporary art." -*Beth Krauss, Austin, Texas*

Not to miss: Ride the city's Third Street Light Rail line, a recently completed project that features art enhancements throughout the route, including pole-mounted sculptures, paving designs and posters.

MID-SIZE CITIES

Pittsburgh, Pa.

A clear favorite of its residents, Pittsburgh has launched an all-out effort to make a name for itself in the glass world. This year, the city hosts the annual Glass Art Society conference (June 7-9) in the midst of a yearlong "Pittsburgh Celebrates Glass!" celebration. If less-fragile art is more your style, the city boasts a large number of museums, from the Carnegie Museum of Art to the popular Andy Warhol Museum.

In readers' own words: "Pittsburgh, in particular, is loaded with wonderful and very top notch arts and performances. For a city of its size, it should be a prize destination for anyone serious about the arts." -*Kevin Noe, Dripping Springs, Texas*

Not to miss: "Chihuly at Phipps: Gardens & Glass." Part of "Pittsburgh Celebrates Glass!," this exhibition of Dale Chihuly's work will be on display at the Phipps Conservatory May 10-Nov. 9.

Albuquerque, N.M.

The recent opening of the nonprofit 516 Arts Center is yet another addition to the art scene in Albuquerque that moves beyond the city's traditional Native American artistic roots. The museum-style gallery features interdisciplinary works, such as a May 26-July 21 retrospective of Patrick Nagatani's "obsessive and meticulous use of masking tape" in photography, collage, assemblage and painting, plus an accompanying exhibition of others' "obsessive, time-consuming and complex" use of alternative, inexpensive materials. Plenty of venues for traditional Southwestern art remain, including the Albuquerque Museum of Art & History and the National Hispanic Cultural Center.

In readers' own words: "The artwork is so interesting and different than anywhere else! Incredible assortment of artists and mediums from all over the world who are obviously inspired by the beauty of the Southwest!" -*Carol Wright, Clarkdale, Ariz.*

Not to miss: The Albuquerque Fiber Arts Fiesta takes place May 24-26 in the Creative Arts Building at EXPO New Mexico.

Las Vegas, Nev.

There is more to Vegas than gambling, showgirls and all-you-can eat buffets. And surprisingly, enough readers have discovered Sin City's artistic side to catapult it to No. 3 on our list of mid-sized top arts destinations. Without leaving the Strip, visitors can see everything from a Chihuly (lobby of the Bellagio) to the Guggenheim-Hermitage Museum at The Venetian hotel and resort. Venture farther out and visit the Las Vegas Art Museum and the city's Downtown Arts District.

In readers' own words: "Vegas has come a long way from tacky to interesting art." -*Olivia Robinson, Seattle, Wash.*

Not to miss: First Fridays in the Downtown Arts District feature galleries and artists' studios, including the Arts Factory, Dust Gallery and Holsum Lofts.

SMALL CITIES

Santa Fe, N.M.

The University of New Mexico's School of Business ranks Santa Fe as the second-largest art market—by sales—in the country, following New York. With more than 250 galleries and thousands of resident artists, the city's economy is largely driven by the arts and cultural tourism. Adding to the creative atmosphere are new artist live/work lofts opening this year at the Santa Fe Railyard development, home to SITE Santa Fe and Santa Fe Clay.

In readers' own words: "I don't need to travel to any other city to find great art." -*Lynden Galloway, Santa Fe, N.M.*

Not to miss: Art Santa Fe, a biennial contemporary art fair, takes place July 12-15 at El Museo de Cultural.

Sedona, Ariz.

The artistic center of the city is the Sedona Arts Center, which features a community school, intensive art workshops and exhibitions, including shows in its Members Gallery. Make time to visit Sedona's myriad galleries, many featuring work by the city's hundreds of resident artists.

In readers' own words: "Sedona is eclectic and has world class artists in residence. More galleries per capita than anywhere in the U.S.!" -*Bill Allison, Laguna Niguel, Calif.*

Not to miss: The Sedona Plein Art Festival, Oct. 22-28, brings 30 painters to town for a weeklong festival where they will capture the Sedona area on canvas.

Key West, Fla.

Like many of the small towns in the Top 25, Key West is home to a large number of artists, drawn by the unique architecture, temperate weather and breathtaking ocean scenery. The city is filled with dozens of galleries, many located on historic Duval Street.

In readers' own words: "I know of no other city that could be more contemporary in the arts." -*Penny Vennare, Pittsburgh, Pa.*

Not to miss: Sculpture Key West, an outdoor sculpture festival, takes place annually in three locations on the island, from January until mid-April.

TOP 25 BIG CITIES (populations of 500,000 and greater)

New York, N.Y.
Chicago, Ill.

Denver, Colo.
Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas

San Francisco, Calif.	Houston, Texas
Washington, D.C.	San Antonio, Texas
Seattle, Wash.	Charlotte, N.C.
Los Angeles, Calif.	Nashville, Tenn.
Boston, Mass.	Milwaukee, Wis.
Phoenix, Ariz.	Columbus, Ohio
Austin, Texas	Jacksonville, Fla.
Philadelphia, Pa.	Indianapolis, Ind.
Portland, Ore.	Memphis, Tenn.
Baltimore, Md.	Detroit, Mich.
San Diego, Calif.	

TOP 25 MID-SIZED CITIES (populations of 100,000 to 499,999)

Pittsburgh, Pa.	Buffalo, N.Y.
Albuquerque, N.M.	Colorado Springs, Colo.
Las Vegas, Nev.	Cleveland, Ohio
Scottsdale, Ariz.	Providence, R.I.
Atlanta, Ga.	Kansas City, Mo.
New Orleans, La.	Ann Arbor, Mich.
Honolulu, Hawaii	Alexandria, Va.
Miami, Fla.	St. Petersburg, Fla.
Tucson, Ariz.	St. Louis, Mo.
Savannah, Ga.	Tampa, Fla.
Minneapolis, Minn.	Athens, Ga.
Tacoma, Wash.	Cincinnati, Ohio
Salt Lake City, Utah	

TOP 25 SMALL CITIES (populations fewer than 100,000)

Santa Fe, N.M.	Annapolis, Md.
Sedona, Ariz.	Corning, N.Y.
Key West, Fla.	Sarasota, Fla.
Taos, N.M.	Burlington, Vt.
Asheville, N.C.	Eureka Springs, Ark.
Carmel, Calif.	Tubac, Ariz.
Charleston, S.C.	New Hope/Lahaska, Pa.
Boulder, Colo.	Cumberland, Md.
Laguna Beach, Calif.	Northampton, Mass.
Aspen, Colo.	Saugatuck, Mich.
Berkeley Springs, W.Va.	Brattleboro, Vt.
Naples, Fla.	Portsmouth, N.H.
Chapel Hill, N.C.	