Metaphorically speaking: Putting Las Vegas on the cultural map

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METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING:
PUTTING LAS VEGAS ON THE
CULTURAL MAP

by

Ester Sara Ó Fearghail
Bachelor of Arts
University of Arizona
1994

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
Anthropology Department
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING: PUTTING LAS VEGAS ON THE CULTURAL MAP

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts Degree

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ABSTRACT

Metaphorically Speaking: 
Putting Las Vegas on the 
Cultural Map

by

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Las Vegas has art galleries, an art museum, a Cultural and Community Affairs Division. It also supports the Allied Arts Council of Southern Nevada and a southern branch of the Nevada Arts Council. Clearly, art and art advocates are present in Las Vegas. Yet, Las Vegas is traditionally viewed as a town with no culture and, furthermore, as a place that it is incompatible with art.

This paper is a study of the relationship people believe Las Vegas has to art. I have used the methodology of Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson: 1980) to analyze language that has been published in popular literature over the last year and a half. The study results in a theory that describes how metaphorical links, between negative and positive stereotypes, may be helping to change Las Vegas from being a "cultural wasteland" to a "cultural frontier."
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Our city can never be considered a real city without having a cultural base to it.

[artist and former entertainment director of the Golden Nugget Casino, Tony Milici] (Cited in Patterson 1998)

Art is variously thought of as being an outstanding achievement of the human species, a prehistoric curiosity, a pastime for children, an educational tool, and a counseling mechanism. The apparent universal preoccupation with making art (Bohannan 1992; Dissanayake 1988) led scholars to formulate theories that define it and to describe what it is exactly that it accomplishes for individuals and for culture. The desire to define art has produced theories from the fields of anthropology, philosophy, psychology, art theory and criticism, and of course from artists themselves.¹

I began this thesis with the intent of discovering what sort of definition of art a cognitive linguistic study of descriptive language, particularly metaphors, would yield. When I limited the area of research to Las Vegas the focus of the study changed. I found that when people speak about art in relation to Las Vegas, the discussion is often aimed at Las Vegas rather than art. The paper I set out to write, which was to

¹
be an attempt to define art, has instead become a study about the relationship people believe art has to Las Vegas.

The capital "C" in Culture indicates the term is being used to stand for the arts. When Las Vegas is called a "cultural wasteland," the absence of culture signifies an absence of art. Establishing the presence or absence of art in Las Vegas, a seemingly straightforward task, is a topic of debate and often a matter of opinion and will be considered here in relation to the idea that Las Vegas is itself a work of art (Linssen 1998; Rugoff, Sims 1994; St. Jacques).² Opinions about Las Vegas' Cultural aptitude, about Las Vegans' ability to appreciate real art (see Table 4), are also discussed within the context of the metaphor LAS VEGAS is a WORK OF ART but are largely examined relative to the metaphors LAS VEGAS is a FRONTIER and LAS VEGAS is an AMERICAN DREAM. These metaphors, which are borrowed from positive stereotypes of the United States of America, allow supporters of art in Las Vegas to speak of the freedom and opportunity that exists for artists in the Cultural Frontier. This study will furthermore show these positive stereotypical images of America are pragmatic choices for those who wish to change Las Vegas' negative Cultural stereotype to positive because the Frontier and American Dream metaphors have "links" in common with negative metaphors also in use, such as LAS VEGAS is a WASTELAND and LAS VEGAS is a VOID. The identification of metaphorical links, between negative and positive stereotypes, will provide an explanation for the transformation of attitudes towards art in Las Vegas.

According to cognitive anthropologist, Roy D’Andrade, "it is one thing to be interested in the ethnographic study of idea systems. It is another thing to be able to
carry out this type of investigation successfully.” And the “basic problem revolves around the issue of identification; that is, the development of a method by which an ethnographer can reliably identify cultural ideas, beliefs, or values” (D'Andrade 1995:16). I chose to identify the way people perceive art in Las Vegas using metaphor analysis as it was first set out by linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson in their book, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). In addition to a method of analysis, the book provides a theoretical framework that may help to explain the conflicting views that people have about art in relation to Las Vegas. For example, Robert Hughes, an art critic for *Time* magazine, stated that Las Vegas is a city that is “culturally under oxygenated” (Hughes 1998) while James Mann, curator of the Las Vegas Art Museum, said that Las Vegas “has more culture per square inch than most places” (cited in Willis 1999). This polarity in opinions about the status of art or Culture in Las Vegas illustrates the attempt—currently being made in Las Vegas—to change the city's negative Cultural stereotype. As well as being a study of opinions about art in Las Vegas, this paper is also concerned, in general, with how a negative stereotype can be transformed in the public mind.

In addition to employing metaphor analysis, I followed the example given by sociologist Jane Jacobs, in her book, *Systems of Survival* (Jacobs 1994) for the manner in which I collected evidence. Jacobs limited her research to statements that only addressed behavior in relation to a work environment. Similarly, I obtained evidence for this study by limiting my research to statements that only refer to art in relation to Las Vegas. The goal has been to discover what the general public thinks about art, verses how artists view their profession. In an attempt to yield a result that
is reflective of public opinion, instead of choosing groups of artists or other people to interview, a common cultural anthropological technique, I looked to a variety of published materials for statements about art in Las Vegas. The data come from popular magazines, journals and newspapers published, with a few exceptions, over the last eighteen months. A great deal of language is based on comments made by art professionals and journalists. Included among them are artists, art collectors, curators, scholars, critics, art reporters and art advocates. Governmental officials, politicians and representatives of the casino industry also carried out discussion about art during this time period.

The possibility of passing a bill for a one percent ordinance for the arts in Las Vegas is behind some of the discourse coming from these populations but the opening of the Bellagio Casino’s Gallery of Fine Art has been the most consistent source of data for causing people, on both a local and national level, to voice their opinions about art in Las Vegas. The Las Vegas Art Museum’s new location at the Sahara West Library has also attracted attention to the topic of Las Vegas’ relationship to art. The museum is located on the western edge of town. Plans for creating a downtown arts district, similar to other major cities, have been drawn up and are being discussed. Even though such a district is far from being realized, downtown galleries such as The Arts Factory are viewed by art reporters, artists and gallery owners as evidence of a "fledgling" arts district.
CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF MAKING MODELS AND THE IMAGINATIVE ASPECTS OF REASON

It was as if the ground had been pulled out from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere, upon which one could have built [Albert Einstein] (cited in Kuhn 1970:83).

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors, along with metonymy and mental imagery, are the mental tools we use to build conceptual systems (Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This holds true in Las Vegas where the language used to defend and assert Las Vegas' Cultural attributes is highly metaphorical.

In declaring that metaphors construct conceptual systems, one must take a philosophical stance: either metaphors reflect categories of phenomena that are universally true or they reveal how different categories of people (i.e. cultures or subcultures) create categories of reality. This study is consistent with the latter philosophical position. Metaphor analysis is useful because it reveals equally "logical" though polar points of view. A classic example from philosophy that opposes the relativistic view of metaphors was set forth by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle.
Aristotle realized the general importance of metaphor to classification as well, but to him, categories of similarities are discovered not created; categories that are based on metaphors reflect a universal truth. Aristotle, the "father of logic," (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:375) wrote that "the greatest thing, by far, is to be a master of metaphor. . . since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of similarity of dissimilars" (Kittay 1987:2). Identifying "similarity of dissimilars" leads to classification systems that, according to the philosopher, represent how the world is structured. A logical thinker understands this structure or organization through the correct identification of classification systems. The above quote shows that Aristotle valued metaphor because he believed it guided one's intuition towards determining how the world is organized. He clearly believed that an individual's intuition guides one toward a metaphor that reflects an absolutely real category. Lakoff and Johnson are opposed to the Classical philosophical position that categories represent reality. Their opinion is that metaphors create classification systems, which represent systems of thinking, and not representations of the way the world is actually organized (Lakoff and Johnson 1987).

The concern for correct representation—in other words, the interest in whether our description of reality is accurate—is also at the center of contemporary theoretical debate (Dickens and Fontana 1996; Lett 1997; Marcus and Fischer 1986). This so-called crisis in the social sciences is focused on whether or not descriptions of people's behavior and thinking should be objective or "true" or scientific. The opposing view is that one does not need to develop general theories of true models in
order to be a social scientist. Social study by definition implies a variance in model
building because social behavior and thought varies among groups.

Ironically, Jacob Bronowski, a mathematician and historian of the physical
sciences, was a great champion of the importance of metaphors to developing
conceptual systems. Bronowski wrote a philosophical treatise which advanced the idea
that all scientific theories are based on analogy and “sooner or later the theory fails
because the analogy turns out to be false” (Bronowski 1973:140). In Origins of
Knowledge and Imagination, he suggested the reason analogy works is because seeing
one thing in terms of another connects phenomena that were not previously connected.
Bronowski gave as an example the similarity Isaac Newton drew between the moon in
its orbit and a falling apple. Newton, as a result, postulated that the moon orbits the
Earth because it is constantly “falling” toward it (Bronowski 1978:109).

Bronowski was explaining how metaphor produces the cognitive framework for
new scientific theories. A few years later, Lakoff and Johnson suggested that people
use metaphorical language to conceptualize everyday experience as well. I stated
above, for instance, that metaphors produce new ways of thinking because they
encourage seeing one thing in terms of another. Lakoff and Johnson would say that I
have just used a metaphor to explain what metaphors do by using the word “Seeing”
in place of “Understanding.” This metaphor would formally be stated as
UNDERSTANDING is SEEING (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:48).

Using metaphorical language to explain the usage of metaphors is confusing
but it illustrates one of the main points of Metaphors we Live By—-that metaphors are
ingrained in the way we describe everyday experience. Another main premise
underlying metaphor analysis is highly philosophical. It suggests the abundance of metaphors found in descriptive language is intrinsically attached to the way we make sense of the world. Understanding is based on categorizations that are formulated by "experience . . . and culture on the one hand, and of metaphor" and imagination on the other (Lakoff 1987:8). Underlying this linguistic theory is a philosophical statement about our relationship to reality: truth is subjective because it is ever-changing, based as it is on human experience and perception.

The metaphor UNDERSTANDING is SEEING emphasizes the notion that representation can have many "views" or "perspectives." Another metaphor that stresses the relativistic aspect of representation is a THEORY is a BUILDING and it will serve to explain how metaphor analysis works. Saying that a THEORY is a BUILDING may sound awkward but it allows us to talk about the construction, deconstruction, or reconstruction of a theory (Table 1).

A metaphor is basically an equation comprised of a target, the thing you are trying to describe, on one side and a source on the other. In theory, everything you can say about the source, in this case a building, you can say about the target. Often only parts of the source are used to describe the target. For example, only some aspects of the building metaphor are used to describe a theory. A theory has a framework and a foundation but it rarely has wallpaper. Those parts that remain unused, like wallpaper, are said to be hidden (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:10).

This process of transferring knowledge from the source to the target results in ontological and epistemological correspondences that form the structure of a particular conceptual system. In fact, the reason we can talk about the "structure" of conceptual
systems, ideas, theories, or images depends on our understanding of how physical objects are put together, an understanding which is outlined by the metaphorical conceptual system of a THEORY is a BUILDING (Table 1). Additionally, to say that a theory is a building implies that it is made by humans. In other words, a theory is created and not discovered. The process of acquiring correspondences between the target and source "domains" is sometimes referred to as "mapping" (Kovecses 1990:47). The term "mapping" may help one understand that transferring knowledge from a source to a target moves information from one mental location to another.

The work of Lakoff and Johnson has sparked interest in the connection between metaphor and cognition (Friedrich 1991; Kittay 1987; Kovecses 1989; Palmer 1996). Not everyone agrees, though, on the nature of the relationship. For example, Lakoff posits that metaphorical reasoning builds mental categories, which determine our expectations of the world. Anthropologist Naomi Quinn argues that metaphors are selected to fit cultural models that are already in existence (Fernandez 1991:56). These opposing views of cause and effect present one with a classic chicken and egg type of question: Which comes first, cognitive models or cultural attitudes?

Some scholars have criticized model building, such as those that result from metaphor analysis, because they say models are static, abstract entities which do not exist in the real world (Fernandez 1991:56). I have found, however, that identifying conceptual systems based on metaphorical language can account for changes in the way people think.
CHAPTER III

"LINKS"

Ideally, a model of a conceptual system should include the entire complex of metaphors, metonymy, images and related ideas that are employed in discussing and conceptualizing a subject, which in this case is art in Las Vegas. In a complete version of such a model, metaphors that are used frequently are considered "prototypical" and metaphors that are used less often are referred to as "peripheral" (Lakoff 1987). The conceptual system outlined in this study will focus only on those metaphors that are most common or prototypical. Table 2 shows that art is discussed most consistently in relation to Las Vegas in terms of the following metaphors: void, wasteland, artwork, American dream and frontier.

LAS VEGAS is a STARVING ANIMAL is the only metaphor included in Table 2 that is a peripheral metaphor. The sample of language generated by it is comparatively small (found in three or less references). It is necessary to include it in this discussion because it entails the idea that Las Vegas needs art to survive (Table 3). If not for the assumption that a city needs Culture, Las Vegans would not feel a need to try to change their Cultural reputation. The idea of Las Vegas being Culturally starved is built upon the language of physical survival. This conceptual metaphor can also be used to illustrate what is meant by metaphorical links and why cognitive linguists find them interesting.

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A conceptual model characterizes the elements people use to understand experience. It may seem that a model, which is abstract and static, may be an unnatural representation of experience, which is continuous (Turner and Bruner 1986). It is the opinion of this author, however, that a change in thinking, such as a shift from a negative stereotype to a positive one, can be accounted for by metaphorical links.

The identification of links or "overlapping" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:94) helps to solve the problem of congruity: to recognize the commonality or scheme behind an apparently incongruous collection of variant beliefs. Since links bind different concepts, studying them aids in learning how people within a larger culture can hold various viewpoints on the same subject.

A mixed metaphor is one type of metaphorical link (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:96). It has entailments that are common to at least two metaphors and therefore fastens concepts together. When Nancy Deaner, assistant manager of the Cultural and Community Affairs Division for Las Vegas, says that Las Vegas is a work of art that must be more than "visual candy" (cited in St. Jacques 1998:32-33) she is implying that art needs to be substantial. Art that is "candy" is unnecessary and therefore one can live without it.

Looking at art as if it has nutritional value emphasizes the attitude that art should be truthful in order to be substantial or real. In other words, real art must not be made for superficial reasons. Advertising or commercial art is often not considered to be real. It is thought of as being superficial or fake because it is not about truth. It is made for the purpose of selling a product or for earning an artist a salary. The term
“selling out” reflects the adage that anyone who makes art for commercial purposes is not a real artist.\(^5\)

Considering Las Vegas as a work of “public art” that needs to be more than “visual candy” combines two metaphors that are used to describe Las Vegas’ association to art: LAS VEGAS is a STARVING ANIMAL and LAS VEGAS is ART. The result is a mixed metaphor that negatively associates Las Vegas to art: LAS VEGAS is an ARTWORK THAT IS NOT NOURISHING.

A mixed metaphor can be important to realizing how people combine ideas from two or more conceptual systems into one. In this case it reveals a belief that many people hold, including Nancy Deaner, which is that fine art, in order to be significant, should be made for no reason other than the artist’s own. Furthermore, whatever the artist’s reasons for making art might be, they must not be affected by the desire or rewards of others. The idea is that in order for art to be real, it must come into the world uncontaminated by practical needs.
CHAPTER IV

THE NEED FOR REAL ART AND SENATE BILL 521

This has put Nevada on the map for art in the West [Assembly Speaker Joe Dini with regards to the Bellagio art collection] (Vogel 1998).

The belief that there is a need for art is supported at the city, state and national level. Organizations such as the Cultural and Community Affairs Division for Las Vegas, the Nevada Art's Council and the National Endowment for the Arts all urge us to "support the arts." Although this need has been described only peripherally by metaphors, such as LAS VEGAS is a STARVING ANIMAL, it is found abundantly in other descriptive language and is the idea that seems to be at the base of all the discussion about art in Las Vegas. Analysis of metaphorical language, therefore, will be postponed in order to bring this underlying concept, that there is a need for art, to the reader's attention.

Why do we need art? There is no other event that has occurred in the last year and a half in Las Vegas which has generated as many ideas about this necessity as has the opening of an art gallery in the Bellagio casino. Most of the discussion revolved around a law which proposed to give art dealers whose art purchases exceed $25,000 a tax exemption and how, if at all, that exemption should affect the charge of an
exhibitor's admission fee. The examples of language suggest purposes for displaying art are tied to economics, education and Cultural identity.

Who needs art? The discussion produced by the Bellagio opening reveals that the need for art is spoken of in terms of three distinct levels: individual, city and state. The need for education is discussed at the level of individuals, particularly in terms of children. Las Vegas and Nevada do not need to be educated—children do. Cultural identity is discussed entirely in terms of the city and state. When speaking of Cultural identity it is the place that is said to require art, not the person. It is not imperative for individuals to maintain a Cultural identity, but it is for Las Vegas and Nevada. The following statements show that art is not for art's sake, as the saying goes, or for people's sake, but rather, for the sake of the city or state:

... Wynn appeared before the commission and gave a 40-minute impassioned speech saying the collection was vital to Nevada as both a cultural treasure and a way to maintain the state's economic position. [Warren Bates, writer] (Bates 1998)

'The law,' [Steve Wynn] said, 'would attract collectors because Nevada would be seen as a haven from states such as New York, where art taxes run 8 percent.' [Warren Bates] (Bates 1998)

... Conway (Bellagio attorney Jess Conway) suggested a charge comparable to other art galleries with similar collections. Such a fee would not be
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prohibitive, and fulfill the Legislature's intent of public display and having the
collection available for educational purposes. [Warren Bates] (Bates 1998)

Assembly Speaker Joe Dini, D-Yerington, the author of the law, said... the
Legislature's original intent was to make admission to such collections free to the

'The spirit of the legislation was to make this art as freely available to the public
as possible,' Barlett said. [Deputy Attorney General John Bartlett] (cited in Vogel
1998)

The Mirage chairman [Steve Wynn] said he did not seek tax incentives for himself
or the Bellagio, but to make Nevada a national mecca for art. [Ed Vogel] (Vogel
1998)

During the 1997 legislative session, Mirage lobbyists consistently pushed for the
art tax exemption bill, though they and art organization leaders maintained it would
benefit the Nevada art community, not Wynn. [Ed Vogel] (Vogel 1998)

To qualify for the exceptions, the art buyer must display his collection in a place
available for public viewing for educational purposes at least 20 hours a week for
35 weeks a year. [Ed Vogel] (Vogel 1998)
Feldman [Mirage Resorts spokesman Alan Feldman] says the bill was designed to make Nevada a haven for fine art collectors, and to benefit the public with a requirement for public display. With a tax-friendly environment on fine art, Nevada could give Paris, New York and Los Angeles a run for their money, he says ... [Steve Sebelius, writer] (Sebelius 1998)

The program (educational outreach program) will include teacher training and lectures in the Bellagio museum. [Ed Vogel] (Vogel)

Mirage Resorts Inc. Chairman Steve Wynn collected art for the Bellagio gallery that amounts to $285,000,000. The collection includes paintings by van Gogh, Picasso, Monet, Matisse, Miro, Pollack and Warhol. For a student of art history or a "supporter" of art the collection is like a text book companion. The gallery's curator Libby Lumpkin, who has tentative plans to teach a course at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas based on the works from the collection, states "It is Art History 250, from impressionism to pop art" (Lumpkin cited in Cling 1998a). Why wouldn't everyone who supports art applaud an art gallery of this caliber in a town that is stereotyped as a "cultural wasteland" (Parkinson 1998:16)?

The Bellagio Casino opened October 15, 1998 but the discussion about the gallery, illustrated above, began a half a year earlier because of the tax break provided by Senate Bill (SB) 521, which was sponsored by Senator Dini and passed in 1997. Without SB 521 the debate over the need for public display of art, where and when it should be located, the price it should cost to view it, or whether viewing it should be
made free to the public, might never have arisen. The bill even raised the question of the definition of art, “particularly about what constitutes ‘art’ within the meaning of the legislation” (Editor’s Opinion/L.V.R.J.).

The extent to which the Bellagio art gallery has elicited people’s views about art is related to the fact that the Bellagio collection is made up of paintings that have been deemed by critics, curators and historians (Cling 1998) to be “real,” yet they are housed within a casino, an obviously commercial establishment. The objections to the art in the Bellagio seem to reflect a deep attitude in our culture about art; money made by it should not leave the “art world.” If SB 521 were not an issue it is likely that critics would continue to question, as they are now, a casino’s right to charge a fee for viewing art. Supporters for the Bellagio gallery have cited the entrance fees charged by art museums. Museums, however, are non-profit organizations. Profits are meant to ensure the museum will be able to continue to support itself, to purchase and exhibit art. It is also the “mission” of most museums to educate the public.

Steve Wynn, the Bellagio’s representatives, and politicians like Joe Dini who supported SB 521 were often interviewed and asked to explain why they deserve a tax exemption and, given the potential of millions of dollars in taxes saved, why they wanted to charge a fee to the public they were apparently so interested in educating. Steve Wynn, in his defense, once said he didn’t want to “cheapen the experience” by not charging an admission fee (Bates 1998).

Senator Joe Neal, at that time Democratic candidate for governor, argued children “shouldn’t have to go to a casino to view art” at all (Neal cited in Morrison 1999). Whether or not children should go to a casino seems to be a problem that is
off the mark: no law has been passed that is planning to force children to enter a casino. It does not follow that because a casino has art in it, children must go into the casino. On the other hand, Neal is clearly responding to the argument the bill’s supporters are putting forth; that the requirement for public display proves the educational interest of the public is written into the law.

SB 521 divided politicians during the gubernatorial campaign. Joe Neal said he felt he needed to protect the people of Las Vegas “from potential abuses of the tax exemption,” calling the bill a “special-interest exemption for the rich” (cited in Morrison 1999). Neal was accused by Bellagio spokesman Alan Feldman of using the debate for political purposes to obtain material for his campaign. Neal’s opponent, Jan Jones, showed her support of “Wynn’s effort to bring fine art to Nevada” by saying “she would have signed the controversial bill if she had been governor in 1997” (Jones cited in Morrison 1999).

Neal’s concern for “kids in the casino” (Morrison 1998) is a reminder that, until recently, Las Vegas has been identified with adult entertainment. Attractions that are suitable for children such as Siegfried and Roy’s lion show at the Mirage casino or the pirate-ship battle at the Treasure Island casino are surely aimed at baby-boomer parents looking for a vacation spot they can take their children to. Steve Wynn is often credited for helping to change Las Vegas’ image from a sin city to a “Disneyfied” city (Weatherford 1998) with these “casino spectacles suitable for the whole family” (Plagens 1998:55).

In contrast to Wynn’s Mirage and Treasure Island, the Bellagio is targeted at an adult, “ultra high-rolling” gambling “art and culture” crowd (Plagens 1998:54-55). The
effort to change Las Vegas' image to a family vacation town did not instigate a debate about Wynn's real concern for children. There was no public discourse as to Wynn's true feelings towards lions or pirates either. But Wynn's desire to change Las Vegas, Nevada into a "cultural treasure" (Wynn cited in Bates 1998) has raised questions about his own attitudes towards art to which he has made responses like the one above in which he states he is not using the Bellagio art collection "to benefit himself or the Bellagio, but to make Nevada a national mecca for art" (Vogel).
CHAPTER V

DISTURST OF ART IN LAS VEGAS

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphorical language creates conceptual systems. Naoimi Quinn, on the other hand, believes that metaphors reflect attitudes which are already in place (Quinn 1991). The metaphors that negatively describe Las Vegas' Cultural identity reflect an attitude that is already in place in our general culture which distinguishes "low" art from "high" art.

"Low" and "high" are metaphorical categories based on spatial orientations and therefore seem to fit Lakoff and Johnson's theory of logic that is built upon physical, experiential classification schemes. In this case the categories of high and low are used to describe instances of art that are characterized by the absence or presence of relationships to practical concerns, the most obvious being monetary involvement.

The maxim that artists must suffer for their art is related to the notion that they must not concern themselves with practical matters such as making money for food and shelter. This idea is so connected to our definition of art that the phrases "starving artist" and "suffering artist" are stereotypical descriptions. The starving artist image is incongruous with Las Vegas, a place that is known for the chance of striking it rich.

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There is perhaps no artist who is better known for having suffered for his art than Vincent van Gogh. The artist seems to have become a model for the suffering artist type. However, he was not pleased that he could not sell his artwork or that he lived in poverty. The famous letters to his brother Theo illustrate the unhappiness of his situation. He painted despite the fact that he could not sell his work, not because of it. Vincent van Gogh is one of the artists represented in the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art. The example of the starving, suffering artist is exhibited by Steve Wynn, who for many people is the epitome of commercial success.

As noted above, Mirage lobbyists and art organizations maintain the tax exemption Wynn asked for "would benefit the Nevada art community, not Wynn." It is apparent by this defense that Steve Wynn and his supporters are responding to attacks on his position as a true supporter of the arts. Apart from the controversy created by SB 521, the Bellagio's collection of art is under suspicion because Wynn's personal feelings towards his art are under suspicion. Articles written on the Bellagio Gallery like those entitled "The Artful Dodger" (Sebelius 1998:12) represent the public's distrust of Wynn's position as a true art lover.

When "Vanity Fair" contributing editor John Richardson asked "Why has Wynn made this costly commitment to modern art?," Las Vegas writer Ben Malisow suggested "most local readers will chuckle and answer, 'Because of the free publicity and oodles of taxcuts, you chowder head'" (Richardson cited in Malisow 1998). Journalist Scott Dickensheets, responding to Malisow, commented "I'm as dubious about the purity of Wynn's motives as anyone..." but added the question that lies at the heart of the Bellagio collection is, not why Wynn collected the art, but why he
spent "so lavishly" (Dickensheets 1998:5). The question that "lies at the heart of the Bellagio collection" in this essay is not concerned with Steve Wynn's reasons for acquiring, displaying or selling art. Rather, it is focused on the public distrust that is directed at Wynn's state of mind relative to his art collection.

Chairman of Mirage Resorts, Wynn is associated with the success of the casino industry. One commentator suggested "Wynn is the new face of gambling in America" ("Arts & Ideas"). He seems to have become a symbol of what Las Vegas is famous for: being "a city built on the glitz and glamour of the casino industry. . . not known for strong cultural roots" (Parkinson 1999). Wynn is also not known for his "cultural roots." He is aware that people see him as having no real concern for art, as standing for the casino. He remarked, "Why this turned into a populist 'Don't let the rich guy get away with something' is inexplicable to me" (Vogel 1998). The answer to his question may in part be due to the distrust that is normally targeted at Las Vegas whenever art is concerned. If Wynn stands for the casino industry, and the casino industry stands for Las Vegas, then Wynn is receiving the suspicion, relative to art, that is normally thrust upon Las Vegas.

Speaking defensively is a commonality among people whose careers or lives are tied to art in Las Vegas. Back in 1981 well-known pop artist Claes Oldenburg built a steel sculpture called "The Flashlight" for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas campus. It took almost a year to build and two weeks to drive across country to the site. At the time of installation UNLV president Leonard Goodall said "it will put Las Vegas, UNLV and Nevada on the cultural map" (Kuzins 1981). The implication of
Goodall’s statement is clear. If there was such a thing as a cultural map Las Vegas would normally be left off of it: there is no Culture in Las Vegas.

It seems that when recognizable works of art are exhibited in Las Vegas, the preview or “opening” of the event is accompanied by a statement like Goodall’s. First, it recognizes there is no art or Culture in Las Vegas and second, it proposes that the specific art event in question will change the status of Las Vegas’ position in relation to the “cultural map.” In 1998 Steve Wynn reported the 27 works of art displayed in the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art would not only put Las Vegas and Nevada on the map, it would “make Nevada a national mecca for art” (Vogel).

The Las Vegas Art Museum has been around since 1950. It has recently received attention since the museum found a new high-tech gallery space inside the Sahara West Library building in January 1997. In “The Ascent of Mann,” an article written about the success of the museum in its new location, credit is given to the museum’s curator, James Mann, and to its president, Joseph Palermo: “With their help (Mann and Palermo), Nevada is posed to become the state of the art” (Hayes 1999). James Mann, in an article entitled “Work in Progress,” also spoke about Las Vegas’ future as an art center when he stated “If Las Vegas decides to become the next art mecca, it will be” (Linssen 1998).

In the summer of 1998 downtown galleries The Arts Factory, Beyond the Neon and the Contemporary Arts Collective joined with the City of Las Vegas Cultural and Community Affairs Division to sponsor an arts festival, which they named the first Gateway Arts and Music Experience. Speaking of its success, Wes Isbutt, one of the festival’s organizers, said “it showed people there was a quality of art in this town”
and he sees it "as another victory in the ongoing fight for recognition of artistic talent in the [Las Vegas] Valley" (cited in Wenzel 1998). Artist Heather Brandes said of the same event that it "solidified not only the city's commitment to the artists, but the artists' commitment to the city" (cited in Wenzel 1998).

The statements above illustrate that Las Vegans defend themselves against negative Cultural stereotypes. There is a collective effort taking place, even if the members of the "defense team" are unfamiliar with each other, to protect Las Vegas' Cultural reputation. Often times, as part of that defense, Las Vegans have asserted that their city not only has art, but that it may be the next art capital of the world.

Of all the reviews and articles written on the opening of the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art (I have read approximately thirty reviews), not one spoke about the art in the collection apart from its meaning to the Cultural presence in Nevada. Perhaps that is due to the high profile of the paintings displayed. As curator Libby Lumpkin pointed out, they are paintings that represent the art of the 20th century. They have already been written about a great deal.

Writing about the Bellagio gallery, critics and reporters spoke of SB 521 or Steve Wynn's intentions. If the Bellagio collection can potentially be used to teach a survey course on 20th century art, one might ask why none of these critics and reporters commented on the art as well? Has everything that can be said about modern art already been said, or is it that an exhibit in Las Vegas often inspires thinking about Las Vegas more than it does about art. In response to critical review, the public defense of Steve Wynn and the Bellagio gallery reflects a larger ongoing defensiveness practiced by those whose lives are tied to the arts in Las Vegas.
Las Vegas' negative cultural stereotype may stem from its competitive origins as a tourist destination. The spectacular look for which Las Vegas is famous originates with advertising. Beginning in the 1930's casino owners used neon signs to attract customers on Fremont Street, now in the downtown district of Las Vegas. As competition grew, so did the signs that advertised the casino hotel and the entertainment inside it. By the early 1960's the sign in Las Vegas had been turned into architecture itself (Hess 1993:21-22). At that time the buildings were unremarkable in comparison to the huge, colorfully lit signs that stood in front of them.

In 1968, the authors of *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, took 15 architecture students from Yale University to study the "prototypical American strip" in Las Vegas. They found the "buildings themselves were ordinary . . . that were architecturally, little more than utilitarian sheds. What was extraordinary was the sheer number, size, and brightness of the surrounding signs and facades. The fierce competition to catch the traveler's eye had led to ever larger, brighter, more animated extravaganzas" (Izenour and Dashiell 1990:47).

As competition for attention between the hotels progressed, advertising became more aggressive, moving to include the casino building as well as its sign. Architects designed casinos to attract tourists to their establishment and away from competing resorts. The result is an array of architectural designs that range from replicas of Venice, New York City, an Egyptian pyramid, a castle, a circus, and an Italian town called Bellagio. Taking into consideration the origins of these designs one might think
of Las Vegas Boulevard, commonly known as the Strip, as being a Strip-long series of
advertisements.

Because of the influence advertising has had on the form and function of the
Strip, the single street that Las Vegas is most identified with, Las Vegas is itself
identified with advertising. According to historian John Findlay, social critics have
traditionally pointed to Las Vegas as an example of a city, born in post war years, in
which unthinking Americans move about from building to building—advertisement to
advertisement—their actions based only on the flashiness of the sign.

It is this traditional view of Las Vegas, as an "entirely artificial and insincere
place" (Findlay 1990), that is apparently behind the negative stereotype that supporters
of art in Las Vegas, like Wes Isbutt, are "fighting" against. Perhaps because we think
in terms of categories (Lakoff 1987) or opposites (Levi-Strauss 1966), Las Vegas has
become synonymous with flashiness and artificiality and disassociated with the
opposite: substance and honesty.

The historical view of Las Vegas is of a city in which mindless obedience to
advertising is pitted against the thinking person's appreciation of Culture and art. This
view offers an explanation for the suspicion that has been directed towards Steve
Wynn and the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art. Wynn has spoken about the collection
both as art and as entertainment and the Bellagio advertises its art collection on a
monumentally large Las Vegas style sign, the way other casinos advertise their
entertainment acts. Advertising art as if it were entertainment brings it "down" to the
level of low art. For this reason the sign itself has been the subject of scrutiny and
criticism. A picture of the sign, not of the art collection it advertises, has been featured in most of the articles written about the gallery.

The advertising function of the art collection appears to have added fuel to SB 521 and the debate surrounding the opening of the Bellagio gallery. Joe Neal, in a meeting before the Nevada Tax Commission, “said the tax break grew out of a move by Wynn ‘to use art to lure high rollers to a particular casino’” (Vogel).

The Bellagio collection functions as both a representation of the most well known artists of the 20th century and as advertising. Because the art is used to draw people into the casino, it functions as advertising art. Therefore, the art inside the gallery has a dual identity. It can be recognized as both advertising art and fine art. It is simultaneously “low” and “high.”

Not all critiques of Las Vegas are negative. In 1970 British architecture critic Reyner Banham called Las Vegas “one of the great works of collective art in the Western world” (Rugoff and Sims 1994). Las Vegas is spoken of both as a collective work of fine art and as advertising art (Tables 4 and 5). The metaphor LAS VEGAS = ART can be used to construct either a negative category for art in Las Vegas or a positive one.

The metaphors that have Cultural void, art, Cultural wasteland or starving animal as the source domain each, in their own particular way, create a category in which Las Vegas is negatively associated with art (Table 2). One can see in the analysis provided in Tables 4 and 5 that the negative association advertising has to Las Vegas’ Cultural identity is entailed by the metaphor LAS VEGAS = ART.
Nancy Deaner thinks that “public art in Las Vegas faces one highly unusual challenge: competition from the environment itself.” According to Deaner, given that “the whole city is public art,” the art that artists make (as opposed to designers and builders) has to be “meaningful” or in other words, has to be “more than visual candy” (cited in St. Jacques 1998:32-33).

The metaphor LAS VEGAS is a WORK OF COMMERCIAL ART reveals that some people believe that art should be serious in order to be real; since Las Vegas as art is popular, in contradistinction to fine art, it is not really art. And as “a museum without walls” (Rugoff and Sims 1994:158) it interferes with the work that real artists (i.e. fine or serious artists) are trying to exhibit.

On the positive side is the view that art should be playful. In their article, “Only in Las Vegas,” Ralph Rugoff and David Sims suggest that casino owners are in the business of seduction and “humor is one of the great tools of that trade” (Rugoff and Sims 1994). They quote art critic and local resident, Dave Hickey, as saying “the thing that drives people crazy here is that it’s never serious” (Rugoff and Sims 1994:158). Looking at Las Vegas as if it were a work of art seems to provide a dividing line between at least two views of art, where serious fine art is contrasted to playful popular art.

Can images or objects that are made for popular consumption be considered “real” art? Traditionally, high or fine art is thought of as being “real” while advertising or popular art is classified as being superficial or low. Is it real or is it fake? Looking at Las Vegas provides scholars and artists with a subject they can use
to re-evaluate classical divisions between categories of art, such as fine versus popular and high versus low.

How exactly can a negative Cultural image become positive? With respect to the metaphor LAS VEGAS = ART, the same metaphor creates opposing views because certain aspects of its logic are highlighted in one category and hidden in the other. Las Vegas as a "museum without walls" makes it difficult for public artists to get attention. Their paintings or sculptures must compete against large scale neon signs or structures that look like castles, pyramids and circus tents. That is a negative attribute for artists who want to make a living in this city. On the other hand it follows that if Las Vegas is itself art then of course there is art in Las Vegas.
CHAPTER VI

IMAGE OF AMERICA: A POSITIVE SPIN ON THE ABSENCE OF CULTURE

Art abhors a vacuum, and if Las Vegas hasn't earned a name for being culturally under-oxygenated, what place in America has? (Hughes 1998)

Those who are speaking positively about Las Vegas' relationship to art by aligning it to the American Dream and the frontier are not trying to convince anyone that there is art in Las Vegas as much as they are trying to change a negative stereotype. Rather than denying the absence of art, Las Vegans are using the metaphors of the American Dream and frontier to align absence of art and culture with the presence of artistic freedom and opportunity.

A scholarly example of this type of mental shift is found in Alan Hess' history of architecture in Las Vegas, *Viva Las Vegas*. Describing how Las Vegas changed from being a path to a destination, Hess states: "That's how frontiers turn nowhere into somewhere" (Hess 1993:14). The author speaks of how the "blank slate" of the 19th century desert site filled with structures according to what he terms the "dictates of commerce:" According to Hess, "the western site freed Las Vegas from the distractions and inhibitions of the East" (1993:14).
Using the concept of a frontier to explain how a “nowhere” can turn into a “somewhere” is precisely what art advocates in Las Vegas are doing today when they speak of the benefits of the absence of Culture in terms of a frontier. Taking it one step further, Las Vegans speak of the benefits, not only of the existing Cultural emptiness, but of the benefits of creating such a phenomenon. For example, the Aladdin, Sands, Dunes, Landmark and Hacienda hotels were all demolished within a five-year period. The demolition of five hotel casinos in as many years has inflamed the view that Las Vegas does not care about its history, culture or art. In some instances, as with the 11-story Hacienda, the implosion was accompanied by a celebration. The Hacienda was imploded on New Year’s Eve. Rob Powers, spokesman for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, said of the scheduled implosion that “It’s gotten to be one of the biggest parties in the country” (Anonymous 1996).

Linda Linssen, speaking for those who complain “that nothing here is sacred” said “All it takes is a few implosive devices, enhanced by a little pyrotechnic wizardry, to draw the crowds and put a positive spin on the destruction” (Linssen 1998:48). Putting a positive spin on the destruction is what James Mann has done in order to change his opinion. “Twenty years ago,” he stated, “I hated progress and the tearing down of old buildings. But now I see the virtues of constant redevelopment. I also see the virtues of preservation, but Las Vegas makes a good case against it” (cited in Linssen 1998:48).

Bob Hlusak, executive design director for Treadway Industries, also has changed his opinion of Las Vegas Culture from negative to positive. “For years,” he
said, "I thought of Las Vegas as just the glitzy, funky, gambling town" (Linssen 1998). Now he is proud of his contribution to the look of the city—of making it a more authentic facade. Hlusak compares Venice, Italy to Las Vegas, Nevada. Like Venice, he said, Las Vegas is the result of a collage of styles: "In Las Vegas, the Strip is lined with recreated goods and ideas" (Linssen 1998).

On the surface, it may seem that the emptiness of a void has little in common with the opportunity found in a frontier. However, a common link, which in this case is based on a common experience of space—that of empty space—provides a mechanism for transition (see Tables 6-9). The following is a list of statements which exhibit reasoning that aligns Las Vegas to America as a land of freedom, of opportunity, of democracy:

Las Vegas is the American Dream lit by neon and the American Dream has always been full of surprises and contradictions. [Michael Ventura, writer] (Ventura 1998:25)

Las Vegas tries to supply the whole American Dream. This city is testing the limits of what is possible and the whole world is watching to see if we’ll get away with it. [Michael Ventura, writer] (Ventura 1998:25)

If Las Vegas decides to become the next art Mecca, it will be. [James Mann, curator of the Las Vegas Museum of Art] (Linssen 1998:47)
We have more correspondence with the New York artists and dealers because a lot of them see Las Vegas as the new frontier, as virgin territory. They can see that we have what they're looking for. [Joseph Palermo, President of the Las Vegas Art Museum] (cited in Las Vegas Weekly 24)

Still, the question remains whether Las Vegas can pull off one of the greatest stunts in its history by suddenly marketing itself as the next art capital of the world. . . After all, Las Vegas is still a frontier town, and all things are possible here. [Linda Linssen, writer] (Linssen 1998:48)

This is such an interesting city. There is so much promise here. It's a city of opportunity, with something for everyone. [Richard Hooker, of the Nevada Art's Council, Las Vegas Branch] (cited in Eaton 1998:39)

Las Vegas, as an example of the kind of raw democracy that [art critic Dave] Hickey favors, is indeed all about permission. [Gregory Crosby, art critic] (Crosby 1998:11)

[Dave] Hickey’s comment touches on the democratic appeal of the Strip, where anything goes. [Ralph Rugoff and David Sims, writers] (Rugoff and Sims 1994:158)
We specialize in the ability to be whatever you want to be. [Hal Rothman, UNLV history professor] (cited in Willis 1999:1E)

A basic premise of *Metaphors We Live By* is that metaphors, regardless of complexity, are based upon experience. There are two main categories of experientially based metaphors, those that are formulated on our experience of physical objects and those that are based on our experience of space. The type of metaphors that are founded on experience of objects are called ontological metaphors. The metaphor a THEORY = BUILDING is an example of using a physical object, a building, in order to understand a more abstract “target.” THEORY = BUILDING, therefore, is an example of an ontological metaphor.

A Cultural void, frontier, wasteland and American Dream are not only examples of experientially based metaphors, they all draw on the same type of spatial experience. A Cultural void can be transformed to a Cultural frontier because both of these metaphors are elaborations on an experience of space that can be favorably compared: the emptiness of the void is spatially similar to the openness of the Frontier. The wasteland, characterized as barren or empty, also corresponds to an open space, as does the “open future” inherent in the promise of the American Dream (Table 6-9).

If there were nothing similar—if there were no links—between the correspondences of the negative metaphors, Void and Wasteland, and the positive metaphors, Frontier and American Dream, Las Vegas would be creating a new identity instead of recreating it around an old building block. The fact that “empty” can easily
be translated to "open" enables a transition to occur—it creates a link between the negative and the positive (Figure 1). The emptiness of the Void and the Wasteland is transformed to the openness of the Frontier and the American Dream. The American Dream and Frontier metaphors embrace the negative Cultural space of Las Vegas within a new, "American" framework for a positive way of thinking about art in Las Vegas.
CHAPTER VII

LINGUISTIC USEFULNESS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM
AND FRONTIER METAPHORS

The idea that America is a democratic nation, characterized by freedom and opportunity, is symbolized by the concepts of the American Frontier and the American Dream. Both these concepts have been used before in relation to creating a model of thinking for Las Vegas. In addition to his own description of "how frontiers turn nowhere into somewhere," Alan Hess describes the role that stereotypical images of the West had to the burgeoning tourist industry starting from the year 1855. He says that entrepreneurs of the late 19th century "soon discovered that western imagery and atmosphere could be mined as profitably as silver and gold" (Hess 1993:14).

Hess further points to the significance western themes had to the "commercial vernacular process" which eventually led to the Strip resort casinos of today by suggesting that the "El Rancho (1943) and the Last Frontier (1942) were more than motels; they were themed places that borrowed regional history as a way to focus a vacationer's experience" (Hess 1993:31).

The Chamber of Commerce also used the image of a frontier town to make Las Vegas attractive to Easterners. In 1939 the Chamber of Commerce published a brochure which included a map entitled "Las Vegas, Nevada: Still a Frontier Town."
In place of a legend, there was instead a block of type which read "this map is dedicated to the prospector . . . ageless symbol of courage who has build the West . . ." (Hess 1993:25).

Hunter S. Thompson, in 1971, subtitled his novel Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, a "savage journey to the heart of the American Dream." The dream was, at that time, equated with "making it" by striking it rich (Cling 1998b). The metaphor LAS VEGAS = AMERICAN DREAM was used to align Las Vegas to the casino industry. Art advocates who speak today of Las Vegas as the American Dream put forth the idea that it is also an excellent place to "make it" in terms of making and exhibiting art. Las Vegas has been equated with the American Dream before but the Cultural part of the city was "hidden" from the metaphor.

The Frontier Hypothesis, as propounded by historian Frederick Jackson Turner, is sometimes referred to as America's creation myth (Rothman 1998:xi). Turner used the concept of a frontier to account for the particular brand of democracy that characterizes America. According to his thesis, presented in 1893 before the American Historical Association, the American frontier closed in 1890. Though Turner's thesis remains highly influential, historical revisionists have stripped it of most of its validity. The postulate that is built into the American Dream—that every individual should be able to "get ahead and gain some measure of success"—is also being re-examined for its truthfulness by contemporary cultural critics (Schwarz 1997:16).

In his keynote address at the 9th annual Society for Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery conference, Vine Deloria Jr. suggested that the idea of democracy
(propagated by the frontier) does not exist in America. Democracy is also a myth because most people do not participate in it. Why are these stereotypes, the frontier and the American Dream, being reintroduced into popular literature when the cultural postulates they entail are at the same time being questioned for their validity?

I suggest that the mythical image of America is being reintroduced into the public forum, not because scholars, art advocates, critics and artists are intentionally seeking to reestablish any particular American ideal but rather because the concept of the American Frontier and the American Dream are useful metaphors. Positive, stereotypical images of America are being newly introduced because the language of the American Dream and Frontier is perfectly suited for building a conceptual system that supports the idea of transformation.

The main precept of the American Dream is that one should be able to move up the proverbial ladder to get ahead. Change and transformation are inherent in bringing about the accomplishment of this particular dream. One must be transformed to some degree in order to ensure success. The frontier is also about opportunity. Turner's thesis describes a process that explains how the opportunity found in the west accounts for America's particular national character. It too is about transformation.

As stated above, if these positive metaphors of America did not have any entailments or correspondences in common with the old negative metaphors, the transition from negative to positive Cultural image would not be possible. Rather, a new positive framework, with no ideas common to the negative metaphors, would have to be established for the idea that Las Vegas is a good place for the arts. Reconstruction, rather than "building from scratch," is possible because there is a
common experientially based link (experience of an empty or open space) between metaphors that otherwise categorize Las Vegas and art in totally opposite ways.

In theory, semantic linkages create a chain that account for how different and even opposing views are all connected within one complex conceptual system (Palmer 1996:96). The principle of chaining is most interesting as far as ideas of Las Vegas and art are concerned, because the links of “open” and “empty” can be used to describe the same physical space. Since these links are found in the four views of Las Vegas’ Cultural identity—Void, Wasteland, Frontier, and American Dream—one can linguistically jump back and forth between them. The import being, of course, that a linguistic change produces a mental one, which in turn may encourage an actual physical transformation. That is clearly what art advocates in Las Vegas hope talking of their town as a “frontier town” will do for the arts in a place that is still regularly referred to as a Cultural wasteland.

When discussing the changing of a stereotype, one may prefer to use the word “bridge” instead of link. When a link provides a mechanism for crossing from one point of view to another it acts like a bridge in that it allows traffic to go both ways. A metaphorical link explains how a positive image can be built on the premise of absence. It also accounts for how one can easily travel between negative and positive conceptual systems. In theory, the thinker can move back and forth between negative and positive views.

Some locals are pointing to the image of the Strip (Las Vegas Boulevard) for concrete evidence that freedom exists in this city. According to James Mann, “freedom creates a delightful spectacle. And it’s where art after post-modernism is
going. Now new artists will begin reconstructing, mixing new resources with old, creating a new art. And there’s no hierarchical exclusivity, there is no set of values that are dictatorially insisted upon. And that’s where art is going” (cited in Willis 1999).

Mann uses both freedom and democracy to explain why Las Vegas is a perfect town for artists. Furthermore, he uses these ideal American features to account for why Las Vegas is not restricted by the kind of tradition one might find in more established cities (cities with Culture). Las Vegas is a frontier town in which artists and art advocates can be pioneers. Also, Las Vegas is itself a pioneer. It enjoys the same privileges that any American of the frontier does. Las Vegas can be, as historian Hal Rothman states, “whatever it wants to be” (cited in Willis 1999) even if it wants to be, in James Mann’s words, “the next art mecca” (cited in Linssen 1998).
CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY

In this study of attitudes towards art in Las Vegas, metaphors were analyzed according to the methodology put forth by Lakoff and Johnson. While it agrees with their view that metaphorical language is important to building systems of thinking, the metaphors described here speak of attitudes about art that are found outside of their associations to Las Vegas. Las Vegas' negative Cultural stereotype reflects values about art that distinguish it as being either low or high, fake or real, commercial or fine. Since Las Vegas is traditionally thought of in terms of gambling, entertainment and popular art, it is considered low, fake and commercial: it is incompatible with fine art.

For at least the past year and a half certain people have been publicly speaking in favor of art in Las Vegas. Most of them have either been artists or people who make their living in the arts. Some of them were governmental representatives and corporate speakers. They have often talked about the absence of Culture in terms of ideal stereotypes of America. Absence is changed into a positive attribute by the American Frontier metaphor. Lack of tradition is transformed into freedom for the artist. Similarly, the American Dream metaphor has also been employed to signify

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freedom and opportunity for Las Vegas artists, art advocates and for the city itself (Appendix I).

Will Las Vegas ever be perceived as a place that is compatible with art? The president of the Las Vegas Art Museum, Joseph Palermo, believed that this question could be answered with a test. Last year the museum exhibited a Salvador Dali painting called "Vision of Hell" for six months. The museum is located on the western edge of town. Palermo said the painting "is a test, since we aren't sure if Las Vegans will really come out for such work. That's why we plan to exhibit it long term—for at least six months" (Hayes 1998).

The future will show whether people change their minds about Las Vegas’ negative relationship to art. It will not depend, though, on how well attendance is for a single painting, or even gallery or museum. As Palermo stated, by 1998 attendance for the museum had tripled since it moved to its new Sahara location. Las Vegas is still stereotypically known for being a Cultural void. A change in attitude will more likely depend on whether the general public will embrace the idea that Las Vegas is a good place for art, based on the reasoning which has recently been published and which was examined in this study. Will the language of a relatively small group of speakers, those who are quoted in the media or are themselves writers, affect the thinking of the readership?

During the course of this study, reactions to my research topic have ranged from initial laughter to skepticism: the idea of studying art in this city is preposterous to most people. The test for Las Vegas, I think, is not whether people will attend art
shows, but rather, will they be able to change their minds and transform a negative stereotype into a positive image.
NOTES

1. For some examples of theories for art from anthropology, see Bohannan 1992; Dissanayake 1988, 1992; Levi-Strauss 1966. For examples from philosophy, see Bronowski 1978; Dewey 1958; Goodman 1976; Santayana 1955. For examples from psychology, see Freud 1948; Jung 1945. For examples from art theorists and critics, see Gablik 1976; Hickey 1993; McEvilley 1991; Tomkins 1989. For examples from artists themselves, see the edited volume Chipp 1968.

2. The statement "Las Vegas is a collective work of art" suggests the speaker may actually think of Las Vegas as a work of art. When people talk about Las Vegas as a work of art they may not be speaking metaphorically. However, since a city, even Las Vegas, has components that one does not associate with art, like public transportation, school systems, power plants, etc., I am identifying their language as metaphorical.

3. In this case, the metaphor would be an IMAGE is a BUILDING.

4. Ronald Langacker refers to cognitive models as "schema" and to links as "commonalities": "an integrated structure that embodies the commonality of its members, which are conceptions of greater specificity and detail that elaborate the schema in contrasting ways" (Langacker 1987:371).

5. I was recently invited to speak about advertising art to an art appreciation course. The opinion that fine and real art is distinct from commercial art was clearly described by the teacher to her students. She explained that an artist must be aware of the danger of "selling out" when working for a patron.

6. One exception found outside the discourse on the Bellagio comes from an article on 1% tax for public art. Artist Robert Beckmann says the value of public art it that it stimulates the general public to question the way they think and the senior visual arts specialist with the Las Vegas Arts Commission talks about art as an "identifier", in that it acts as a landmark and helps people to identify themselves with neighborhoods in a community (Parkinson 1999).

7. The fee to enter the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art was finally set at ten dollars.

8. Gary Palmer defines postulates in anthropology as "cultural premises that are entrenched in language as in religious dogma, folk philosophy, folk law, and folk medicine, as expressed in slogans, aphorisms, rules, maxims, and incantations" (Palmer 1996:105).
Figure 1. Metaphorical Links

Positive Metaphors

VOID

FRONTIER

Negative Metaphors

Empty--------Open

Barren--------Free

WASTELAND

AMERICAN DREAM
Table 1.

THEORY = BUILDING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Building</th>
<th>Target:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The building is the theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The theory is constructed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The theory is supported by a framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A good theory has a strong foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAS VEGAS = VOID</td>
<td>LAS VEGAS = AMERICAN DREAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Las Vegas is a Cultural void)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAS VEGAS = WASTELAND</td>
<td>LAS VEGAS = FRONTIER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Las Vegas is a Cultural wasteland)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAS VEGAS = ART</td>
<td>LAS VEGAS = ART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Las Vegas is a work of art)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAS VEGAS = STARVING ENTITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Las Vegas is Culturally starved)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Starving Animal</th>
<th>Target: Las Vegas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The starving animal is Las Vegas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas needs art in order to survive and be successful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas needs real art (fine or serious art) in order to exist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.

LAS VEGAS is a WORK OF COMMERCIAL ART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Art Vegas</th>
<th>Target: Las Vegas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Association Between Las Vegas and Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—The work of art is Las Vegas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Las Vegas is popular or advertising art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Popular or advertising art is not serious or fine art, therefore Las Vegas is not real art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.

**LAS VEGAS is a WORK OF FINE ART**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Art</th>
<th>Target: Las Vegas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Positive Association Between Las Vegas and Art

- The work of art is Las Vegas
- Las Vegas is popular or advertising art
- Popular art is a type of fine art, therefore Las Vegas is a work of fine art
Table 6.

NEGATIVE
LAS VEGAS IS A CULTURAL VOID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Void</th>
<th>Target: Las Vegas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The void is Las Vegas Culture
- Las Vegas completely lacks Culture or Art
- Las Vegas is empty of Culture or Art
Table 7.

NEGATIVE

LAS VEGAS is a CULTURAL WASTELAND

Source: Wasteland  Target: Las Vegas Culture

—The wasteland is Las Vegas' Cultural Scene
—There is no art in Las Vegas
—People in Las Vegas do not appreciate art
—Las Vegas is aesthetically *barren*
Table 8.

POSITIVE
LAS VEGAS is a CULTURAL FRONTIER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Frontier</th>
<th>Target: Las Vegas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—The Frontier is Las Vegas' Cultural scene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Las Vegas' Cultural scene (the Frontier) has unused resources that can be exploited by anyone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Las Vegas' Cultural scene is open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9.

**POSITIVE**

**LAS VEGAS is an AMERICAN DREAM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: American Dream</th>
<th>Target: Las Vegas Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>—The American Dream is Las Vegas' Cultural scene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Artists are <em>free</em> to make any kind of art in Las Vegas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Las Vegas is open to immigrants who may find artistic freedom that is lacking in more Culturally established cities like New York.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Las Vegas offers the possibility of success to artists who would have no future unless they obeyed traditional Cultural maxims. Therefore, the lack of tradition and Culture is a benefit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

ATTITUDES TOWARD ART AND LAS VEGAS

Nevada and Las Vegas need art/people need art

There is no art in Las Vegas
Las Vegas is Culturally starved
Las Vegas is a Cultural wasteland
Las Vegas is a Cultural void

Las Vegas and art are incompatible
Las Vegas is commercial/Las Vegas is a commercial work of art/ Commercial art is not real art or fine art
Las Vegas is fake
Real artists in Las Vegas face competition from commercial art, or art that is not real

There is art in Las Vegas
Las Vegas is a collective work of popular art/Popular art is a type of fine art
Artists in Las Vegas face competition from the city

Las Vegas is a good place for art
Las Vegas is a Cultural Frontier
Las Vegas is the American Dream
Artists are free to do whatever they want to in Las Vegas.
Las Vegas can be whatever it wants to be
Las Vegas can be an art center
Las Vegas can be a mecca for art
Las Vegas can get on the Cultural map
APPENDIX II

DATA SOURCES/SPEAKERS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

The research this paper is based on began in 1997 and ended in 1999. The data is limited to statements that were made about art in relation to Las Vegas. Statements were all found in the following publications:

Arizona Republic (ar)
Art in America (aa)
City Life (cl)
Harpaar's Bazaar (hb)
Las Vegas Life (lsl)
Las Vegas Review Journal (rj)
Las Vegas Sun (lvs)
Las Vegas Weekly (lww)
Nevada Historical Society Quarterly (nhsq)
Nevada State Council on the Arts (nsca)
Nevada Woman (nw)
New Yorker (ny)
Newsday (n)
Scope (s)
Time Magazine (t)

Speakers*

Lee Abraham, writer (LA)
Jose Bellver, artist (JB)
Ginger Bruner, artist (GB)
Monica Caruso, writer (MC)
A.M. Chamberlain, writer (AC)
Carol Cling, writer (CC)
Gregory Crosby, critic (GC)
J.C. Davis, writer (JCD)

*A writer is anyone who has written the article and was featured in the byline. This category includes editors, journalists, reporters and commentators.
Nancy Deaner, Las Vegas Cultural and Community Affairs Division (ND)
Constance DeVereaux, writer/Allied Arts Council (CD)
Scott Dickensheets, critic (SD)
Joe Dini, politician (JD)
Michael Duncan, critic (MD)
Susan J. Eaton, writer (SE)
Timothy Erwin, writer (TE)
John Findlay, historian (JF)
Paul Goldberger, writer (PG)
Leonard Goodall, UNLV president (LG)
Mike Grainger, artist (MG)
Justin Cord Hayes, writer (JH)
Alan Hess, architect (AH) Dave Hickey, critic (DH)
Bob Hlusak, designer (BH)
Richard Hooker, Nevada Arts Council (RH)
Robert Hughes, art critic (H)
Jeff Inman, writer (JI)
Rebecca Kuzins, writer (RK)
Linda Linssen, writer (LL)
Libby Lumpkin, writer/curator of Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art (L)
Jonathan Mandell, writer (M)
James Mann, Las Vegas Museum curator (JM)
Tony Milici, artist (TM)
Jane Ann Morrison, writer (JAM)
Joe Neal, politician (JN)
Mel Parkinson, writer (MP)
Michael Paskevich, writer (P)
Joseph Palermo, Las Vegas Museum president (JP)
Mike Prevatt, writer (PM)
John Richardson, writer (JR)
Hal Rothman, historian (HR)
Ralph Rugoff, writer (RR)
Candice St. Jacques, writer (CS)
Geoff Schumacher, writer (GS)
Steve Sebelius, writer (SS)
David Sims, writer (DS)
Lisa Stamanis, Las Vegas Arts Commission (LS)
George L. Sturman, art collector (GLS)
Alisa Tager, writer (AT)
Roger Thomas, interior designer (RT)
Michael Ventura, writer (MV)
Ed Vogel, writer (EV)
Mike Weatherford, writer (MW)
Sean Whaley, writer (SW)
Stacey J. Willis, writer (SJW)
Steve Wynn, chairman of Mirage Resorts (W)
APPENDIX III

STATEMENTS

Nevada and Las Vegas need art/people need art

As this city grows [Las Vegas], there's a real need to begin supporting the arts (GLS) (rj).

"They see it [art] as necessary for the community and for themselves," she [Cheryl Miglioretto, Nevada Arts Council] says (CD) (nw).

I still believe art helps us survive (JB) (cl).

Our city can never be considered a real city without having a cultural base to it (TM) (rj).

Studies have shown a correlation between a commitment to the arts and economic prosperity. As public art improves the aesthetic appearance of a city, it contributes to a city's positive identity and image... (MP) (cl).

The spirit of the legislation was to make this art as freely available to the public as possible (JB) (rj).

The Mirage chairman said he did not seek tax incentives for himself or the Bellagio, but to make Nevada a national mecca for art (EV) (rj).

...Mirage lobbyists consistently pushed for the art tax exemption bill, though they and art organization leaders maintained it would benefit the Nevada art community, not Wynn (EV) (rj).

There is no art or Culture in Las Vegas

[Las Vegas] a town where "Art" is normally the name of someone's limo driver (H) (t).
... there is a contemporary tradition that insists art and culture exist elsewhere but not in Nevada (CD) (nw).

If you've lived here for any length of time, you've heard the refrain: "Las Vegas has no culture. It's nothing but casinos and strip malls" (JD) (cl).

As we started to travel and look around, we'd see these things [an art community] in other towns that are totally missing in Las Vegas (MG) (cl).

A city built on the glitz and glamour of the casino industry, Las Vegas is not known for strong cultural roots (MP) (cl).

**Las Vegas is Culturally starved**

Christ [music director for the Las Vegas Music Festival, Evan Christ] has been organizing summer concerts for nine years, and word gradually spread beyond the mom-and-dad circle to starved classical music fans (MW) (rj).

Last year's success also came from a public hungry for independent and foreign movies that either don't find their way to Vegas at all or play in one or two theaters for a week (P) (cl).

A city that offers the drive-through wedding chapel must have appeared in need of the nourishment provided by a return to institutional ritual in the same way the Tainos appeared in need of "civilization" (L) (nsca).

**Las Vegas is a Cultural wasteland**

The sudden torrent of prestigious artwork making its way to Las Vegas has caused many to speculate that the city may be shedding its reputation as a cultural wasteland (MP) (cl).

Critics who deride our community as a cultural wasteland just don't know where to look (GS) (cl).

But there are those in Las Vegas who argue that without the efforts of private collectors and businesses, Las Vegas would remain the cultural wasteland it's criticized as being (MP) (cl).

[title of article on culture in Las Vegas] Thriving in a 'cultural wasteland': A call for civic pride (JD) (cl).

Up to now, Las Vegas has been a cultural wasteland (AC) (rj).

"We are constantly hearing comments about Nevada being a cultural wasteland," said Barrett [Las Vegas arts advocate, Maureen Barrett] (EV) (rj).

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Supporters of the bill said it would encourage the importation and display of fine art in Nevada, bring in new visitors, and help change the perception held by some that the state is a cultural wasteland (SW) (rj).

She [gallery owner Caty Crockett] becomes vexed when people criticize Las Vegas for not being up to par with major art centers. "It makes me crazy when people say Las Vegas is a cultural wasteland" (MC) (rj).

That would help erase the city's slow-fading reputation as a cultural wasteland (P) (rj).

**Las Vegas is a Cultural void**

Art abhors a vacuum, and if Las Vegas hasn't earned a name for being culturally under-oxygenated, what place in America has? (H) (t).

For him [artist Christophe Ritenour], the void of artistic awareness in this peculiar city is what keeps him here (LA cl).

**Las Vegas and art are incompatible**

The LVAM [Las Vegas Art Museum] was originally granted only a two-year lease with no renewal option—most likely because board members of the time did not believe that a premier fine arts facility could be successful in Las Vegas (JH) (lvw).

The notion of a world-class gallery inside a Las Vegas casino prompted some "eye rolling" among art insiders... (CC) (rj).

He [Dave Hickey] especially likes the students who have chosen the seemingly paradoxical option of graduate studies in art in a place like Las Vegas (GC) (s).

... Hughes' assertion [is] that Las Vegas is "absent a real museum, or the civic will to build and endow one...” (SD) (lvs).

But at least "they're not putting their van Goghs and Monets...where people are playing blackjack," observed Arthur C. Danto, art critic for The Nation, who teaches at Columbia University. Separating the gallery from the casino "shows a certain respect for their art" (CC) (rj).

The problem with culture in Las Vegas is this--most people just don't care (JD) (cl).
Las Vegas is commercial/Las Vegas is a commercial work of art/Commercial or popular art is not real art or fine art

Vegas has often been decried by some artists as nothing more than the temple of a crass and souless materialism that many would argue is at odds with the received wisdom of art’s “spiritual” function (GC) (s).

...nothing here is sacred. All it takes is a few implosive devices, enhanced by a little pyrotechnic wizardry, to draw the crowds... (LL) (lvl).

... the whole city is public art... public art here has to be more than visual candy (ND) (lvl).

In a city of such overripe simulacra, whose most characteristic museum is dedicated to the memory of Liberace, what room is there for the clean, piercing, complex presence of real works of art? (H) (t).

Las Vegas is fake

Las Vegas is only as authentic as we want it to be (RT) (hb).

The museum had all fakes, and the gift shop had the real thing... It just summed up Las Vegas for me (MD) (ar).

Why should the idea of starting an art collection in Vegas seem so odd? Basically because Las Vegas... is a city in which every cultural citation is fake, so that the real thing feels out of place (H) (t).

It’s the kind of town [Las Vegas] where an establishment with the words “art museum“ in its name can include an “exact replica“ of King Tut’s tomb or an almost exact replica of an Old Master painting (M) (n).

[regarding the opening of the Bellagio gallery collection] Las Vegas is the home of the simulacrum. What happens to the aura of authenticity when it enters the force field of the facsimile? Will the intersection make for a shocking short-circuit of sensibility, as some in the national media have suggested? (TE) (lvl)

Real artists in Las Vegas face competition from commercial art, or art that is not real

...public art in Las Vegas faces one highly unusual challenge: competition from the environment itself (ND) (lvl).
Any public work of art is apt to pale to invisibility beside those neon sign and huge, crass, mock-Hellenistic sculptures (H) (t).

There is art in Las Vegas

As far as I’m concerned, Las Vegas has more culture per square inch than most places (JM) (lvw).

It [the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art] dispels once and for all the old canard that Las Vegas has no culture (JM) (lvl).

Las Vegas is a collective work of popular art/Popular art is a type of fine art

"Art in Las Vegas" is either an oxymoron or a statement of the obvious, depending upon one’s definition of art. The city’s center is a strip of casinos which specialize in creating complex fantasies and illusions to attract spectators and participants (AT) (aa).

[Las Vegas is] a museum without walls (RR; DS) (hb).

A menagerie of theme palaces... has made Las Vegas more than a gambler’s paradise: It’s America’s greatest living work of art (RR; DS) (hb).

"Great art... communicates!" he [Reyner Banham] yelped, and Las Vegas communicated “something about greed and elation and fear and daring and compulsion and escape and some of the higher forms of hypocrisy” (RR; DS) (hb).

Like it or not, Las Vegas is our aesthetic labyrinth of the moment... it may be the most truthful art we have (RR: DS) (hb).

Artists in Las Vegas face competition from the city

Miralda’s [artist Antoni Miralda] moment of imperial grandeur, however, lost its punch when night fell, and robbed of their context, the images seemed to shrink in relation to the lights of Las Vegas in the valley below... (L) (nsca).

Making art in Las Vegas requires large doses of self-confidence in order to avoid being overwhelmed by the welter of existing visual stimuli (AT) (aa).

Las Vegas is a good place for art

Las Vegas is a Cultural frontier

We have more correspondence with the New York artists and dealers because a lot of them see Las Vegas as the new frontier, as virgin territory (JP) (lvw).
Could a city known more for artifice than art become the next Art Capital of the World? Considering the frontier spirit that continues to fuel Las Vegas’ growth, anything is possible (LL) (lwl).

Still, the question remains whether Las Vegas can pull off one of the greatest stunts in its history by suddenly marketing itself as the next art capital of the world...After all, Las Vegas is still a frontier town, and all things are possible here (LL) (lvw).

For such a work of art [Las Vegas], there can be no better frame than the hundreds of miles of Mojave Desert that surround the city... Dry desert winds convey a delirious frontier freedom (RR: DS) (hb).

**Las Vegas is the American Dream**

Las Vegas is the American Dream lit by neon (MV) (lwl).

This is a more audacious place than most, because it tries to supply the whole American dream (MV) (lwl).

There is so much promise here. It’s a city of opportunity, with something for everyone (RH) (cl).

Yet, “on the other hand, it’s a totally democratic town,” Gilliam [movie director Terry Gilliam] says of Las Vegas. “Because everybody has the same chance to lose” (CC) (rj).

Las Vegas tries to supply the whole American Dream. This city is testing the limits of what is possible and the whole world is watching to see if we’ll get away with it (MV) (lwl).

Las Vegas represents culture for the masses; unlike Frick or the Vanderbilts, who built their castles to proclaim their distance from everyone else, Las Vegas aspires to push democracy farther. The only reason the new hotels exist is to have crowds swarming through them (PG) (ny).

**Artists are free to do whatever they want to in Las Vegas**

So you don’t think there’s a point when all the freedom in Vegas—freedom from history, from received ideas of culture, from behaving yourself—becomes oppressive? (GC) (s).

“You still have a feeling of the wild west, not a lot of walls put up,” she says [artist Ginger Bruner] of being an artist in Nevada (CD) (nw).
You can go in so many directions with your art. This landscape gives you the ability to see the bare bits of composition (GB) (nw).

Vegas doesn't have a lot of the things you find in most places, which is sad, but at the same time it's inspiring because it's wide open (MG) (cl).

**Las Vegas can be whatever it wants to be**

Hickey's comment touches on the democratic appeal of the Strip, where anything goes (RR; DS) (hb).

We specialize in the ability to be whatever you want to be (HR) (lvs).

The Las Vegas image is primed to reinvent itself again (JM) (lvs).

**Las Vegas can be an art center**

Nevada is posed to become the state of the art (JH) (lvw).

Mann [James Mann] says that Las Vegas is primed to be an international hub for serious art (SW) (lvs).

**Las Vegas can be a mecca for art**

The Mirage chairman said he did not seek tax incentives for himself or the Bellagio, but to make Nevada a national mecca for art (EV) (rj).

If Las Vegas decides to become the next art mecca, it will be (JM) (lvl).

**Las Vegas can get on the Cultural map**

It [Claes Oldenburg's "Flashlight"] will put Las Vegas, UNLV and Nevada on the cultural map (LG) (rj).

While most observers have tended to place Las Vegas, Nevada, on the margins of their mental maps of the American cultural landscape, a few writers have occasionally proposed a more central location for the nation's gambling capital (JF) (nhsq).

"This has put Nevada on the map for art in the West," Dini [Joe Dini] said (EV) (rj).
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