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TENNESSEE ARTS COMMISSION
Regional Update: Memphis
Mary J. Karimnia is an artist, arts administrator and arts advocate in Memphis, TN.

Broaden its arts presence through programming, more opportunities for local artists space, a shared art-making facility - which will include a full-service woodshop, a variety artist residencies program, expanded gallery offerings, a dedicated video screening from the building for the past five years. The new space will house a multi-disciplinary program and has been building up a wide variety of arts programming across the street 2017. Crosstown Arts will be moving the majority of its operations into the new space. Brock Museum continues the Rotunda Projects series with Rochelle Hope and Gregory Drayton. The largest is over 23 ft. tall. This work by Australian a lush fiber installation is inspired by the daily tasks of people from Nigeria. The museum work by Memphis artists that have shown in the Wallory/Wurtzburger Gallery, a space devoted to local art, between 2008-2015. The Doos will host complimentary talks related to both exhibitions during their March and June series on Wednesdays at noon throughout the run of both shows.

Regional Update: Nashville
The Nashville Art Scene has been abuzz, this winter, with that tension between the individual and society, isolation, alienation, and togetherness. Making art, in and of itself, is about this tension, as the artist tries to make art — in isolation — but ultimately realizes art is inseparable from community — that it is really about this universal condition of being human.

Local artist, gallerist, and arts community advocate extraordinaire, Lain York, curated a show that was the epiphany of communities and artists curating: Heaven State, at the historic Mothersen antelouis mansion in Hendersonville, TN. Local contemporary artists across mediums and disciplines were invited to participate, including a number of emerging artists. The paintings, figurative and abstract, sculpture of all sorts, expected and unexpected, and sides, inside out the open windows from the front lawn, combined with the architecture and decor of the mansion, created a synthesized types of space, and people that space unique to that place. There was even live sound art performance in the night of the opening, as well an, unexpected inclusion of some theologically decorated Christmas trees in the main parlor, as part of an outgoing installation at the mansion. All in all, Heaven Tender realized the goal, the goal unexpected things about people coming together to cultivate contemporary art in the South.

Zeltz Gallery is showing paintings by Richard Feaster and sculpture by Alex Lockwood through February 25th. Feaster’s paintings are abstract, made of washes and signs that floor, white space endure, both ethereal and physical, with tangible rituals and vows that may be natural forms. Feaster’s paintings are, perhaps, the grounding, the night sky in which to take solace, one day, for the figure of Lockwood’s Auld Thing: Made of recollected plastic, Lockwood’s brightly colored, playfully carved figures are in various states of contention, under pressure, and bodily ruin. “Oh, man, it’s horrifying, but it’s a helpful way,” said artist and art curator Dr. Gocarle of the show. “It progresses from front to back, starting with tranquility, to negotiating, dreams, and ultimately horror.” Lockwood’s works offer a program tack at the university, and the isolation of the human condition — physical, psychological, metaphorical — and shows how can alleviate this loneliness, or make it more real, more funny, through the sharing. (and the color)

The First Center for the Visual Arts is host to three group oriented exhibitions. Samuel's Way and a Group, through January 31st, presented spectreal helmmets, arrows, swords, and other accoutrements. Excursions from Samuel films were also shown, the exhibition on the whole offering a fully immersive, window into Samuel culture, dispelling myths but opening up much room to wonder about these still-mystical individuals. The First is showing, through February 12th, work by Kentucky artist Ragnar Kjartansson. The work centers on the idea of a group, and the exhibition is a video installation of eight musicians, positioned in various rooms of a house, contributing communally to a musical and video landscape, which is sure to be magical no matter the moment at which the viewer enters. Finally, the Cattle Community Gallery at the First is host to the Huong Tran exhibition, a group show by students from advanced high school studio art programs across the states. The work is diverse and wonderfully personal and anecdotal, reminding us all how grateful we must be for the artists.

Regional Update: Richmond, VA

Inspired by Newfoundland & Labrador, Richmond, Virginia as part of the National Arts and Humanities Month, Culture Works, a local Richmond nonprofit that generates a vibrant community, by inspiring, enriching and cultivating visual arts and culture, launched RiLiVe: A Virginia’s only month-long celebration of art and culture. Richard Feaster’s work included the Richmond Tattoo and Arts Festival September 30th-October 2nd where the city showed off its popular scene for tattoo art at the festival. With over 100 booths, the first artbooth was a solid success that the city hopes to see for many years to come. October 1st-5th was the highly anticipated Richmond Folk Festival. The Folk Festival is a community favorite in Richmond, VA, and is spearheaded by Venture Richmond, a non-profit that engages business and community leaders in partnering with the city to enhance the stability of the Richmond community through economic development, advocacy, and events. The Richmond Folk Festival builds their mission as it transforms Brown’s Island, a beautiful space located at downtown-Richmond, riverfront into a cultural experience. The festival brings families from surrounding counties to the heart of the city to share and celebrate this cultural treasure. Throughout the entire weekend the community knows to expect live music, dance, traditional crafts, storytelling, and food from cultures around the world. From blues music to traditional Sri Lankan dance and cooking demonstrations, this festival has it all. Despite heavy rain throughout the entire weekend, the festival remained packed throughout its entirety, demonstrating just how beloved the Folk Festival is in Richmond, VA.

On November 19th ; a nonprofit show for new work 1708 Gallery, Hosted: H. H. Maudslay: The People of the East The exhibition on the whole offering a fully immersive, wondrous look into the history of art. H. H. Maudslay was an English artist, interestingly, the people he painted were all from the East. This exhibition was curated by the museum’s former Director of Education, Lisa Cottrell. Significantly, Maudslay’s work offers a program tack at the university, and the isolation of the human condition — physical, psychological, metaphorical — and shows how can alleviate this loneliness, or make it more real, more funny, through the sharing. (and the color)

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts features Jasper Johns and Edvard Munch: Love, Loss, and the Cycle of Life exhibition, which runs through February 20th, 2017. This exhibit features works by Johns and Munch from the VMFA’s permanent collection, as well as works from the collections of multiple Virginia museums, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the University of Virginia Art Museum, the Robert and Penny Fox Center, and the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art. The exhibition explores the relationship between love and loss, and the cycle of life in the works of these two artists, who represent different artistic movements and time periods. The exhibition is organized around three themes: the cycle of life, the cycle of love, and the cycle of destruction.

The Spring months look to bring exhibitions and festivals galore to Mississippi. From the Mississippi Delta to Jackson, MS, the region has plenty to offer for you if you’re looking for a road trip filled with culture and good eats.

The Wright Center Art Gallery at Delta State University recently hosted Sticks by Rick Hermerge. Hermerge is a sculptor and installation artist creating works inspired by nature that mimic organic patterns and repetitions but are composed of man-made materials to highlight man’s disconnection from the natural environment. Outlining the events at the Wright Center Art Gallery for the Spring/Summer season will be two student exhibitions: The Annual Juried Student Exhibition opening April 9th and the Senior Thesis Exhibition opening May 6th.

Located in Columbus’s historic downtown Studio 213 has an eventful Spring ahead. Studio 213 focuses on showcasing works by local and regional artists in and around the Mississippi Delta. A group exhibition, runs through March 4th and makes way for Spring in Small Towns, a group exhibition that opens on April 1st and runs through May 25th.

The Crossroads Art and Jazz Festival comes to Cleveland on April 8th. The juried art show features hundreds of exhibitions displaying paintings, sculpture, pottery, fabric and paper designs, hand-made furniture and jewelry. High quality handcrafts are offered in a marketplace setting. Visit www.crossroadsfestival.com for more information.

The 2nd annual Double Decker Arts Festival kicks off on April 28th. A two-day event, Double Decker offers live music, art from regional artists, and a variety of festival food from over 200 vendors. Visit www.doubledeckerartsfestival.com for more information.

The Mississippi Museum of Art hosts the 2016 Mississippi Invitational March 11-20, which features work from 1708 artists, in communities large and small, to gather a broad sampling of the art of our time. The show features a wide variety of media from diverse groups of contemporary artists and explores how these artists are informed by the past, innovating with materials old and new, and engaging with issues relevant to our times. Overlapping this national showcase, the Doos is hosting an overview of local artists. From January 22 – April 16th, Middle/Watertown A Metaphors, will examine new work by Memphis artists that have shown in the Watertown/Watertown Galleries, a space devoted to local art, between 2008-2015. The Doos will host complimentary talks related to both exhibitions during their March and June series on Wednesdays at noon throughout the run of both shows.

For more information, visit www.crosstowndistrict.com and www.museumofart.org. For more information, visit www.museumofart.org. For more information, visit www.museumofart.org. For more information, visit www.museumofart.org.
Big Picture View: Scott Allen

Based in Jackson, Mississippi, the artist, muralist and sign company owner Scott Allen naturally takes a big-picture approach on the visual front. Allen goes through the windshield of an SUV at his mural on the exterior of The Hatch, a creative co-op located in Midtown Jackson. “You’re always interested in the way things looked when they were bigger,” Allen says.

He takes stock of the toll four years, a surrounding power wash, and a leading door’s ups and downs have taken on his painting. Missing flecks of paint here and there do nothing to diminish the Midtown mural’s power. A tree trunk connects top and bottom of the 18-by-40-foot scene. Its branches and roots fan out and intertwine to form a rough, rectangular frame so thick and organic it almost appears to be a child’s crouches at the base of this tree of life in a nod to the future.

Allen worked with the community to produce the design, with sketches and ideas shared in town hall meetings. Funded as part of a larger arts initiative to spark development for the neighborhood, the mural was a self-portrait of Allen?

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William Goodman:
The Subconscious View-Master

The mural was supposed to be temporary. That was over five years ago, and when an eye-level swath of wall along a walkway to the Mississippi Museum of Art presented an enticing canvas. In October 2011, Jackson artist William Goodman put a month of painting into “The Subconscious View-Master” along the walkway. Mississippi Museum of Art director Betsy Bradley’s initial vision was to host a mural by a local artist for an arts festival and opening of its Art Garden, then rotate artists for a different mural every nine to 12 months. Goodman had another idea.

“I was the first artist that they choose to do that wall, and I just went all in,” he said. “Icky blank wall, huge space for me to just kind of go wild on,” with few restrictions in the public space. “I had a lot of fun with it,” he said, aiming for images that would spark universal interest and love. “It is some type of narrative as to where I ended up in there too.

Goodman’s real-time experiences fed the work, too. “One night a local hip-hop group showed up and they wanted to shoot a music video while I was painting, and I’d be in the background,” Goodman explained. “I ended up taking pictures of them and incorporating them into the mural.” The security guard who would watch over Goodman’s late-night production ended up in there too.

Other life-relevant details worked their way in, including his current wife, Nell Knox. The painting depicts the time they were falling in love. “It is some type of narrative as to where I was in my life at the time,” he considered what people would enjoy looking at for years to come. That made that mural a more curated, collaborative project, Goodman said. Many nights, Long would hang out late as the artist painted. In Goodman’s method, imagery isn’t just black-and-white, but many shades of gray. He breaks down images into four to six different layers — from light gray to darker shades of gray to black — for added depth and to create “an image that really pops off the wall.”

Long’s involvement in the creative process made that mural a more curated, collaborative project, Goodman said. Many nights, Long would hang out late as the artist painted. In Goodman’s method, imagery isn’t just black-and-white, but many shades of gray. He breaks down images into four to six different layers — from light gray to darker shades of gray to black — for added depth and to create “an image that really pops off the wall.”

She was the perfect opportunity for me to just — I mean, it’s a 600-foot wall — explode on creativity.

He didn’t really have a plan going in, just several images he knew he wanted to include. Cars, retro toys, words, expressions, details from previous pop-inspired collages, and a View-Master reel were among them.

He worked from left to right, building it like a visual storyline. “It started growing into this big vine … It all just started flowing,” he said.

It went in, Long said. This mural, too, is a magnet for snapchats. “The comic book panel, Roy Lichtenstein-like, with a lady sobbing over chocolate chip cookies, has proved popular for selfies,” said Long. “The cookie-obessed creeper in the panel says, ‘I’ll never stop making his chocolate chip cookies, I’ll just die!!’”

Long said the mural brings a lucky synergy to the lunch spot that lies well with the “downtown hodgepodge thing” he has been doing for a while now. “A pretty good investment,” he said. “There might’ve been some cookie barrier, but I think it was mostly cash.”

Other Goodman murals include an outdoor corporate commission by the Outlets of Mississippi in Pearl, and an indoor mural in Greenwood for Viking Range. Murals hold a strong place in Goodman’s body of work. While he doesn’t want to be a full-time muralist, he wishes he could do more.

“I love working large, I always have,” Canvas leaning against his studio wall measure 5, 6, and even 8 feet tall. Murals offer a challenge, getting him outdoors or at least out of the studio. Travel to do murals holds some appeal, he said, noting the inspiration of neighborhoods such as Miami’s Wynwood and its colorful street murals.

But what comes often with buildings, neighborhoods, and murals is red tape. “You’ve got to get the right people behind it. Is the owner of the building behind it? Is there funding for it? The days of people trying to get artists to do something for free are few and far between. It, at least for me, they are.

Goodman imagines a several-block area in Jackson and a city-funded project or granting mechanism. Artists could submit their designs, have freedom of expression based on the caliber of their work, and there would be money to pay them. “If you look at any city that has been turned around, it has been done because you put the arts there, you put murals there, everything else follows,” including restaurants, music and eventually condos. “The whole economy of that area starts to thrive. “Jackson needs to take a look at how other cities are doing it.”

Meanwhile, he finds inspiration in naturally occurring street collages. Torn posters, weathered and faded, tagged by grafitti and covered by the new next thing, have become part of his imagery — photographed, sectioned, reworked and recreated in compositions that are like a history of fragments.

He considered some of his mixed media works — paintings made with acrylic and spray paint, — of musical icons such as John Lennon, David Bowie and Elvis Presley. Layers of imagery, words, patterns, labels, logos and photos share the feel of time’s passage, the mark of new energy.

“I can see doing murals that are like this, that look like they’ve faded into the wall, like they’ve been there for a long time,” he said.

“That’s what I’d like to do.”

For more on the work of William Goodman, visit www.williamgoodmanart.com.
As an artist, or in anything that you do, there are many obstacles you must overcome. The most challenging hurdle that many of us face is ourselves. However, if we can silence our egos, we hold the potential to do something great and make the world a better place.

Ed Trask has done just that. Trask is one of the leading muralists around the world and spearheaded the world-renowned mural art scene in Richmond, Virginia in his college days. Ed went to college for painting at Virginia Commonwealth University in downtown Richmond. During his third year of college after many unsuccessful attempts to show his work in more traditional galleries, he decided to turn dilapidated buildings around the city into his exhibition space instead. He illegally painted directly on buildings, or boards that were later screwed onto buildings, until the city was covered. Little did he know, his actions were sparking an art form in the city that Richmond, Virginia would become known for around the world.

Holly Zajur: Was art an important part of your childhood? When and why did you start taking it seriously? Ed Trask: As a kid, I was constantly sketching everything I could find, from comics and skateboard logos to Kiss record covers. It wasn't until fifth grade, during the mandatory art class, that my art teacher pulled my parents aside to say she was seeing some talent.

What struggles did you face early on in your artistic career? Myself! My ego and my self-esteem. Early in my career, my biggest obstacle was myself. I was always battling this kind of artistic integrity and self-esteem issue. Questions like: "What kind of work should I produce? What materials should I use? Do people think my work is good enough? Do even exist?" What I thought I meant to be a successful artist was crazy. Success was shrouded in a romanticized world of suffering and glamour. My ego was too much of a leader in my decisions.

But for me, it was a bit different because I was simultaneously touring the world playing drums with different punk rock bands. I was on the road seven months out of the year. But I always would carry a kind of "illegal art kit" on tour. I started throwing up illegal murals all over the world. It was this creative thing I had to do. That creative thing just happened to be "illegal..."

What advice would you give someone starting out? Don't expect to be a giant artistic success right away. I worked as hard as I could to constantly produce art and worked as many jobs as I could when I was home to fund this art making. Every job you have, every person you meet will teach you something that reflects itself in your art. Work shown in coffee shops, restaurants, houses, parties, bookstores can be just as important as a piece in a museum. Nobody will know about your work if it is stuck in your studio because you were too good to show it.

What brought you to mural art? I wanted to work big and I wanted to make the dilapidated buildings that surrounded me canvas. I wanted to make the city my gallery and I knew that by putting illegal art on these buildings, it would spark creative conversations; conversations about politics, race, socioeconomics. I had such respect for the WPA mural artists, and different Mexican muralists, but I knew that coming from what I see as a punk rock sensibility, my art would be different.

Many unsuccessful attempts to show your work if it is stuck in your studio because you were too good to show it. What do you hope to do in the future with your projects? I want to create a positive legacy of public art in this city that will last longer than any transient piece of art I could ever create. Through love, light, and color I want to make people take a breath, take a moment to see how their stories connect us to a larger collective of living. I want public art to be comprised of more than just murals, but collaborations in sound installations, light art, sculpture, temporary sculpture, dance, food, and more.

Do you think murals help break down walls that divide communities? Whether it is a piece of graffiti, a shitty tag or a commissioned mural, paint on a wall illuminates the reality of what is happening to a community be it blight, gentrification, racism, crime, etc. Murals give art to everyone, not just the gallery or museum viewer but anybody that is willing to see art to make community change and raise money for arts based charities. We bring attention to different communities, match out of town artists with local artists, and nourish our local talent pool.

Holly Zajur: As an arts educator, potter, and writer who creates community cultural development through the arts, how have murals impacted the city and the way the community interacts with art? From the Lacausa cave paintings to Andy Goldsworthy sculpture, from the first Subway graffiti pieces to knit bombers, I believe we as people have an innate drive to make a mark that will demonstrate the cultural, social, and historical temperature of when the mark was created. Murals have quite simply become a part of the identity of our city. They are not just an economic development driver; they are a spark plug of change. Our community is receptive to this. For example, I am a part of the RVA Street Art Festival, a 501(c)3 non-profit that uses public art to make community change and raise money for arts based charities. We bring attention to different communities, match out of town artists with local artists, and nourish our local talent pool.
Interview: Miya Bailey

I first heard of Miya Bailey not through his numerous magazine or television spots, nor his appearances on radio, no. I was given his name during a conversation with a brilliant young man working for youth mentorship and advocacy in the Bay Area and across the country. Miya, in addition to working as a high-profile tattoo artist, his tattoo shop City of Ink, is deeply involved in community-works projects. An exhibiting artist himself, he works toward a fully interdisciplinary and inclusive creative Renaissance that embraces all kinds of cultural production. His interns are required to have a working knowledge of the local art scene as part of their coordinating activities across galleries, performance spaces, publicity initiatives, and forthcoming projects. With that in mind, Miya seemed like the perfect candidate with whom to discuss murals in Atlanta without losing sight of the larger geographic and cultural picture.

After some correspondence on Instagram we set up a time to talk; what follows is a loose transcript of that conversation, edited for clarity and coherence.

Raphael Cornford: Hey Miya, I’m talking to you on the recommendation of Jared Mitchell, who sees you as somewhat of an expert on community arts in Atlanta because of your involvement in City of Ink and all the other projects you’ve done. I’m especially grateful you could make time to speak. Do you have any notes, any preferred way you’d like to introduce yourself or your accomplishments to folks who might not be familiar?

Miya Bailey: A visionary before anything else, helping to cultivate culture. Spreading the culture of Atlanta across the US. Artists should be the ones getting the recognition and money for their crafts, that’s what I do however I can. Specifically, City of Ink is a tattoo shop and an art gallery. I provide jobs for young tattoo artists; artists in the community get a hundred percent of their proceeds when they show in my spaces. I also run Notch 8, a 6,000-7,000 square foot gallery that’s a year old, mainly showcasing Atlanta, the diversity of it, the whole thing. I show work from local artists that local people want to see. You really see the whole thing, it’s everyone’s scene mixed all together. It’s simultaneous, it’s a seamless lifestyle. Everyone is doing something creative, visual art, design, photography, music...something creative. Having just opened a community gallery myself, I really admire what you’re doing. How do you see relationships between murals, tattoos, music, and your gallery spaces?

I know a lot of folks doing murals and going back and forth and working in the gallery as well. Peter Ferrari, Ford Warrior. Some great work, participation in a vibrant and multidimensional cultural center is that example. There is a creative Renaissance in Atlanta; it’s the actual proof, a different art space where folks, where people of all kinds, are actually buying work. More directly, it’s the beginning of an art industry; a movement is building. The Atlanta art community is very powerful right now, even the mayoral candidates are reaching out. That’s literal politics, the mayoral candidates reaching out to you and members of the arts community. That’s to the point where your movement is affecting the structural politics of the city. And all of this you’ve done without outside help, you’re self-made in that sense...

Actually I have to correct you. I would talk about it more in terms of grassroots. I’m from the ground up, from the people up, I’m people-made. And it’s an Underground Railroad we have here, not from slavery to freedom but to a place of security or safety through employment. We’re independent and we’re creating an ecosystem that supports local artists locally. It’s self-sufficient, and that’s a positive example. That’s hope.

It’s the law of attractions; people have donated stuff. They know we are working hard and people see it and they want to help. They are us, we are them. It’s been blessings, it’s really been blessings. What’s coming up, what’s on your radar that you want to share?

Well there’s Goat Farm, and the Beacons art program. Beacon gets old buildings all around Atlanta and then they find someone to do something with the buildings, keeping it art related, and keeping it in the community. They help you do the labor, which is really incredible. I’m working with them to expand into a new space, making a coffeehouse and art library as a community resource. It’ll be the 10th year anniversary of City of Ink in business for me, which is pretty big.

It all comes back to connecting everybody together. We need no more division. Working together is more powerful than working apart from each other. Are there any artists or murals you want to talk about in more detail?

Fabian Williams, definitely. He works across different mediums, murals, drawings, paintings. His show Controposition at Notch 8 in April of 2016, looking at traps for young black males like mousetraps or complex and deadly obstacle courses. He did a mural with two other artists at Martin Luther King Station as a commission from the City of Atlanta: Fahamu Pecou and Joe Drehmer. The giant mural shows this guy floating with birds coming from him. It’s a really positive message, “Rise above” and something to look at.

Learn more about murals in Atlanta:
http://myballoons.com
http://www.cityofink.com
http://thepenrosehall.com
http://occasionalsuperstar.com/index.html
http://www.fahamupecouart.com
http://livingwallsatl.com
http://joekingatl.com
http://thegoodfareartcenter

Learn more about murals in Atlanta:

Brandon Sadler, Atlanta Beltline mural, 2016.

Raphael Cornford wayward pro, artist, author, gallerist, and educator.
Interview: Karen Golightly

Karen Golightly is an Associate Professor of English at Christian Brothers University. She directs Paint Memphis, a nonprofit organization that sponsors a one-day paint festival each year, which results in the largest collaborative mural in Tennessee. What they originally set out to do was to simply paint a wall. What happened was something completely different. It brought together artists from all over the country, businesses and organizations locally, and it worked to build community, one wall at a time.

Ruthie George: So why and how did Paint Memphis get started?
Karen Golightly: I’ve been a graffiti photographer for about 6 years, and had traveled all over the world. I kept seeing all of these amazing murals, graffiti, and public art. Just like people take pictures of sunsets to remember them or remember the experience, I took pictures of public art, because I knew it was temporary; it was going to disappear, and I wanted to give it a sense of permanence. So I would take all these photos, sometimes of graffiti, sometimes murals, sometimes sculptures or any street art. I realized when I came back to Memphis that we didn’t really have anything like that at that time (which was seven years ago) where you could walk down the street and see a whole slew of murals or public art. Soon after, the 1 Love Memphis mural campaign was started by the Urban Art Commission. They really set the stage for Paint Memphis, because suddenly Memphians wouldn’t just see murals on walls, but instead, sought them out so they could take pictures of themselves next to the murals, and then post them on social media.

About that time, I met Brandon Marshall, who is a muralist and I had photographed some of his work. I said to him “I really don’t understand why we don’t have this type of public art in Memphis.” He told me about Soul Food, a paint jam that he had hosted over the course of several years. He held them mostly in the University of Memphis area, and he would get twenty or thirty people to paint over the course of a weekend. We decided to expand that and worked for years to get the city to give us permission to paint on specific city walls.

The next year, we held the event on October 1st 2016. We also did another Ioby.org campaign, a “Cocktails for a Cause” fundraiser, and had several corporate sponsors, such as A/V Artistry, Buckman Labs, and Loeb Properties. We got enough money to provide 140 artists with all the spray and bucket paint they needed. This time we painted both sides of the wall and doubled the number of artists and the mural space. We now have a board of nine members to help elevate Paint Memphis to new heights.

When is the event this upcoming year?
This year’s event will be on September 23rd. We are moving locations, hopefully to the downtown area, and plan to expand even more this year. We will do a call for artists in May. You’ve mentioned that people can donate things. How else can they get involved? We also need a ton of volunteers to make this happen. We need people weeks before the event to help buff the wall, a few days before the event to dab bute paint, and on the day we need help with security, water and food distribution, set up and clean up.

What sort of benefits does Paint Memphis bring to the community?
Other than the obvious aesthetic improvement to an area, we try to build community between businesses and organizations, between the artists, and among neighbors. With the Chelsea wall, we got input from the community about what they wanted on the wall. Mostly they told us what they didn’t want, such as, gang symbols, drug references, and profanity. We passed these guidelines on to the painters. This past year we included two different artists who live within two blocks of the wall. We also included a youth painting program from the Carpenter Art Garden as well as some students from St. George’s independent school.

Paint Memphis changes the face of the community. It brings people to the area who might not otherwise visit. Now, instead of a field of grass, rodents, and dumping ground, the field stays mowed by the City of Memphis. Clean Memphis sweeps through monthly to make sure that it stays clean. It’s a place where people can come, gather, and enjoy themselves. So you’ve run out of space? Do you have any other plans for the future? We’re moving next year to a Floodwall downtown. Our plans should be finalized soon and the project will be even larger, taller, than the last one. We’re hoping for it to become a destination, attract people from all over. Our tag-line is “building community one wall at a time.” It really is a project that involves a huge community of artists. We also want to inspire pride in the neighborhoods we work. We want our corporate sponsors to be involved with the project and work to showcase the talent of our artists in Memphis and the region.

Why does graffiti inspire you when so many people think that it’s a symbol of blight?
Right, well one of the things that I set out to do from the beginning was to shut down that stereotype. That was the hard part when I approached the Memphis government. I explained that if they provide places to paint instead of making arrests then artists will be able to paint beautiful murals without legal transgression and fear of reprisal. This also allows the graffiti artists and muralists to rethink what they do and how they do it. They should be able to make a living doing public art. I want the graffiti to be a sign of community and caring about the community instead of a sign of blight.

What’s your favorite memory from all of this?
The day of the event is always really fun. However, the best part is usually when we start giving out the paint to the painters. The first year it was at my house so we had these giant pallets of paint all over my backyard and they were so excited to be able to pick out and receive free paint. They were so happy about it. I really believe in this project, and I feel as though you should do what you believe in. If it serves people, then that’s even better!
Weaving through a municipal building on your way to traffic court, you might notice a mural depicting a megafauna flocking toward a nascent father signing a charter in front of his cronies. Or maybe you have observed tourists posing in front of a mural with your town’s name emblazoned in the foreground with depictions of happy people enjoying a park, college football, and fireworks in the background. These murals can be found in many U.S. cities. Paintings in this vein are well-executed in Knoxville, TN. But not all the vintage downtown murals have predictable subjects. We still find the old cephalopod near the mission district. In the former warehouse district, now populated with trendy restaurants, Keep Knoxville Beautiful is funding the activation of an aging mural commemorating the importance of train transportation to the city’s commercial history. This interest in mural preservation is due to a building’s new owner brazenly painting over a much beloved and faded local history mural.

Thanks to a modern progressive local government and forward-thinking artists, Knoxville has enjoyed a variety of innovative new murals over the past few years. With the City of Knoxville’s help, an inner-city neighborhood near a major interstate on-ramps was razed for roadway improvements, but a graffiti artist tagged the remains. Volunteers painted huge murals on viaduct walls indicating the entryway into historic urban neighborhoods located just outside downtown. The City of Knoxville, and its tourism office, also created a national mural contest with a cash prize for the winner. The new mural was to be painted in a section of downtown’s historic underground. The dark, damp outdoor space, a part of the original Gay Street, can only be seen from the lower floor of the Arts & Culture Alliance Building. California mural artists Sofía Lacroix and Henriess Christophel won the contest. Their abstract entry — chosen for its non-traditional style and bright colors — contains traces of downtown buildings sur- rounded by trees reminiscent of the Smoky Mountains. The mural also depicts geometric rays of light located near the mural’s only natural light source.

One of Mayor Madeline Rogero’s pet projects is maintaining and adding additional sections to the City’s greenway system. Thanks to the City’s greenway near the University of Tennessee that depicts plants, fish, and endangered freshwater mussels found in the Tennessee River, encouraging greenway users to reflect upon the local water and wildlife is crucial.

In a struggling neighborhood outside of downtown, the Knoxville Graphic Market is located on an unattractive active lane leading to interstate on-ramps. After Court Carrison oversaw eight months of pain-staking renova- tions to her building, a grafﬁti artist tagged the exterior wall facing on-coming traffic. Since The City of Knoxville requires business owners to absorb the cost of grafﬁti removal, Carrison, an artist and graphic designer, decided to cover the grafﬁti with a mural. She drew the feeble image and found volunteers through social media to paint the wall. Today, the Knoxville Graphic Market building has been nominated for a beautification award.

Not all grafﬁti is illegal. The owner of a used appliance store gave an employee, Perry, permission to spray paint the store’s exterior. The resulting mural of saucy anthropomor- phized appliances was a bright spot on an unassuming roadside shuttered with abandoned structures and salvation lots. Last year this building was razed for roadway improvements, but a block away, on the side of a convenience store, Perry’s outer space mural, with its intergalac- tic bees, lives on. And it inspires: a group called Grafﬁ Whitey was given permission to paint a revolving wall next to the convenience store. Other illegal grafﬁti murals have also popped up on an urban music school and clothing store.

A Unitarian church recently installed an unusual mural in its social hall. Dr. Carl Gombert’s canvas mural is fifty-one feet of mag- nificent rubber stamp artistry. Taking months to complete, Gombert used a multitude of rubber stamps to create seven large mandalas surrounded by numerous smaller mandalas. Minister Jake Morris said, “This work has the dignity needed... and the playfulness and complexity native to the culture of this congregation.” From a distance the art looks like a kaleidoscope made from intricate lace. Up close, the viewer is treated to butterflies, strawberries, and flowers. And, gnomes, closed babies, toast, sneakers, and more. Lots more. Jake Mor- ris continues, “Already, I can tell it will take us years to notice the patterns and pages Carl1 integrated into it!” Photos do not provide the magical and meditative experience of seeing the mural in person.

Finally, Hawai’i Ward Johnson, a Liberian refu- gee, created a mural as a gift for an inner-city recreation center. Usually children’s murals contain fantasy elements, cute animals, sport themes, or superheroes, but Johnson inspires children and adults with her breathtaking mural of the center’s namesake, Phyllis Wheatley, a West African girl who was sold in slavery. After Wheatley was purchased in North America by a Boston family, she learned to read and write. Eventually she became the first published African- American poet. A superhero, indeed. Spanning four walls, the mural includes the shore of an African village and quotes from Wheatley’s writing. The centerpiece is Wheatley seated at a small table surrounded by overflowing book shelves. Children from the center can recom- mend their favorite books by writing the book titles onto the painted books in the mural. Some of the children included the titles of books they want to write in the future. Johnson has another mural in an Old North Knoxville Baptist church. Her family has returned to Liberia, where she is the principal of a small school in Bong County.

As a community, we are fortunate to experience this renewed interest in murals. It feels good to unexpectedly encounter art. To repeatedly drive or walk on the same street every day, and then suddenly notice Hank William’s silhouette on a deserted building. It’s a surprise gift. Near by Charlotte and Chattanooga and Nashville have more public art, but stunningly, upon some of Knoxville’s unexpected treasures can be meaningful and memorable.

At the top of the stairs at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts lies islamic artist Ragnar Kjartsson’s piece, The Visitors, an experience not to be missed: it soothes, questions, and invites, most fervently, but not in a pressing way — more in an urgency of wonder. Outside the box of the gallery, you cannot see anything, but you hear a hum of something instrumental, maybe lyrical. One then enters to find all the walls filled with light-fitted projections of eight different — differing — musicians, populated in various rooms of a house. These players, various, as in breathing spirit, as in rhythm, are individually animating the space, with their bodies and sounds.

The house does not feel too large or lonely; it feels warm and cozy in those gallery walls, where the musicians’ symphonic harmonies, rounds, cords and discs, vocals and instru- mentals, are actively woven together in a single, undulating, flowing entity, formed as the musicians are connected to one another, in their separate rooms, only by headphones. Any tension is woven there, this being alone versus together, otherwise versus the collective, all of this is playing out. Whatever stress or tension could (does, always, universally) happen, in the human form of the gallery, it is kept out. Like a sacred space, it is the collective, meditative, and experiential. All of this is happening, where the musicians swell a powerful symphonic collective dinge, a “work song,” a chant, the song that gets you through a celebration song. The main refrain: “Once upon (I fall into) a feminine way....” (Which, I initially misheard as a return to “famous” ways, which would also fit the universe, as the collective is on an infinite garden, as in the garden, as in the human, as in the universe.)

There is a smoking priest, a guitarist in bed, a cellist at the top of the stairs. Ragnar sirmall ads vocals and acoustic guitar from a bathtub. There is another priest, moving the flowers and potted plants, asymmetrical, as they open across the gallery from one another. An accordion player sits by the windows, and of course, the guitarer, an electric guitarist, a lanky black man, in the study, a facing off with some Greco-Roman busts. While all of this is happening on the gallery’s interior-facing free-standing wall, people are sitting on the porch outside the house, listening, waiting, a sort of chorus: they are full of the small gestures of porch sitting. And the tangible visuals of the porch itself, its columns and railings, ledges and perches, the grass all around, a cannon being cleaned, maybe loaded, in the yard. They are actually listening, singing along, waiting for this crescendo, this happening inside the house, where a cathartic, sea-swelling, curling musical cascade of sound is playing out, between walls. We, the viewers, in the dark space of the gallery, are inhibiting this flowing, golden glowing liminal space between the musicians, in their individual perches, and the porch sitters, who are the guardians of what is happening inside. The Visitors is a group show for our collective viewing, listening, and feeling. As viewers, the experience of permeating or parabombing this path given to us, is soothing, meditative, and most of all, collective. The intimacy of occupying the gallery space with fellow viewers, fellow visitors, is warm, and feels like a sacred space, a living, breathing, and moving entity. Each visitor has agency to hover around (or not) in the space, to experience it, each taking away their own experience, shaped and marked by the other visitors, markedly collective, unique, and universally thus.

There is no urgency to leave the space of The Visitors, through it is possible to take you a “nugget of pure truth,” to quote Virginia Woolf, no matter the moment at which you enter, or how long you stay. The piece encourages all of this: one may happen next: to the musicians themselves, their settings, and cigarettes, as they sing and play their instruments and bow their heads and each wall, each Origami, its own meditation, a piece of writing, an attempt to wrangle them into print.

Two of the eight musicians are female: the ethereal impalpable accordion player, and the cellist on the leading also the stairs. In the midst of the swell, the cellist’s deep and lilting cello notes and the accordion player’s unique voice are head- turners, spine leaders. They are stars. They are all stars. “There are one stars, esplodgoudg around yous,” as they swell and swoop in the building crescendo, (punctuated by a bathtub-foot- step) by none other than Ragnar Kjartsson. There is also a girl with a guitar in a guitarist occupying one bedroom, who lies on her side, in the dark, in the box of the gallery, and notices her because he seems to be a liminal figure, like us, the viewers, but seemingly with less agency. An idolatry? Maybe not… we could enter into her psyche and think about the rhythms sounds she is feeling and hearing, just taking it in, breathing, being, how those are rhythms sounds and why, and the other sounds heard in any other room, to which only she is privy, of which she makes her own art.

At the climactic scene, she rides and comes down the stairs with the guitarist, continuing in song, following suite with all of the other musicians, as they gradually leave their rooms and spaces, and then later, the cellists leaves, as they all gather together, a powerful ritual of reassurance and hope and reality of that alive and well.

Elísabet Davids. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik


Ragnar Kjartsson. The Visitors, 2022. Nine-channel video projection, 64 minutes. Photo: Elizabeth Daniels. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik

Bridget Bailey is an artist and educator in Nashville, TN.
This winter, the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art presented Whole Cloth, a mid-career retrospective of Tennessee artist Herb Rieth’s textile based art. These pieces are dense, multi-faceted artworks that are auto-biographical, at times confessional, and serve as meditations on the intersections of art, music, literature, and history. Many of the pieces hang as flags or banners, calling to mind both the declarative nature of the flag as its most iconic symbol. There is a great deal of symbolic content in Rieth’s art, expressed through combinations of fabric, color fields, found objects, and moments of sudden representation. Yet one feels invited to meander through this work to discover the moments of humor and pathos, and to connect one piece to another in an investigation of narrative possibilities.

The use of clothing as textile elements extends beyond Rieth’s quilts, objects that capture an essence of the lives that once existed within their fabric. There is a tangible sense of that life in Rieth’s work as well, art which functions as both a literal and conceptual topography. In some pieces, such as 15 Keys / Jack of Diamonds, the artist appropriates verbs such as “she”, “the” and “her” to create a narrative arc that runs through the quilt, a storycapsule hiding on almost every square inch and weaving the pieces together.

The look of Rieth’s work proffers a story of survival and transformation, a narrative of transformation, a narrative of the fabric that makes possible the narrative of the clothing itself. Like a legend, the story is filled with intrigue.”

Rieth’s art, expressed through combinations of fabric, color fields, found objects, and moments of sudden representation.

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Adela Goldbard: Paraallegories
Jepson Center
Savannah, Georgia
December 2, 2016 - March 26, 2017

Ojos que no ven, corazón que no siente.
Eyes that don’t see, heart that doesn’t feel.
Out of sight, out of mind.

At this unique moment in U.S. political history, imagination, misapprehension, and a rattle-snake in the grass are all very much on our minds. The resultant vertigo, while not an aesthetic condition of the political works of artist Adela Goldbard, is critically addressed in her video series, Paraallegories. Goldbard has been working on this series of ten videos, of which four, Lobo, 2013, ATM, Casino Royale, and Microbus, all 2014, are on view at the Jepson Center in Savannah, Georgia, 2 December, 2016 through 26 March, 2017. In these visually striking, dream-like montages (if one were to dream in the language of photojournalism), Goldbard toggles truth and fiction in an interpretive study of Mexican mass media and folklore. She, like many artists of her generation, works on two sides of one border, residing in both Chicago and Mexico City.

Goldbard’s video montages mirror the complicated nature of political corruption, media coverage, and the Mexican Drug War, highlighting especially “events in which violence, protest, disidence, or repression make the news.” Independent of one another, Goldbard’s use of dark humor and sensationalist media techniques – technology set against nature and the aesthetically captivating display of fireworks and explosions, are arresting in their co-variation of true urgency and violent acts of prideful self-interest.

According to Telfair Museums’ press release, “Goldbard’s video series specifically references the Burning of Judas, a tradition of Catholic origin in which effigies of public figures, built after Judas Iscariot, are detonated in a ritual to allegorically get rid of the evil embodied by the traitor.” It is when we begin to look for the traitor that we are overwhelmed by an unsettling vertigo.

I find an interesting parallel between the precariousness of concealment and the sudden return to what could easily be viewed as Historical Painting, a genre defined by its subject matter rather than artistic style. There is even an oddly uncomfortable moment when, perhaps to the dismay of the artist, one of the actors breaks the fourth wall, peering back at the camera for direction.

It is clear that a great deal of labor and craft has gone into these short productions. They are, totally immersive, captivating and beautiful, but also grotesque and jarringly uncanny. It is this, however, that seems to mirror, or highlight so eloquently the disquieting tactics deployed by media, government, and cartel alike.

Lobo, 2013, 4k video projected in HD / stereo sound, 4:30 minutes.
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The Hurstly, Feiho, et al., AR, 2015, photostat print, 24 1/2 x 34 inches,
Grand Award Winner, 59th Annual Delta Exhibition.