Let’s face it: making art has its own set of challenges, but getting your work out there, looked at, reviewed, funded, exhibited, marketed, collected, or purchased – whatever fits your definition of being a working artist – can be really difficult. And when you can’t pay your rent with what you create in the studio, which is common for most of us, how do you find personal and professional growth opportunities in a 9 to 5 job that feels creative? Can you? If not, what else is out there for budding art professionals? Most people working at Number: Inc are artists ourselves, and these are burning questions that we want answered.

This issue, Art 101: Introduction to Art Career Practices, serves as a primer for new and emerging artists or anyone wanting to expand and grow as an art professional. We asked seasoned experts to contribute advice and insights based on their own experiences in an effort to provide constructive information to makers in the South as they develop their own careers. It is our hope that, no matter what part of the art ecosystem in which you find yourselves, you will discover something useful here to save and carry with you as you find your way.

Our contributors are happy to share with you the joys and realities as well as the nuts and bolts of their careers as a call to action for artists and artist professionals to sort through possibilities and find your way among the ranks of those you admire and respect. Whether your interests lie in gallery exhibitions, grant writing, performing, education or community engagement; where to begin or where to go based on where you are; our writers have provided a peek into their process and, hopefully, some inspiration as well.

Based on feedback from some of our dear readers, we are happy to announce that Number:101 kicks off our efforts to provide relevant, timely, useful professional practices information in each issue. Be on the lookout for our new column, Art 101, appearing in Number:102, Craft & The Creative South and subsequent issues. You will decide what we cover in our exciting new venture: we welcome topic ideas and questions from our readers, contributors and supporters in the South on a rolling basis about career development, working with materials, art making processes, and anything else you dream up about developing a successful art practice. We will begin publishing this column in our quarterly print publication but hope to expand and publish more often on our website as your requests come rolling in. Please email us or message us on Instagram any time, include Art 101 in the subject line, and let us know what’s on your mind. We look forward to hearing from you and learning with you.

Sincerely,
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Regional Update: Northwest Arkansas

The winter/spring gallery programming for Northwest Arkansas is proving to be exceptional. On February 8th, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (CBMAA) will open Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal... and it will run through April 20th. In addition, CBMAA will open The Momentary on February 22nd with the exhibition, State of the Art 2020. The exhibition will be on view at both The Momentary and CBMAA through May 24th. The Arts Center of the Ozarks has a solo exhibition by Fayetteville-based artist, Leah Grant. The show features a wide range of printmaking works and is on view until March 28th.

The Fine Arts Center Gallery at the University of Arkansas’ School of Art is currently showing Laleh Khorramian: Sentients. The exhibition features prints, paintings, textile works, and animations; and runs through February 23rd. Starting on March 6th and running through April 24th, the School of Art at the University of Arkansas will present the MFA Thesis Exhibitions for Fatemeh Abolbashari, Nicolette Bonagura, Thomas Coffey, Shelby Fleming, Ashley Kaye, and Anthony Kascak.

In Fort Smith, the Regional Art Museum in Fort Smith (RAM) will have three exhibitions on view this spring. We are the Music Makers: Preserving the Soul of America’s Music will run through March 8th; Nadia Lougin: Expressions of a Creative through April 2nd; and Maximum Exposure will remain on view until April 19th.

Marc Mitchell is an Associate Professor of Art at the University of Arkansas’ School of Art.

Regional Update: North Mississippi

At Southside Gallery in Oxford, Mississippi, artists Virginia Rougon Chavis and Brooke White present Sense of Place. Both artists are professors at the University of Mississippi, Chavis a lead faculty member in the Graphic Design Program and White the area head of the Imaging Arts Program. Chavis’s bright and colorful mixed media prints incorporate elements of French poster design with the landscape. Chavis’s work has been featured around the world, and she is a SEC-ALDP Fellow at the University of Mississippi. White’s reflective and somber landscapes were created by combining traditional and contemporary photographic processes. White’s work is exhibited at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in Louisiana. She received the Mississippi Arts Council Individual Artist Grant for 2019, and her work has been featured in several publications including Aint Bad Magazine. Their joint show will run from December 3rd, 2019 to January 11th, 2020.

The University of Mississippi Museum is featuring a joint show, Two Lives in Photography, highlighting the works of wife and husband artists Maude Schuyler Clay and Langdon Clay. Known for her Southern landscape photography, Maude’s work is exhibited in several collections around the world including The Museum of Modern Art in New York and The National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. Langdon’s photo work encompasses a wide range of subject matter, from the industrial to the natural, and is found in museums around the world. The exhibition will run from September 17th, 2019 to February 15th, 2020. This is the artists’ first joint show together.

In Tupelo, Mississippi, painter Philip Jackson is exhibiting work at the GumTree Museum of Art. Jackson is a professor at the University of Mississippi, leading the Painting Program. In this exhibition, Jackson’s floral works explore the impact of light and how it can elevate the mundanity in ordinary objects into something more. Jackson’s work has been exhibited in numerous exhibitions, nationally and internationally, and he has received grants from of the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation in Montreal, Canada and from the Mississippi Arts Commission. Jackson has also been featured in many art publications including Art in America. The show will run from December 3rd, 2019 to January 28th, 2020.

This November, the Starkville Area Arts Council and the Yoknapatawpha Arts Council held their annual Scrambled Art Bowl. The origin of this event lies in the football rivalry between The University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University and their yearly Egg Bowl showdown. Members from both councils selected the artworks that were exhibited at 929 Coffee in Starkville. The showcase ran from November 15th, 2019 to December 30th, 2019.

Olivia Whittington is a photographer and writer working in administration at The University of Mississippi Art & Art History Department.
Regional Update: Memphis

Memphis has a booming exhibition roster in March, so please take advantage of the numerous opportunities.

David Lusk Gallery will be exhibiting Deconstructed, an exhibition of work by local Memphian Catherine Erb until the 21st of March.

The Dixon Gallery and Gardens has hosted a wonderfully high rate of engaging work the past few months. Augusta Savage: Renaissance Woman, Under Construction: Collage from The Mint Museum, and William Eggleston and Jennifer Steinkamp: At Home at the Dixon will be on view until March 27th. Lawrence Matthews’ photography exhibition To Disappear Away: Places soon to be no more will also be on view until April 5th. The Interactive Gallery is also home to Kong Wee Pang’s Day of the Dreams, an exhibition that includes a modular mural design encouraging audience participation until March 8th.

A Journey Towards Self-Definition: African American Artists in the Permanent Collection will be on view at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art until May 10th.

The University of Memphis’ Fogelman Galleries of Contemporary Art are exhibiting To Wove Blue (Poema al tejido) that contains the work of contemporary Guatemalan artists and poets until March 13th. Following this exhibition, the galleries will be featuring an MFA thesis exhibition by artist Travis Washington entitled Skorg Roots Bare Strange Fruit as well as an undergraduate thesis exhibition including the work of Anna Hoard, Catt Vegioli, Elizabeth Rast, and Tracy Treadwell, which will have an opening reception on March 27th from 5 to 7 PM. Attending this opening will be a great way to support young and emerging artists in the Memphis community.

The Metal Museum will have two exhibitions opening in the month of March, including Tributaries, a selection of furniture works by Sophie Glenn opening on March 15th and Tradition of Excellence: Japanese Techniques in Contemporary Metal Art that opens on March 29th.

The Collective will continue to feature through the month of March the exhibitions The Auditory, which explores the representation of black artists in comics, illustrations, and other forms of popular media, as well as Sonikto: Modern Mysticism which is an exhibition of work by artists Amber George and Nubia Yasin that explores themes surrounding trauma and triumph.

Crosstown Arts will have Here Is Where We Meet, an exhibition of work by Dennis Congden and Susan Lichtman in their West Gallery until April 9th. In the East Gallery, an exhibition entitled STUDIOS will feature work by Keko Gonzalez until April 19th as well.

Clay Palmer is an MFA candidate in Painting at the University of Memphis. He received his BFA from the University of Tennessee at Martin in 2017.

Currently on display at The Frist Art Museum is J.M.W. Turner: Quest for the Sublime, an exhibition recounting career highlights of one of the greatest romantic artists in the Western canon. Known for his intense and turbulent landscape painting, William Turner’s dramatic evocation of evanescent light and hues has inspired awe for nature’s unmeasurable magnitude and power ever since. The work on view is selected from the Turner Bequest, a unique collection of Tate Britain containing the artist’s studio materials, which was bequeathed to the nation after his death in 1851. Sketches, watercolors, and large oil paintings give insight into Turner’s practice and the origin of his pursuit of the Sublime that eventually led to iconic masterpieces. David Blayney Brown, senior curator of 19th Century British art at Tate Britain, gave a lecture on the topic on the opening day of the exhibition.

Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery hosted Visionary Aponte: Art and Black Freedom. This traveling exhibition originally opened at Art Basel Miami Beach in 2017 and is curated by Édouard Duval-Carré and Ada Ferrer. It brought together twenty international contemporary artists who each present a piece based on the long-lost “Book of Paintings” by the Afro-Cuban revolutionary José Antonio Aponte (1780 - 1812). Among a wide array of subjects, the book contained representations of a diasporic black history that connects the shores of Cuba to faraway lands like Ethiopia and led officials to declare Aponte as the leader of an island-wide colonist rebellion. The book disappeared after his execution in 1812. Today, Visionary Aponte is a vibrant legacy to the document, one that strives to rethink historic black narrative and the role of art in creating social change.

Also on view during the first quarter of 2020 were two photography exhibitions with regional artists documenting life and change in the South. Throughout January, Zeitgeist Gallery featured Nashville Now: New Photographers, New Work in which nine local artists exhibited segments of their ongoing projects of capturing (extra)ordinary moments in Music City, including its growing pains, tourist traps, acts of activism, and ordinary suburbia. A wider, regional perspective is currently presented by Ground Floor Gallery with the juried show Stories of the South: A Photographic Exhibition. Selected images from photographers across the region highlight the deep-rooted traditions and changing culture of the American South. Curated by Matte Ott and Janet Yanez, this exhibit documents natural beauty alongside decaying infrastructure, unique communities with idiosyncratic conventions, and a challenged new generation who will shape their future. Ultimately, these exhibitions offered insights into the complexity, contradictions, and questions of sustainability of both the city and the region.

Lastly, Red Arrow Gallery presented a new solo exhibition by Ohio-based artist Dana Oldfather. Her jam-packed, abstract paintings layer familiar landscapes and interiors spaces with piles of bodies, objects, drips, and glazes. These ‘scenes-in-flux,’ as the artist describes them, question traditional ideas of femininity, motherhood, and the fragility of contemporary American life.

Inge Klaps was born and raised in Belgium and earned a MA in Art History at KU Leuven. Since 2015, she lives and works in Nashville.

Regional Update: Nashville


I'm Colleen McCartney, the Grants and Initiatives Manager at ArtsMemphis, where we work to sustain Memphis’s world-renowned cultural vitality and strengthen local communities through the arts. Our team manages over 160 grants, partners with over 70 art organizations and artist grantees, administers various initiatives and distributes more than $2.5 million in grant funding each year.

I came to ArtsMemphis through a different path than most might think. My background and education are in anthropology and museum studies, and I worked at several local museums before joining ArtsMemphis in 2017. While I don’t have an arts background, my focus in programming, community development and data collection work perfectly for working with grants and initiatives.

As a result of my distinctive path to the arts, I have three key things I would advise any professional starting out:

• Look for a job based off of skills you possess that are required for the position, not necessarily just a job title. Particularly with the arts and nonprofit sector, there are so many diverse positions that are available, you never know how you might fit into the mix.

• Always be willing to learn something new. A diverse range of skills is always a plus and it can also help uncover a new passion. I have taken several free online courses from MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) that have helped me discover new interests. It’s also a great way to get some business basics under your belt, which can be helpful as an artist.

• Networking is a necessary evil. On the positive side, networking can be fun! Go meet people at a gallery opening, an artist lecture series, an art-crawl night or somewhere else a bit untraditional. Especially in a “large-small city” like Memphis, it’s beneficial to make those connections.

The most impactful lesson I was ever given was from my late professor Dr. Robert Connolly. He would ask us on a regular basis, Why is what you are doing better than eating a plate of worms? It’s one of those questions you think has an obvious answer, because eating worms would be disgusting. Often, I replied sarcastically referencing gummy worms, the general taste of earthworms or the like. But he had a point. I might be incredibly passionate about my work and see the benefits to what I am doing, but if someone else can’t, how do I justify it? How do I describe why my work is important, necessary and vital to our society? If I can’t communicate why my work matters, how will I get others to experience it?

This statement is essential to my career now. I use it to frame how I talk to all our constituents. I talk to donors about why the arts in Memphis matter, and I talk to patrons about why they should experience the arts. I talk to grantees about how their work is vital to sustaining Memphis’s world-renowned cultural vitality. I think, especially as a nonprofit professional in the arts, you have to get used to talking to not just the art lovers but also people who (think they) have never experienced the arts, think the arts are extraneous, the arts are too expensive, or people who don’t understand why the arts are important. So, I challenge everyone to ask themselves: Why is what I am doing better than eating a plate of worms?

I promise that an ArtsMemphis grant application won’t ask you why your work is better than eating a plate of worms.
a plate of worms, but the same concept applies. We want to know about your work, why you do it and where you want to go with it. I know several artists who have used our applications to regularly refocus on their current projects and plans for the next year. Even if you are just starting out as a visual artist, I encourage you to apply for an ArtsAccelerator grant if you live and work in Shelby County. It offers professional experience talking about your work, exposure of your work to new people and feedback to improve artist statements and work samples.

We understand how hard it can be for emerging artists to get started, so a lot of organizations and opportunities focus on that group. At least one of the six ArtsAccelerator grants is awarded to an emerging artist every year! Just know that you are established enough to apply and, as I mentioned, it’s beneficial either way. When you apply for an ArtsAccelerator grant, keep these tips in mind:

• Read through the guidelines and eligibility, ask questions, seek opinions. A favorite part of my job is helping people with their application in any way that I can. It’s incredibly frustrating to read something that could have been corrected or changed, had I been asked to provide feedback.

• ArtsMemphis recruits judges for the ArtsAccelerator Grant that live outside of Memphis, so I can give you very straightforward feedback on your application before you submit.

• If you want feedback, contact me early. On the last day of a grant deadline, especially in the last few hours, my phone is ringing off the hook. I love helping everyone, and I do get to everyone who asks. But, if you want time to yourself then come in early, because I can offer you more if I’m not pressed with a line-up of questions.

• Write your application clearly. Assume the person reading your application has no clue who you are or anything about your work. Often judges read dozens of applications, so the more clear and straightforward you are, the more memorable you’ll be.

• If you’re not sure if you want to apply for a grant but are still looking to grow professionally or learn a new technique, several organizations in Memphis offer free or low-cost professional development opportunities including the business side of being an artist, round tables and critiques.

• Crosstown Arts. Shared Art Making is a membership-based workspace that provides anyone with common access to facilities and equipment in digital arts, music, woodworking, printmaking, and photography.

• Indie Memphis. Shoot & Splice is a monthly forum for filmmakers. There is a different topic and presenter each month.

• Momentum Nonprofit Partners. If you are looking to work in a nonprofit capacity, they have courses in all kinds of administrative functions for organizations.

There are so many pathways to use your art, your passion and your skills. I found mine at ArtsMemphis. Every day I work to sustain Memphis’s cultural vitality and strengthen local communities through the arts, and you better believe it will always be better than eating a plate of worms.

The CLTV. PRIMER offers free workshops that
An Application for Your Consideration, hehe

Liz Clayton Scofield is seeking like-minded oranges.

I’m writing a grant.

Here is the application.

**Objective:** In an effort to connect with others, share joy and ideas, grow love and community, I am releasing oranges into the world, distributing them in significant places and gifting them to cherished people. I am also collecting oranges: documenting the oranges that reveal themselves to me in my daily life, encouraging others to do the same and share them with me. We write poems to the oranges. We are planting seeds.

**Budget:** $1.25 per unit x 1000 units = $1250.

I am requesting $1250.

I will buy oranges, $1250 of oranges.

Sharpies and transportation in-kind.

(Sharpies stolen from work. Transportation donated by my own two feet.)

**Timeline:** Time, as a structure we live within in the United States, is a construct of capitalism. Time is units of labor, multiplied by the base economic value of services exchanged, to equal the compensation for this exchange, aka a salary or wage, or otherwise the worth of one’s contributions as deemed societally.

I desire that this project resists these notions of value operating in other understandings of “time.” Measuring the distance between a ripe orange and another succumbed to rot, not in minutes, but rather how many walks I have taken with you in the in-between and beyond. No deadlines, no narrative of progress. Rather, nonlinear, circuitous, repeating, varied and multiple iterations, layering, unfolding within spaces where I feel boundaries of space and time and distances between you and me dissolve.

This body of work will be completed both immediately upon transfer of funds, while simultaneously unfolding over the duration of my lifetime, in addition to reaching back into the past long before I ever held an orange in my palm or submitted this fictional application requesting funds.

**Projected outcomes:** I will write poetry on the oranges and disseminate them.

I will not claim ownership of the oranges or the poems inscribed into their peels.

This simple gesture is the most meaningful art-gesture I can think of making, of ever making... mostly. Other than loving. Probably. Properly. Trying. Learning.

I do not want you to grant me your money to make anything less meaningful than giving you an orange. An orange to be peeled, consumed, discarded, redistributed, or to rot, to bury, to cherish, to love, to let.

Nothing more meaningful than the love exhaled in our conversations shared in fruit, marked in pulp.

She will rub a cross section of an orange on my body, and the scent marks me. Isn’t this how art unfolds?

You don’t think this is worth your money. You’re having a hard time envisioning a “return on investment.” You request measurable outcomes. I offer a measurement of juices dripping from my clenched fist, but you sigh.

I understand. It’s hard to quantify, to pin down. I continue to resist your notions of productivity through “measurable outcomes,” “returns on investments.” You know, deliverables.

Delivering $1,250 of oranges to a doorstep, perhaps mine, or perhaps an unexpected doorstep.

Florida Fruit Shippers will deliver 60 oranges hand-packed the day they are picked, fresh from Florida orange trees, to your door for only $82.99 (plus $12.99 shipping). Can you taste the difference? Hand-picked, hand-packed, with care.

I’m not interested in a product, not in packages. (Well, maybe a different kind of package.)

**Grant committee member:** Why do you keep writing about oranges?

Me: I’m not writing about oranges. I don’t even know what an orange is. What is an orange?

I never wanted to explain to you what an orange is, after all. You can Google that, you know.

(Here is one representation of an orange: [Imagine a drawing of an orange on a small piece of lined paper ripped from a pocket-sized notebook, signed with a heart, taped to a wall beside a bed.])

I don’t want to sell you a picture or a sculpture of an orange. I just want to share an orange with you. I want us to be in study of how the orange feels in the space between us, how its scent fills the air and then our lungs at a specific moment in time: this present. A gift of being here with you and learning. The orange, a gift like the present, like an unfolding of an experience. There is not a price to mark on the experience of tasting with you.

When two palms hold a single orange, fingers graze each other, overlap, intertwine.

It isn’t about the oranges. It was never about the oranges. (It’s always about the oranges.)

Five years ago, I left my art education feeling burnt out and then displaced. I moved to a new city where I didn’t know anyone after school, and then to a farm, and then to another new city. During this time, I juggled freelance gigs trying to make enough money.
to get by. I accumulated debt moving from city to city.

I certainly can wax poetic about queer strategies for sustainable creative lives (redefining success and value, living artfully and playfully, and creating interdependent communities, etc.), but the feelings of inadequacy from the failure to achieve the capitalist myth of “success” are a Sisyphian hangnail. Relearning Ways to Be is a Practice, not a Product.

Queer strategies exist at intersections and in contradication. Within but Not-Of. Tension and Release. Orgasmic.

I’ve been experimenting with strategies of how to live a life for as long as I’ve been alive.

I want to resist the notion that my value is based on external markers of productivity and success. I don’t want to define myself through labor or work or traditional ideas of success. I want somehow to work less, play more, and afford living in our hypercapitalist work-obsessed society, while participating in vibrant art and queer communities that provide support and care to nourish the growth of ideas, love, and learning to those involved.

Like other myths of capitalism, the myth of Going-It-Alone won’t serve us so well. Going-It-Alone is a strategy to keep us divided. Scarcity Mindset and Competition isolate us from one another. Resources are actually abundant, but capitalism limits our access to them. Those of us with access to resources through institutions or otherwise can co-opt and redistribute them.

(Here is another representation of an orange: [Imagine a glistening sphere dripping in goo. This, too, is an orange, unexpected, preserved, a magical gift.]

Two years ago, I gave an experimental lecture on wandering and transformational sculpture, ending by offering the small group of attendees oranges, inviting them to collaborate in making Transformational Orange Sculptures. This offering was an attempt to connect to others.

I offer you an orange because I love you, and I want us to figure out how to live beautifully together.

Sometimes I get tired, and then I see an orange peel sleeping on the sidewalk. Oranges always remind me of exactly what I need to know in any moment. Now, to rest.

A deliverable: a love letter from me written to you and mailed from my house down the street to your house, but along the way, it journeys through the USPS and has many more stories to tell of its adventures than the words I put inside it when it finally makes its way to you. All at the low price of a 55 cent forever stamp and cost of materials.

I’m lying in bed, whispering to an orange resting patiently on the pillow next to me: “What are models of interdependent, supportive, collaborative art communities? How do we share resources and strategies to make more room for each other? How can we co-opt resources from institutions to support ourselves, our making, and one another?”

The orange responds in knowing silence. I exhale.

I continue, excitedly: “How do we uphold queer ethics (I’m thinking of ethics based in liberation, transformation justice, kindness, and symbiotic support systems) and resist power structures that want to prevent us from making?” Then falling into silence, I ponder with the orange, breathing into this space that we hold.

(Here, again, orange: [Imagine a bowl filled with petrified citrus, varying in shape, kind, color, a range of stages of rot.]

David Robbins draws on the metaphor of the king and the jester in Concrete Comedy: to be the jester is to give up ever achieving the power of the king, but by being the jester, you access a different kind of power.

I’m pretty sure I’d like to keep laughing.
One thing that any arts-related person, either employed by or volunteering for the field-at-large, can agree on: artists play a role in society. Cliché, right? This summation fails to encompass the complicated relationship between how vital and yet how often overlooked creative professionals are when it comes to our cultural and societal preservation, growth, and collectively held futures. There have been so many words and intellectual jargon wrapped around this concept, this need, the gap that may exist and how to fix it, that I won’t attempt to recreate any of that. What this piece will do is give you an overview of some of the moves being made in Louisiana, along with a challenge to you to take up the mantle in your own communities and charge forward.

The program I oversee for Louisiana’s Office of Cultural Development in the Division of the Arts is a creative place-keeping program using arts and culture as economic development tools and community development assistance. States don’t often have statewide programs within the arts that facilitate this with the exception of the many different types and sizes of grant funds that are out there. With communities looking to move forward; grow; retain talent; attract new talent; preserve their histories while also interpreting it all appropriately for their present; safeguard and perpetuate traditions; along with so much more, arts and culture provide a space where individual identities aren’t compromised but are instead woven into a mosaic that strengthens every component of life. But what does this have to do with economic development? Or the role of the artist?

Let’s use board development as an example [quick side note: you’re going to want to check out Revitalize Or Die when you have a moment]. The discussion about building out a healthy and diverse group of folks typically revolves around community members that can actively contribute either through time or dollars; won’t be dead weight, miss meetings, or fail to answer emails; hold positions helpful to the overall mission; and (hopefully) work well together. In many of these conceptualized “board rooms,” artists are simply not at the table. They might be used, engaged, or employed to complete whatever projects or vision this board has in mind, but many times they are not initially involved in the planning.

I’ll say it plainly: this has to change. In Louisiana, we are changing it.

So, what type of work are we talking about? Where does the artist/maker need to be included? Developing public art plans. Networking within government structures to build relationships so that projects can happen and happen quickly. Saving historic buildings to activate them into productive spaces. Getting people together in a room for the first time in a long time. The cyclical nature of this Good Work will always repeat itself, because there will always be this type of work to do and new people to include in it and inactive folks to engage with again. You dream it, it can happen. So, then what? How do we quantify the growth and stats that result from these collective actions? How do we identify data and metrics that can prove the worth of incorporating them when it comes to unwieldy forces like arts and culture? What role can an individual artist play in these lofty topics? The Big Question: How do you even start?

Louisiana is known for many things, and the 106 current Cultural Districts showcase the best of these. You can find any of the major highlights of our arts and culture landscape within these cities, towns, and neighborhoods. But not all communities are eating beignets for breakfast and snatching beads out of the air by lunch. Our creatives in these communities reveal the diverse cultural depths of the region each is nestled in, pulling out treasures and tragedies that have shaped the unique footprint of all of the
people, products, and places that we’ve called home for hundreds of years. They are preserving buildings, asking hard questions around development, getting together to sustain language and dialects, training new artists, honoring traditions, and constantly and consistently (possibly most importantly) producing. These Cultural Districts are in all stages of this type of work, and they do it in 106 individually beautiful ways. The strongest of them have recognized and elevated their creatives to a position equal to that of any other contributor, and it shows.

But guess what? If there isn’t space for you, create some. Creatives, listen up. Assume your role. Take your position. This past year, spending time with visionaries like Jamie Bennett from ArtPlace America, Pam Breaux of NASAA, and artist/educator Xavier Cortada of Cortada Productions out of Miami, along with so many others from our own state like Jönathan Foret of the South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center in Houma, Brian Davis with the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation, Grammy winner Sean Ardoin of Lake Charles, Tori Davis of Ruston Main Street, and award-winning visual artist George Marks of Arnaudville, has cemented the call to arms for artists and makers alike: get in formation! Queen Bey was talking to y’all, and to all of us makers. Your job – dare I say it, your calling – is to use your particular skill set to help the community where you’re currently living and creating in order to see life, possibilities, issues, and victories in the same revolutionary way that Technicolor changed black-and-white television.

Artists and makers new to the game: no connection is a bad connection. Get out of your studio or apartment or day job and meet people. Learn who your local, regional, and state arts organizations and advocates are and what they are up to. Creatives that are burnt out and tired: find a new passion project. Train, don’t just execute. Speak and teach and lead. Ask questions. This work that we are doing is an exciting and lovely jumble of skill sets, backgrounds, dreams, and know-how. Communities truly need and require everyone, because nothing can be accomplished in a silo. If you’re wondering how the body of paintings you’re frantically trying to finish for a show next month plays into this overall patchwork of economic development and community growth, look no further than the attendees to that show. They will drive there (gas), they will probably eat or drink before or after (supporting the local economy), they will buy a piece of artwork (sustaining the creative economy), and they will most likely engage in another activity or event that is clustered around the same time as your art show. This domino effect is something that you can trace in your own patterns of activity and then use as a tool to show how these individual actions roll up into a vibrant and successful Place.

A few of the success metrics we use to judge the effectiveness of our program center around buildings and sales of original artwork. But the best practices that our districts exhibit and strive to accomplish go much further than these two numbers. Some things you can keep an eye on in your own community are:

1. Efforts contribute to the public’s education and awareness of arts/culture
2. How the work changes the economy, business community, occupancy rates, jobs
3. Community identity formation, exploration, promotion
4. Strategic partnerships, starting with public-private but going further than that into innovative relationships
5. Inclusive cultural planning and sustainable environments for artists to produce within
6. Accessible events and venues

There’s so much more, but the great news is you don’t have to do this alone! Pick something that resonates, and go with it. To quote one of our newest Cultural Districts, “If a place is worth living in, it’s worth working on, for, and within.” So, let’s be about the work.
There’s a romantic idea about being an artist. You may envision a French garret stuffed with canvases and a painter dreamily waiting for their muse to provide inspiration. Or a café crowded with artists drinking the night away excitedly discussing philosophical matters. Or perhaps a chic New York City art gallery filled with clients clamoring to pay in the high six-figures for an artist’s work. For some, I imagine these stories exist, but for most it’s about going to bed at a decent hour to rise the next morning and slog away in a converted space (inspired or not), followed by marketing on the computer in hopes of selling work that will pay the mortgage. I fall into the less romantic category, and I’m here to share some thoughts about becoming a fine artist with anyone considering this deeply gratifying but not always easy field. I encourage you to share this article with anyone who might have an interest in making art—no matter their age or experience level.

Since earning my BFA from the University of Georgia, I have worked in various art-related positions in New York City, London, Florence, Italy, Los Angeles and Nashville. These jobs include fabric and fashion designer, graphic designer, art gallery director, advertising photographer, commercial illustrator, landscape designer, interior color consultant, fine art painter, sculptor, art teacher, leader of art trips abroad and writer. Because of my array of experiences in the art field, I feel comfortable stating that there are many different ways to express yourself as an artist and get compensated too—and many more positions that I have not experienced. Some are highly lucrative salaried jobs (art director, website developer, animator, art professor, etc.) while others are riskier freelance opportunities, such as photographer, illustrator, or what I will discuss here—fine artist.

I am a tremendous believer in attending art school to learn from experienced educators, but if you cannot afford the time or tuition, don’t worry; there are other avenues. Literally thousands of people without formal art degrees (who are self-taught or take local, non-matriculating online classes) are augmenting their income or supporting themselves with their passion for art. With professional art teachers selling instructional videos online and artists sharing what they know on YouTube, a person can learn a great deal about art and make their first creations right in their own living room.

Outsider or intuitive art (artwork beyond the realm of the mainstream art world) mixed with an entrepreneurial spirit can be a powerful combination! You can see numerous examples of this on the Internet, and there’s even a museum for this genre in Chicago, Intuit: The Center for Intuitive or Outsider Art. With the advent of YouTube and social media platforms, art fairs, pop-up shows, etc., there are thousands of...
On Being An Artist—At Any Any Time

I've watched toxic pigments (high above their art) are using. I've seen artists sprinkle but don't understand the tools they are using. I've watched YouTube classrooms is that inex- pensive to use. One of the greatest risks materials can be toxic and danger-

Safety is important too. Many art restorers (years from now) will curse shortsighted. You may become an art should I care if it's archival? Don't be pedantic, but being an art teacher, I cannot emphasize enough the impor-
tance of learning how to use your tools safely and in an archival fashion.

I recently saw someone state online that it was okay to paint acrylic gesso on top of an old oil painting and begin a new painting in acrylic on top of it—not an archival practice! If you cannot attend art school with access to valid information, I suggest turning to reput-
able websites such as the compa-
nies who make art materials—they are great resources'. You may think, My art isn’t selling now anyway—why should I care if it’s archival? Don’t be shortsighted. You may become an art star. Don’t be the artist that an art restorer (years from now) will curse for using cheap materials that were used wrongly. You want your work to last far beyond your lifetime.

Safety is important too. Many art materials can be toxic and danger-
ous to use. One of the greatest risks of YouTube classrooms is that inex-
perienced artists create many of the videos. They often have great ideas but don’t understand the tools they are using. I’ve seen artists sprinkle toxic pigments (high above their art) without using masks. I’ve watched them use blowtorches next to flam-
ammable liquids and heat encaustic wax in closed spaces with no respiratory masks or ventila-
tion. Please educate yourself on the safest use of your materials.

Once you feel confident about how to use your mate-
rials correctly and in an archival fashion, you are on your way. Learn the principles of art and elements of design. Understand how to create strong composi-
tions, consider the rule of thirds and odds, study color theory and color mixing, then move deeper into your content. What is it you want to say with your art? What mood do you want to evoke? Do you want to express beauty through a painted seascape or make an environmental statement by creating a sculpture from litter found in that same seascape? There are no wrong answers—you are the creator here.

Leon Trotsky said, Art is not a mirror to hold up to

multimedia and conceptual art in the 20th century, art has become inextricably tied to social change. It's easy to imagine how to make money with paintings and sculptures, but how does an artist earn money in less traditional genres?

Conceptual artists, for example, can get compensated through grants, fellowships, sponsorships, paid resi-
dencies, or, like an ephemeral artist, they can sell the documentation of their work (think Andy Goldswor-
thy). Some conceptual artists keep a day job so they can make their art without worrying about sales for fear the monetization of their art might interfere with the integrity of their work.

No matter what genre you choose to work in, there are many steps to becoming a professional artist. This could range from getting your busi-
ness cards printed to creating a consistent body of work, from writing an artist’s statement to the framing and presentation of your work, from building your website and social media platforms to writing grants and entering shows, from writ-
ing contracts for commissions to working with public art committees, from bookkeeping and paying sales tax to crating, shipping and installa-
tion. Like anything involving sales, it’s a business.

There’s much more to this career than painting all day to your favorite music—much, much more. But even if you’re starting late in life, don’t be put off by this. It’s easy to learn and you can catch up quickly if you are devoted to the process.

I’ve met a great number of people who wanted to be artists but were told it wasn’t a practical way to make money, so they followed another career path. These people are now looking toward retirement and want to circle back to their first love—ART. They fear that it’s too late to begin or to make money as an artist. I’m here to tell you it is never too late. Just think of Grandma Moses who had her first show at seventy-eight years old, followed shortly afterwards with an exhibit at the MOMA in New York City. Some of my students are beginning to paint and sell their work in their sixties. Please don’t limit yourself by ageism or negative thinking.

Once you’ve figured out your voice and style, medium of choice and subject matter, begin creating work that moves you without consider-
ation of what is trending or perceived important in the art world. If you make art because it means something to you, then I guarantee you that your art will resonate with someone else as well— someone who may actually purchase it! You may want to make art for personal satisfaction and give it away or you may want to have your work in fifteen galleries and five museums. What-
ever your goal is, I suggest that you follow your heart, be professional, kind, fearless, always archival and most importantly, be yourself, no apologies!

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Rachael McCampbell, Clouds That Whisper Your Name, 2020, oil and cold max medium on panel, 48" x 24". Photo courtesy of the author.

Rachael McCampbell, Xeromicro Landscape, 2020, oil and cold max medium on panel, 48" x 24". Photo courtesy of the author.

Rachael McCampbell, Clouds That Whisper Your Name, 2019, oil on panel, 36" x 36". Photo courtesy of the author.

Rachael McCampbell, Flowrings, 2019, oil on galvanized steel, 3D Mobius strip suspended from ceiling. Photo courtesy of the author.

[1] State art commissions with links to local programs, classes, grants can be found in Tennessee (tnartscommission.org), Arkansas (arkansasarts.org), Alabama (arts.state.al.us) and Mississippi (arts.ms.gov).

“Finally, an assignment that I’ll actually enjoy doing!” a student blurted loudly at the tail end of a class-wide drawing demo I was wrapping up. Swallowing my irritation while trying to maintain my best Mister Rogers voice, I said, “Sometimes, we keep our thoughts inside of our heads.” You would think this sort of interaction would be rare at the college level, but it is, in fact, not. I am not sure whether my wife awaits my return home more for me or for the story of whatever ridiculous moment happened in one of my classes. Teaching is not for everybody. It requires an even disposition, patience, and a buoyant sense of humor. It is also one of the most rewarding things I can think to do with my life. It affords a private kind of pride, seeing a student blossom and evolve in such a short period of time, not to mention those rare occasions (always years later) when you get wind of your influence on a successful former student. In teaching, I can trust that every day will be unique. Even though academia is growing increasingly inhospitable to the humanities daily, I know that I will not wake up in the middle of the night wondering if it matters.

As a blue-collar, first-generation college grad anxious to find a way making both art and a living, teaching seemed inevitable as a career path. Now, I have been teaching at the college level for seventeen years and have tenure tucked safely in my back pocket. Over the last ten years, I have been the one on the hiring side, as both a search chair and committee member, and have seen hundreds of applicants in that time. Because of experience, I am here to provide some insight from the inside. How do you get your foot in the door? How can you land that interview to finally show that you are ready and eager for a teaching position?

1. Teaching requires teaching experience.

I look through dozens of applications of artists applying for teaching gigs with zero experience in a classroom. Only endowed universities hire art stars with no credentials other than their creative production. Most hire professors who can make an impact with students (more on this below). Seek these opportunities out no matter how seemingly insignificant to your CV. Teaching in grad school as an “instructor of record” is a great move, and teaching full-time is ideal, but if you cannot land the paid experience, then volunteer your time in any classroom you can manage. We all start somewhere. When we see your teaching philosophy (and yes, you will have to write one) it will not be full of conjecture, it will be full of experience.

2. Get the right degree.

In most academic settings now, it is virtually impossible for us to hire someone without a terminal degree in our specific field. To do so would put our accreditation in peril.

3. Make the work and display it.

Whether you produce poetry, performance, paintings, whatever — lead with it when you apply, even if the institution does not tout itself as a research institution. The very first thing I look at is the professional portfolio; it will tell me the most about a candidate’s artistic ideology, tastes, and potential emphases in pedagogy. We look for the best, most consistent work that could add diversity and a refreshing voice to our department.

4. Show the work.

Once I have established the candidate is creating interesting work, I look for the evidence that they are putting it out into the world. If the position requires teaching alone, we still investigate the candidate’s research activity. Why? Because you are a professional artist first, and thereby demonstrating to students that art is not created in a vacuum. If it is tenure track, the creative hermits do not get tenure — they get fired. The old adage “publish or perish” still rings true.

5. Cover letter blues.

I cannot tell you how many cover letters I read that only talk about the dissertation or research. Guess what — you can tell me all about that in the artist...
statement I skim. I will spend more time with the application when we have made a shortlist, and you make a shortlist by telling me directly why and how you are qualified for the call. Two pages maximum, one page is on fleek.

6. That jerk you work with.
Yes, we absolutely Google you. Do not be fooled – we will do a deep dive into what kind of persona you project. Whether you want to or not, you will be working with faculty closely on service, participating in democratic decision making, and shaping impressionable (mostly) young minds. Do not be an asshole. At the very least, clean up your online messes.

7. Know the game, Homefry.
What does the department emphasize? What is their student makeup and dominant demographic? How do you fit in the identity of the region? What are some changes or challenges that the institution faces? Do your homework and set yourself apart by being able to speak to how you will benefit the place. Do this in the cover letter and then in the interview.

8. Charisma counts.
The arts are under attack everywhere as enrollment declines, workforce-focused politicians cut public education like soft cheese, and capitalist drones are our administrators. The “well rounded” mission of the liberal arts is undergoing a trade school makeover. In the last gasps of the liberal arts death rattle, can you recruit and keep what students we already have committed? It is shaky ground right now for the humanities. We cannot hire and keep someone who makes a classroom miserable.

9. Sorry, but we are all the same.
Academia is still full of what outsiders think of as conformists. The Internet may love the avant-garde, but the old white men still rule the ivory tower. A candidate who applies wearing a shirt stamped with “fuck you, you fucking fuck” and toting a portfolio consisting of Advent calendars formed by their own pubic hair might not jive in the rural South. Academic artists show in museums, private and public galleries, and juried exhibitions; it’s old-fashioned, but has a paper trail. And while we are chatting about conformity: adhere to the application instructions on the job call. For baby Buddha’s sake, how are you going to expect students to follow directions if you can’t?

10. Stick with it.
Don’t be too discouraged. I have seen committees make wise, resolute decisions and I have seen them make absurd ones based on fickle moods. Know, however, that education is an ever-revolving door. Regardless of what you will hear about the increasing rarity of tenure track jobs, positions do open up — and they open up often. The first step is becoming a qualified candidate. Keep producing and get your valuable work out there. Hiring committees look for quality work, great teaching, and collegiality, while administrators want thoughtful, professional, and motivated long-term hires. You can work your way up once your foot is in the door. If you are willing to pick up and take a chance — it is very likely you will land your dream teaching gig.

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On Teaching, Drag, & Crying in Parking Lots

My name is John, most of the time, and for the rest of the time my name is Moth. I have worked as an art teacher in different camps, schools, and museums since around 2013. I have been a drag queen since 2016. I have a pink house, a handsome partner, and four cats. I teach kids of all ages throughout the week — from little babies to early teens. By day I am teaching my kiddos about printmaking, papermaking, drawing, painting, sculpture, and anything else we are interested in — sometimes we even make soap. By night, I am rearranging my face in the mirror, twirling on a stage, giving a midnight lecture on queer history, or making a new wig out of yarn and old videotapes. I also paint and write a lot.

I would say that I traverse many worlds throughout the day.

In my early career I made efforts to stifle my loud and proud extra visible queerness before walking in the door. I woke up early to get the paint off my nails. I worried that if people knew that drag was a big part of my art career then they may assume that I am a party animal and a heavy drinker. Only one of those things is true. I worried that if I explained myself as a queer, nonbinary, hyper-liberal freedom fighter it may be too much for the nerves of the daylight crowd.

As time went on, I felt a fear compounding within me. I love teaching kids, I love being a drag artist, and I love living in Memphis. How could I continue to do all three without one unraveling the other? What is the glass ceiling for a drag queen who prefers a PG-13 rating? How long could I work in education in the South before it all blows up, leaving me with nothing but an unpaid mortgage and a mouth full of ashen dreams?

There was a time when I found myself working in environments where there was no way to be myself. The chaos and confusion. At the time I had been searching for a new “grown up job” and one became available to me. I grabbed at the chance. I lasted a few months, but not without mental and spiritual damage sustained.

If I could astral through time and sit in the car with myself, crying in the parking lot of that former employer, I would say this: Hey starlight, those folks in there, they aren’t going to get it. While I know that you don’t like to give up on the humanity of others, you are going to have to make an exception and get yourself out of here. You walk in fear every day. When you leave you will promise yourself that we will not arrive here again. There are bigger, better, and more beautiful places to be.

Thankfully I don’t have to travel back in time to convince myself to quit. All it took was a Solange Knowles song and a couple of minutes of rocking back and forth under a table in the basement. The worst thing about navigating in this environment was that for months I felt like a failure for not being able
to make it work. In all my cleverness, I was too stupid to find a livable angle. This is not what Carly Simon wanted for us.

I quit. Then I worked several jobs to get myself through. Including lots of drag shows, loads of walking ghost tours downtown, and an abundance of peanut butter sandwiches. I taught any class that I could. I saved money. I spent a lot of time looking into what part of the field would be exciting and inclusive. A public school would never take me, and I did not have the experience needed to open my own studio yet.

After the year of one thousand gigs I found my way into another museum, this time working officially as their art teacher. This time in a secular organization with contemporary-minded people.

For the first time, I was encouraged to bring myself to work every day, which changed everything in my life. I am able to navigate my experience as a queer person who is a teacher on my own terms. I am allowed to prove my wits and talents. That acceptance is all I needed, and what every young queer person in the field deserves.

I am lucky to have found a soft, supportive place to land, as I have spoken with so many who live under different stars: a woman who had to go back in the closet so she could transfer into a well-paying job, a nonbinary person of color who had been turned away from several jobs before the interviews had even begun. I have yet to meet a trans person who works full-time in children’s education. These stories should wound us. In a world that needs good teachers, how rotten it is to have so many cut off at the knees.

I do not know that I have any sage wisdom, but I can speak on my singular experiences. With the support of my organization, I was able to not only teach with my painted nails and flowered hats, but I have been able to bring Moth along for some educational adventures as well! From lectures on drag history to literacy programs, I have been able to bebop around in a big blue wig to entertain and inform families of all kinds. Having the space to bring all my vocations together generated the birth of a new vision for myself as an artist, teacher, writer, performer, and person. I am at my happiest when I get to stand in the intersection of these little worlds. As time goes on, I feel them all getting closer together. I hope that when the time comes it can all form a singularity and birth the next vision for my life.

Until then, I can only offer these words. I hope that there is a darling soul who may find them useful.

You have every right to stand tall no matter where you are or what you do. The world may try to frighten dignity out of you. I promise that you have the power to resist it. Look to Marsh P. Johnson, Walt Whitman, and Rebecca Sugar for guidance.

This generation of queer people are practically a new species. Many of us didn’t spend our young adult-hoods in closets that turned into unhappy heteronormative marriages. Less of us have been chased by men in trucks with baseball bats. When I look at the crowd, I see a hundred shining eyes ready to invigorate the world with new ideas. I see light in us every day.

In closing, I can only say, if you are reading this and it is reflective of any part of your journey; I love you, and I will always believe in your power.
On a Mission: Artists and Institutional Imperatives

Benjamin Hickey is the curator of exhibitions at the Hilliard Art Museum in Lafayette, Louisiana.

Two years ago, the Hilliard Art Museum celebrated its 50th anniversary on the campus of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Milestones like this often prompt reflection, and this was very much the case in the curatorial department. We began to review the collection and rethink the overall exhibition program with the goal of developing a more clearly stated institutional identity that would set us apart from other institutions. We needed a concept that would provide us with a clear decision-making logic for the dynamic art history we are recording.

With this in mind, I was tasked with creating a theoretically sound explanation of our mission, and quickly discovered how difficult it was to evaluate the Hilliard’s 50-year corpus of cultural output. How should we create a critical position for our institution? Is there one that embraces our past while making the future more coherent and unified? After seeing the emphasis on professional development for artists within this issue of Number, I realized that curator/artist interactions formed the basis for our institutional decisions. During the writing process, I recognized this article is a personally revelatory preamble to my ongoing research and writing about canon building within the art historical tradition.

Before I proceed any further, I think it is important to acknowledge there is no immutable, naturally occurring art history. My personal mien, institutional resources, and intellectual influences have put me on my present course. The baseline for my, and ultimately the Hilliard’s, conception of art history is Kenneth Frampton’s seminal essay, Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance. Frampton embraced modernism in architecture, but not its universal qualities or placelessness. I am adapting his thinking and applying it to art history.

In simplest terms, the Hilliard’s art history will be one with a Louisiana and Southern perspective; the perspective of our community. The Hilliard’s projects will address what is most urgent to our audience in an era of culture when linear historical narratives and cohesive artistic movements, while they may be recognizable in one form or another, do not drive critical dialogs surrounding culture. Accordingly, finding similarities amongst disparate art histories and viewpoints will be the Hilliard’s emphasis. It will be what defines us.

The net effect will be an institutional program as diverse and multifaceted as the history of Louisiana. In the future there will be sustained cultural dialogues with Canada (francophone and otherwise), the Caribbean, the United States in general, and the world at large with the goal of the Hilliard’s audience seeing themselves within a variety of intersecting art histories. The intellectual framework for my ideas is an intuitive synthesis of Foucault’s analysis of knowledge and relationships of power, Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic conception of culture, and Glissant’s Poetics of Relation.

When visitors see themselves in our exhibitions, they
are more apt to see others as well, especially if those “others” are in the next gallery seeing themselves. An exhibition program with this type of seeing in mind creates empathy (which feels like part of a museum’s civic duty) and builds consensus about what types of culture define our era and locale. Information about what is relevant will be primarily gleaned via institution-sponsored programs and activities. While this is a relatively populist approach to thinking about the canon of art history, the Hilliard will still be defined by professional connoisseurship while following the developing trends in museums of showing a diverse range of artists and improving interactivity with audiences. I feel this is exceedingly important because the concept of looking at art history inter-regionally, in collaboration with audiences, is a fairly unique institutional imperative.

Why is this important for artists to hear? Because institutions use ideas like these to build all kinds of relationships, particularly ones with artists. Artists are selected in terms of how they complement a museum’s overall meta-narrative. It is imperative artists understand this and ask what an institution’s overarching goals are. Perhaps, “how does my work fit into your program?” is a better question than, “how do I exhibit here?” Asking that kind of question could more easily lead to building multifaceted relationships with institutions over the long term. Discussions along these lines are apt to create conditions whereby exhibitions substantively address the content of an artist’s work more thoroughly and perhaps from a slightly new perspective than might otherwise be expected.

Being involved in dialogue with a curator or other arts professional in a manner in which an artist is not asking for something tangible like an exhibition or acquisition will almost certainly be more rewarding than something that feels purely transactional. For example, without conversation many artists often take the metaphorical potential of an exhibition space for granted. They do not consider how the physical arrangement of their work in a space should be used to amplify the meaning of their work rather than being a rote presentation of their practice where little is gained by looking at more than a single work of art. Conversation can lead to insights that might represent a sea change for an artist, and potentially a curator.

Thinking about an institution’s imperatives or mission could be the nudge an artist needs to gain access to higher-level thinking within their practice because they may have to address how they are interconnected to new histories, ideas, or places in addition to what they are trying to achieve individually. In a way, this is what I am doing as a curator as I grapple with altering how my institution articulates itself. As a result, I am increasingly interested in artists who seem to be doing the same.
Non-Traditional, Artist-Run Spaces

As a touring artist and performer, I have relied on every type of space to house my work, often for just one night, with generous and open arms to help me make gas money and put food in my belly until the next stop at the next space the next night. I have performed in venues, art galleries, churches, parks and warehouses, gorgeous theatres and small black boxes, institutions, museums, and homes. I am a non-discriminating touring artist: if you will host me and support my work with a stipend or a cut of the door, I will be there with my trusted overhead projector to give you my best offering of song and shadow puppetry, dancing, and painting my face for you.

I have found myself in some strange, unforgettable places on the road, like the back of a donut shop in Nebraska where I played an all-ages show, or the time places on the road, like the back of a donut shop in Nebraska where I played an all-ages show, or the time I have found myself in some strange, unforgettable shadow puppetry, dancing, and painting my face for you.

and I especially love non-traditional artist-run spaces that are made for and by artists who are making their own way on their own terms. In the following, I will discuss three models of spaces: artist- and community-driven, live/work, and artist-driven spaces: Rhizome DC and 2640 Space.

Underground spaces helped raise me in Albuquerque, where spaces came and went, which seems to be the nature of non-traditional spaces. They ebb and flow based on location, cost of rent, and burn out. However, I have noticed in recent years that in larger cities where the cost of living is skyrocketing (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, DC, for example), these spaces are simply disappearing, with little replacement.

Rising rents mean spaces either have to embrace capitalist ideals and charge more for people’s participation—which inevitably excludes the types of community they purport to foster—or they are simply forced to shut down. There is an increasing trend of large real estate developers buying up blocks of real estate and either tearing them down to build condominiums or allowing them to stay vacant until someone with enough capital to meet their inflated prices purchases them, which can take decades. Allowing properties to sit vacant forces people who might otherwise occupy those spaces as homes, businesses or arts spaces. In an article titled Who Owns Our Cities - And Why This Urban Takeover Should Concern Us All (first published in The Guardian in 2015), Saskia Sassen writes that “Proliferating urban gigantism has been strengthened and enabled by the privatizations and deregulations that took off in the 1990s across much of the world, and have continued since then with only a few interruptions. The overall effect has been a reduction in public buildings, and an escalation in large, corporate private ownership.” The effect urban privatization has on art spaces is two-fold: not only does it force folks out of cheaper neighborhoods, but it narrows the pool of available spaces causing rents to rise. This obviously effects everyone, not just artists.

In my travels this past summer, I noticed that the spaces that gave me the most hope and excitement were all in smaller cities and towns such as Baltimore, Providence, Pittsburgh and Catskill, NY, where cost of living has not yet made it difficult to obtain a space. Also, in larger, more expensive cities, it seems that spaces are oversaturated with performers in the few venues that survived or hopping from one space to the next as they open and close at a dizzying speed. Because of these factors, I have found that house shows are on the rise in larger cities.

Rhizome, a lovely venue, gallery, and artist residency in a historic house on the border of DC and Tacoma Park, MD, is overwhelmed by the demand of artists. Layne Garrett, Rhizome’s director, said that his biggest surprise in opening the space was how much of a demand there is. The collective initially intended for the old house to be primarily a gallery for visual artists to display their work and hold workshops, but because of the high demand for space in that area, they host one to three music shows every day of the week, with artists on the wait list. This
makes me wonder about the viability of maintaining a thriving arts scene in cities like DC when it seems that developers and investors have made it near-impossible for low-income artists to live and work there.

2640 Space in Baltimore is a similar story: they are a noncommercial, collectively-managed space for radical politics & grassroots culture that has been around since 2006. Partnering with a Methodist church, 2640 centers their mission around activism and providing a home to community meetings. They also host about one music show a week, with abundant interest for exhibitions and plays.

Live/Work Spaces: Dirt Palace

When my tour buddy and I walked up to Dirt Palace, Xander Marro was waiting nonchalantly on the stoop of the fairly nondescript building on a busy street in Providence, RI. It seemed nondescript until I noticed the gorgeous intricate stonework façade, a strange lumpy and colorful window display (an installation by an artist-in-residence), and a merry-go-round horse in place of a sign. Dirt Palace is a two-decade old feminist-run warehouse space that is supported by the city government, a future plan, not-for-profit status, and full financial and structural transparency. I had stars in my eyes the whole time we were touring, oohing and awing at the silkscreen shop, music room, artist studios, library, communal kitchen, stage, and living spaces. Then we walked a few blocks away to the Wedding Cake House, the new project space run by Xander and Pippi Zornoza, which is essentially the Dirt Palace for artists of older generations.

What I love about these spaces is that they have maintained their original model of supporting feminist artists by providing affordable live/work space, facilities, shared resources, opportunities, and a culture of cooperation. They have functioned as an incubator for over 40 woman artists over 19 years, while also evolving from an entirely cis-woman-run space to being more expansive around gender and trans-inclusivity. Simultaneously, they are growing into a more refined “adult” space. This notion of spaces growing to fit the needs of the communities they serve exemplifies my ideas around space as evolving, self-aware structures of support for artists by artists. I yearn for more spaces like this existed to exist in the world. Let’s make more!

Capitalist/Revenue-Driven Spaces: HiLo and The Pharmacy

There are also spaces that are trying to be both ideological and capitalist, to varying degrees of “success.” Take The Pharmacy, for example. Despite the fact that the venue hosts almost one show per day, it supports artists by providing a stage and sound, but nothing more. The money made at the shows does not end up benefiting the artists that procure it, but instead goes to pay the space’s rent, which has risen thanks to gentrification.

HiLo in Catskill, NY, run by Laura Davidson and Liam Singer, seems to be striking a balance between community support and capitalism. They have a traditional business plan and operate a small café during the day while hosting community events at night. They also have expanded by running The Avalon Lounge, a restaurant and bar venue. Unlike The Pharmacy, they have more flexibility in their structure. They offer community support by hosting meetings, gatherings, and music and art shows at no cost to the artists. Though they provide support for their community, they still function primarily within an individualist and capitalist flavor.

Do It

I am proposing reimagining the idea of success in an art space away from profit and towards supporting artists and building communities, while not taking advantage of free labor from creatives. Most of these spaces are built upon ideologies, community, survival, and support. A well-functioning space abolishes the idea of the starving artist through sharing resources. I am interested in the spaces that ebb and flow around the shapes of people’s lives, and the spaces that are emblems of right now, this moment, in the towns and cities they take up space in. These spaces -- temporary or long-term -- are evolving with society and are essential for the continual transformation of arts culture. People are excited about making things with their friends and holding space for creativity and performance, for traveling artists and musicians. While none are perfect, each space has its own story and mission and viability in our ever-capitalist world. I am excited to see the artist spaces of the future as we continually and creatively adapt to our ever-changing surroundings.
Marc Mitchell: I would like to start by acknowledging that all of you hail from elsewhere. What was the appeal of moving to the Southeast, a place not synonymous with revered art scene?

Katie Geha: I moved to Athens for the job at UGA (University of Georgia – Athens). It was appealing because it was a teaching position; it allowed me to continue to curate and run a small arts organization. Having lived in Iowa, New York, Chicago, Austin, and Kansas, I knew that art can and should happen anywhere.

Mary Laube: I took a one-year lecturer position at University of Tennessee – Chattanooga in 2015 and was hired by University of Tennessee – Knoxville in 2017. My decision to return to the South was largely influenced by my brief, yet positive, experience in 2015. I am continually surprised by how engaged and vibrant the art community is within the Southeast.

Craig Drennen: I moved to a Georgia to reroute my employment trajectory. I’d been working at museums (primarily in New York City) but thought I had a skill set better suited for teaching. I also had an idea that true innovation might be able to happen at the periphery. Outside of Rome, so to speak.

Pete Schulte: In 2011, I arrived to teach at the University of Alabama. Since then I’ve traveled extensively across the region and have been astounded by the number of artists, particularly mid-career artists, who seem to be pushing the envelope in meaningful ways. It seems that working in the margins – outside of ‘Metropolis’ – can be a healthy place to build a creative life for some people, myself included.

Marc Mitchell: The Southeast has a growing network of galleries (Howard’s and Tif Sigfrids, Athens, GA; Institute XXIII, Lexington, KY; Tops, Memphis, TN; Good Weather, North Little Rock, AR; Fuel & Lumber, Birmingham, AL; C for Courtside, Knoxville, TN; and others) that showcase artists within the region and beyond. Can you talk about how these spaces have created opportunities or influenced work in our region?

ML: C for Courtside is a great place to see artists from beyond Knoxville. This connectivity to other communities, whether regionally or nationally, is important. I’ve lived in other ‘off-center’ places, some much larger than Knoxville, and have been disappointed by the insularity of the art community. I am really looking forward to the TN Triennial. I imagine this will continue to expand the reach of the Southeast.

PS: I think that the quality of programming at the spaces mentioned raise the bar for both artists and venues alike – which is a good thing. While there is strength in numbers and attention garnered, it’s difficult for me to quantify how this has generated specific opportunities. It’s important to note that almost all opportunities, whether regionally or nationally, is important.

CG: The spaces mentioned were created in response to perceived shortcomings within local scenes. As an artist, it can be exasperating to deal with art communities that are repetitive and conservative. People create a platform for the work they want to see. Tif and Ridley have a fantastic operation and are an asset to Georgia. Laney Contemporary (Savannah, GA) and Day & Night Projects (Atlanta, GA) are doing great things too. Even Burnaway (Atlanta, GA) was started because the founders were frustrated by the lack of art criticism in Atlanta. I’ve started a space, THE END, in the front of my studio space for the same reasons.

MM: As highlighted, the Southeast relies heavily on alternative spaces for highlighting contemporary art. Given you all teach at universities within the region, how do you see these venues helping recent graduates (BFA, MFA)? In addition, do you feel there is a strong collector base that supports artists in the region?
CG: I'm interested in how everyone else will respond to these questions. In terms of recent BFA and MFA alums, the alternative spaces are really crucial for providing venues for those first exhibitions out of school. Atlanta has grants for projects and studios, which is extremely helpful to young artists. This allows artists to organize exhibitions or projects with very little funding. An example is Scott Ingram’s recent project utilizing buildings slated for demolition and became a de facto Atlanta Biennial.

As for collectors, I think it’s more complicated. Coherence and relevance seem to play a role. If art produced in a city or region seems incoherent or irrelevant then it’s hard for anyone to advocate for it. One role art criticism performs is helping audiences understand why work is relevant. Serious collectors gravitate toward those same qualities. I know many collectors in the Southeast that are active and engaged. If a gallerist can match that level of commitment to contemporary art, then collectors seem ready to work with them. Perhaps the South need its own Helter Skelter exhibition like the one mounted at MOCA in Los Angeles.

KG: I'm always encouraging my students to "make their own art scene" rather than relying on someone else to organize it for them. This often takes the form of the alternative space, apartment gallery, or an artist-run space. By creating their own space, individuals forge new relationships with peers and learn about the practicalities of being an artist beyond the studio. In many ways, I try to run the Dodd Galleries like an experimental space — encouraging established artists to use the space as a testing ground for new ideas or soliciting proposals from students that require them to curate and develop their own programming. I strive for a vibe similar to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design’s gallery programming in the late 1960s through the 70s (key word: strive).

I don’t know a lot about collectors since I generally don’t work with them. However, I do work with our board and fundraise for the galleries. UGA has tremendous support from alum and I believe wholeheartedly that art is a fundamental part of education. It’s easy to solicit funds for something I deeply believe and trust in.

ML: Curatorial work is a shared interest among faculty and students at UTK. Recently, several graduate students created exciting projects focused on exhibiting the work of others. For example, Kelsie Conley and Marla Sweitzer created Bad Water, an exhibition space impressively built from an abandoned garage. That is all to say that, while the students absolutely benefit from these spaces, they are also giving back.

PS: While I agree with all of your assessments about alternative spaces, I have also noticed a curious shift that I would like to highlight. While it’s typically the youthful energy of recent grads and young artists that fuels alternative spaces, most of the spaces mentioned (with the exception of Mild Climate, Bad Water, etc.) were founded and are run by mid-career artists with proven track records. I’m not exactly sure what to attribute this to: an anomaly, a generational shift (aging punks), lack of opportunities for artists, or simply semantic hair-splitting from my skewed perspective? Whatever the case, this crucial aspect of art in our region seems to be propelled by those who have been around the block a few times.

CG: I’d agree with Pete regarding mid-career artists who start DIY exhibition venues. I’d like to circle back around to Katie’s point about the university galleries serving as a genuine testing ground, because I think that’s really important. I would even say that Katie and Marc are both great role models for how gallery directors can set a tone of artistic rigor and “aliveness” within a university. That can be very contagious.
The Composition/s of Community: An Interview with Rick Lowe

Rick, thank you so much for participating in this interview. This issue of Number: focuses on differing aspects within larger cultural ecologies, with insight from established artists and professionals toward navigating the industry. While Number has an online platform, its printed matter situates itself within the American South, and I think your practice will render well for its readers who wish to consider community-engaged practices and thoughtfully operating within, and outside of, one’s identified community. I would like to begin with a few definitions, because terms fluctuate and it may be important for readers to grasp your understanding of the following words: how do you identify community/ies, social practice, public art, sustainability, and education (as this is an inherent component of public-facing programs and projects)?

First, I must admit that I’m often skeptical of labels. There have been many different labels used over the past 30 years or so attempting to define or describe work that seeks to challenge the lines between multiple dichotomies, i.e., art/life, institutional/community, public/gallery/museum art, etc. Because my work has been subject to being discussed using many of these terms, I’m comfortable enough with them. But from the art side, my preference is Josef Beuys’s term, social sculpture. This term best defines the work I’m interested in because it has the potential of encompassing so much from public art to museum institutions. From a community side, I prefer social- and community-engaged art. The “community” in this phrase is very important to me because social practice and socially-engaged art has become popular in terms that omit any connection to community. Not that these forms can’t address community, but it’s my opinion that it took many years of artists working to bring community into the periphery of the art context to allow it to just slip away by omission.

Due to this issue’s focus, can you discuss the seeds for your dialogically-entrenched practice? Meaning, instead of offering a “trajectory-narrative” of your work, how has dialogue, community, and art-as-impetus for public and social reflexivity interweave into your processes and production? Was there a concrete instance that allowed your work to respond to site/community/conversation; or, was this organically connected through materiality, place, cohorts?

The thing that forced me into dialogical ways of working was scale. I didn’t go into dialogical work based on some philosophical directive. It was out of necessity. The scale of Project Row Houses1 and the lack of resources forced me into conversation with others. Because I didn’t have all the skills and resources it took to pursue the project, I had to engage with others seeking their ideas on approaches of real estate, historic preservation, architecture, legal, construction, education, and social services. Having to do this opened my eyes to the creativity, richness, and resourcefulness that was all around me at any given time in any location. It also helped me understand the value of artist leadership in exposing broad sectors of society of its creative potential and how empowering that could be for individuals and communities. This really helped me understand Josef Beuys’s proclamation that “everyone is an artist.” I understood that this proclamation is about human potential and that artists are natural leaders in helping “everyone” realize this essential part of their being.

Project Row Houses is an incredible project/model that has expanded to other communities. Can you speak about how that project came to fruition; identify a particular or contingent of challenges that arose and how your team unpacked that; how you and your team contend with the nuances of bringing model into other cities? What components allow communities to rise and glow? What about the concept needs to be further developed?

The thing that I learned early on with Project Row Houses was the need to listen. I believe that, in most circumstances, answers are never too far from the questions. We just have to practice the art of listening hard. Listening with our ears, eyes, heart and all, is the way I learned to meet the challenges the work brought forth. Obviously, the big challenge for Project Row Houses was familiar to most startups: funding. Quickly, my answers to the funding question repositioned my thinking from funding to resources. We realized that, while we didn’t have funding, there were many resources around us. Prior to social media, we skillfully used print and television media for putting pressure on the municipality and for engaging with populations outside the neighborhood. We instrumentalized museums, churches, universities, and a wide range of social groups. We rarely focused on what the challenge was but who could likely bring resolution to it.


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1 Projectrowhouses.org

Project Row Houses, ongoing, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Row Houses.

Jessica Borusky is an educator, writer, and independent curator working throughout the American South.
I don’t generally think of Project Row Houses as a “model.” But I do think that its development was based on a set of principles that are easily transferred to other places. The top principle is to believe in the local. There is so much intelligence within the local population about the context and value of a place. So, I always start there. Another principle is creating space for free flow of ideas among as diverse a population as possible. This allows for ideas to grow and to extend networks. There’s a lot more I can say here but everything stems from rootedness in the local context with a space for free-flowing ideas. The challenge that I’ve found for most of my work that I continue to develop is sustainability. I think short-term work can meaningfully add to community goals. But the work I seek aims at long term relationships and impacts. This is a major challenge. It took 25 years before Project Row Houses made it to a point of sustainability. This is the question that my nearly 30 years of social- and community-engaged work has brought me to. I’m confident that the answer is close by.

Author Adrienne Maree Brown discusses the importance of developing holistic and responsive (emergent) strategies toward equipping communities to thrive well beyond their nonprofit’s initial work, thereby generating sustainable ways of organizing. While Brown primarily operates within social-sector nonprofit work, I think this concept applies to cultural organizing: how do you equip those you work to engender sustainable outcomes? What are ways in which readers can begin cultural organizing that responds to their community in thoughtful, dynamic, and sustained ways while acknowledging that the terms of each community (its needs and definitions of sustainability, in fact) are vastly different depending on identification/locale/context?

This is the question that is guiding my interest in social- and community-engaged work going forward. For me, exploring what sustainability really means is important because I’m not convinced that sustainability means that an initiative continues forever. I’m thinking this somehow means de-centering the work or the project from the idea of sustainability. Maybe it means focusing on the sustainability of the drive to continue to enhance the core values of a particular context rather than the project itself.

Having had the opportunity to work with you in the artist selection process for the Greenwood Art Project, I was impressed with your facilitative capacities in aligning polyvocal needs within the Tulsa creative community. Can you talk about your ethics when entering into a community as a project artist: how do you identify cultural vision and desires within a community; how do you navigate myriad histories, opinions, voices, stakeholders, viewers/participants, outcomes, cultural and social growth, and differing narratives within a diverse constituency?

I’m happy that you were impressed with my facilitation. In general, I’m not very sure about this aspect of the work because it’s so difficult to stay true to the form of allowing the voices around you to truly set the direction. As I said earlier, the most important thing for me is to make sure the local voice is primary. This does not mean I’m not willing to challenge the local. The intention is to have dialogue and growth. I hope that through dialogue I can elevate the locals’ understanding of certain things, and, certainly, the local folks help me understand the reasons behind their positions. It also helps build confidence when you establish interest in the local community in substantive ways.

In the context of the Greenwood Art Project, I hope that, in making it public, we were targeting artists from Oklahoma and Tulsa and, through those efforts, we established trust. Once we have trust, then we can move on to being in dialogue about how to make the best project we can for the Centennial. The way that I work, I’m careful not to try not to tell the narrative of a community. I mostly try to create platforms for those narratives to be told and expressed. For me, what becomes important about telling narratives is to make sure there are enough diverse voices in the mix. For instance, the challenge with Tulsa is getting the White narrative into the conversation about the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. I’m convinced that there is are meaningful perspectives from that point of view.
Melissa Dunn: Holding Space

I sat down with Melissa Dunn to discuss her artistic process on multiple occasions and in multiple locations; the following interview is the latest in a series of discussions we had over the past few years about art, life, living, being a woman, being Gen X, tea, pets, family, and other minutiae that matter not much to everyone.

This time, we met at my sunlit kitchen table, surrounded by a child’s art and floral steam from a pot of jasmine green tea.

Kathleen Stevens: In a nutshell, what’s your current process?


Drawing is consistently there. I don’t paint every day, but I draw every day. I also write every day. Life does have to be lived, and that’s a big part of the drawing. The writing helps me connect the life experiences to the drawing—they come together to come up with the idea for a painting. The writing is the bridge, the conduit, and out of the combination of those three things (drawing, living, writing), the painting emerges.

What makes art work for you? What’s the key component of your practice that everything else is built on? Why do you need a daily visual/handwork practice?

I draw every day to find shapes. The shapes are the backbone of my paintings, and I find these shape relationships so interesting that in 2002 I took imagery out of my work. I’m still making these various shape juxtapositions. They seem almost infinite to me. I keep coming back to my curiosity about shape. That’s not real glamorous, but that’s the purest, most honest answer I can give.

Buckminster Fuller said: “What is it on this planet that needs doing that I know something about, that probably won’t happen unless I take responsibility for it?”

When I read [that quote], I realized, I can simplify all of this. I gave myself permission to say my work is about shape and color.

In my studio process, I’m taking full responsibility for [shape and color]. Sometimes I wonder if the world needs more abstract paintings in 2020, but no one is going to make these paintings. I feel like I’m polishing a stone. It takes me so long to make these paintings the way I want them. A lot of that time is just thinking and looking. I do a pass that takes two hours, but I may have looked at it for 2 months.

This person describing my work to someone else said: “She’s a painter. She makes these abstract paintings that don’t look like animals, but they’re, like, animals.” And I knew exactly what she meant. They’re alive. They’re alive and they’re vibrating, and I don’t know why these two squares are making me feel what I feel, but that’s what I want them to do—to become their own thing that people can engage with.

Why is repetition—repetitive motion, repetitive practice—important to you in your work?

Repetition is important because I want to be able for others to see my hand, my arm, my physical gestures—in the work. I want to make a certain line or certain mark or shape to have this sort of feeling that it does when I make a quick drawing. To make it so it’s not stiff or constrained, I draw it over and over and over again. In order to get the freedom in the painting I have to do the repetition. I want to be able to do it quick and do it fast. There’s a lot of planning vs. discovery. In the drawing, there’s a lot of discovery. When I go to make a painting, I usually have a plan. I want the feeling of discovery without losing the ability to plan.

If I spend three hours drawing something, I embody it when it’s time to paint. It’s a bodily thing; my art is very physical.

I love to paint big because it feels so good in my body. It’s not always the right thing to do, because you don’t move all the work you make and I have to tell myself, “You may live with this, do you have a space to put it?”
Art is often a solitary act. Why do you choose to bring a social component into your studio practice?

I thoroughly enjoy learning about other artists and seeing other artists work on Instagram, but it doesn't replace one-on-one conversation, people coming into my studio and having conversations about my work. That’s real important to me—having someone see what I’m working on, and then asking me good questions about it. I don’t want to make work in a vacuum. It’s important to invite people into your studio.

In Memphis—it’s a small art community, but it’s a kind art community. Artists in Memphis are incredibly generous. Every time I’ve asked people to come into my studio, they have.

What are some of the benefits of inviting people into your studio practice? What are some of the disadvantages?

When you have your nose up to the glass in your studio practice, you don’t see your own evolution, whereas someone else might be able to point it out. My work is kind of like a river; it’s these ideas and they wash down, and they’re a continuation. If I want to see the evolution, bringing someone else in helps me see I’m doing something different here. Inviting artists into your studio gives you a sense of perspective.

The disadvantage is when someone slips in as though they’re in a grad school critique: “I see you’re doing this, why don’t you try that?” In art school, it’s all about what you can do differently to move [your art] forward. I’m doing exactly what I’m doing because it’s what I need to do now. We have to be careful when giving each other feedback NOT to fall into those habits.

Sometimes I want a fixer, and sometimes I want a witness.

How do you incorporate social engagement into your solo, in-home studio practice?

In 2016 after the election, I felt very helpless and hopeless and did not know how best to direct my energy. What I decided, for me, was to have more small gatherings around the act of making. That could be someone knitting and me drawing—I have a friend who works with wire while I draw—what it does is this, sort of, sewing circle idea.

You’re gathered with other people with something occupying your hands, and there’s plenty of room for comfortable silences where conversations could potentially go below the surface of chit-chat. So we can grieve together, commiserate, and talk about as artists what our role is in the midst of all of this.

Your work often contains references to textile patterns—to traditional “women’s” crafts—but they’re subtle. How important is it that people get that aspect of your work?

It’s not important if people get it. I do a lot of research—part of that is looking at craft, at textiles, thinking about women’s work, domesticity, feminism, all of these things. When it comes to my paintings, it’s just filtered in—you might see a thread or a pattern or joinery or a gradation I pulled from a drag queen on a YouTube makeup tutorial. It’s not a matter of what I make work about; it’s about how I take one thing and pull on this thread for this painting. A big part of what I do in the studio is editing.

I’m definitely very conscious about taking my eyeballs out into the world—having experiences that are very tactile is very important to my work.

Your work also often contains a lot of interior space. We’ve talked before about how your paintings can almost function as vessels. Do you feel that relates to how you want viewers to construct meaning from your work?

I have an interior life that nobody sees—it’s mine. I’m trusting that when people see my work, they too have that, and maybe we can connect on that level. It’s non-verbal, experiential, and it requires a lot of trust in them from me. So sometimes that does influence the actual shapes that I make—they’re womb-like, or vaginal, or organic, and sometimes they’re linear and geometric—but those are different types of holding spaces.

Where does that difference come from, for you?

I like the contrast between the two. I need both—that visual tension. I love when straight lines intersect with organic lines. I’m very inspired by striation, by layering in rocks, and the symmetry is so soothing especially when it comes next to a container (which is a craggy, organic, non-linear thing).

And those are just metaphors.
The Juanita Harvey Art Gallery is housed at Midwestern State University’s Fain College of Fine Arts in Wichita Falls, Texas; the only public liberal arts university in the state. The Juanita & Ralph Harvey School of Visual Arts and the gallery were established in 1978. The mission of the gallery is to serve as a teaching gallery and provide exhibitions by mid-career and established artists while seeking content that is responsive to issues relevant to the university’s liberal arts mission.

Since 2010, Edith and Peter O’Donnell have generously provided funding for all artists who exhibit at the Juanita Harvey Art Gallery through the Visiting Artists Program established by the O’Donnell Foundation. The Visiting Artists Program ensures that each exhibiting artist is provided a $2,000 stipend, and funds for travel and accommodation. Each artist designs a workshop that students and the public are invited to participate in.

Gary Goldberg, Professor of Photography, has served as the Gallery Director since 2014 and says he strives to invite artists that will be impactful for the students and the community. During his tenure as director, the gallery has hosted Edgar Heap of Birds, Melanie Yazzie, Victoria Meek, Hasan Elahi, among many other internationally recognized artists. Students and faculty have noted an increased awareness of global and cultural issues, along with a focus on empathic dialogue with visiting artists. Previous to Gary Goldberg’s tenure as director of the gallery, Printmaking Professor Catherine Prose served as Gallery Director. During her tenure, she hosted installation artist Gabriel Dawe among others and organized the gallery’s Thirty-Year Retrospective Exhibition in 2008. With a record of prominent exhibiting artists and the liberal arts mission of the gallery in mind, painter and installation artist Jon Revett was invited to install his show, Conceptual Crystallization.

From October 25th to December 13th 2019, Revett’s exhibition was on display in the Juanita Harvey Art Gallery at MSU Texas. This exhibition brought together large-scale acrylic paintings, sculpture, and interactive installation. In this series, the artist builds colorful tessellations based on photographs as his source material to process complex experiences and ideas. Taking inspiration from a wide range of influences that include traditional Islamic art, contemporary figures working in geometric abstraction, and his experiences as the primary caretaker of the late Robert Smithson’s Amarillo Ramp in Amarillo, Texas, the paintings in Conceptual Crystallization could be read as narratives that attempt to grid space, time, and memory through transcendent pattern.

The artist designs soothing contradictions in a number of ways. In Hey Man, Thanks For the Beer (after Doig’s Ski Jacket), Revett creates strict boundaries of color with the patterns he employs, while simultaneously bringing together a seamless gradient of warm and cool colors. The tessellations he designed are hard-edge geometric shapes that have been consumed by larger organic forms. The titles are somewhat mysteriously but give enough insight that we begin to imagine the origin of the experiences they reference. The similarities between recurrent motifs found in traditional Islamic textiles and architecture, and the use of color and pattern to build narrative tessellations in Revett’s paintings, are seen throughout the show. Revett describes his reverence for traditional Islamic art in previous interviews and artist talks. His approach to bringing Islamic tessellations into a contemporary context invites viewers to consider the transcendent ways we are connected through color and pattern.

Revett confronts very different color combinations and design problems with each tessellation that he brings to life, but all of the paintings in Conceptual Crystallization share a penetrating attempt at freezing a memory into a powerful grid of color, light, and pattern. Revett’s experience as the long-time caretaker of Robert Smithson’s Amarillo Ramp has undoubtedly influenced his approach to geometric abstraction, not only in the painting with the same title, but in his understanding of the ability and opportunity an artist has to crystallize a time and place, or a landscape in the case of Smithson’s work. As he works to preserve a piece of land with each shift and curve as Smithson intended it to be, he does so movingly for the memories he preserves with his shifts and curves of color and light in Conceptual Crystallization.

While a visiting artist at Midwestern State University, Jon Revett created a tessellation design workshop for painting students at the Juanita & Ralph Harvey School of Visual Arts. Students exhibited their collaborative paintings with Revett in the Pit gallery, a student gallery in the Fain College of Fine Arts.
Cliff Tresner’s *Another Day Tripping Over Cypress* was on exhibit in the Bethea Gallery in the School of Design at Louisiana Tech University, located in Ruston, Louisiana. Tresner’s exhibition used a variety of materials, such as wood, metal, and paint on canvas to three-dimensionally portray his abstract ecosystem of cypress knees against an installation of backgrounds of blue sky, harsh gray clouds, and green landscapes. Tresner’s works vary by size, from the smallest at 5x7 inches to the largest at 4x5 feet. This diversity of size and materials allows Tresner to merge two opposing perspectives: malleable softness and coarse hardness. Rough edges of sharp metal and hard corners of wood are juxtaposed by pliable clouds or a round, wooden stone. In addition, the high plains landscape, an allusion to Tresner’s midwestern roots, emits a tenderness in its cradling of the sharp, wooden cypress knees. This continuation of opposing perspectives is seen throughout each individual piece of the exhibit. At first glance, the eye is automatically drawn to the large landscapes on canvas, which provide an air of freedom and movement, and the centerpiece of wooden cypress knees, but quickly the viewer is drawn to the smaller, more intricate pieces that are as important to the entirety of the exhibit as the larger installations. Some miniature in scale, these pieces are also made up of landscapes on canvas, natural elements like acorn caps and a sweetgum seed pod, and suspended metal and wooden sculptures in a variety of earth tones. Most of these smaller pieces serve as ecosystems of their own when combined, an idea reinforced by having multiple pieces enclosed in wooden frames. Reflective of the individual perspective of the viewer and their interconnectedness with the environment, each piece is individually stunning and can stand alone while simultaneously being dependent upon each other, revealing a symbolic and symbiotic ecosystem that creates a depiction of internal and external landscapes. Each piece represents our internal landscape and dialogue, but the pieces are in reply to each other, merging different perspectives and engaging in dialogue, as we do ourselves. Combined, these pieces reflect nature and its ordered chaos, which is symbolic of the sometimes tumultuous interactions among ourselves caused by opposing perspectives. Interaction is the catalyst for discourse, and the entirety of the exhibit illustrates the societal ecosystem that occurs within us and among us, demonstrating that even though we are all individuals with individual dialogues, our dialogue is a part of a larger, more complicated conversation. The two dialogues are not mutually exclusive and exist together to create one whole.

Ultimately, Tresner’s work sends you on a journey, literally “Tripping Over Cypress” as you navigate through his exhibit much like navigating societal discourse, bumping into hard edges and rough surfaces, sometimes getting caught in a tight, complicated spot, or literally wedged between a rock and a hard place, and sometimes feeling boxed in by the thick, wooden frames, but eventually finding the comforting movement of the free landscapes and learning the connection we all share, despite opposing perspectives.

Rebekah Barnes is co-owner and writer at R&M Content Writing and an English instructor at University of Louisiana at Monroe.
New Symphony of Time

New Symphony of Time brings a rich, refreshing collage of creativity and imagery to the galleries at the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson, where new and familiar artworks draw the eye not only for their inherent, individual interest and significance, but also for the bold juxtapositions of their display.

The ongoing exhibition, a reinstallation of the museum’s Mississippi galleries after a two-year exhibition marking the state’s bicentennial, features works drawn primarily from the permanent collection but also includes recently purchased artworks and new loans from national institutions and private collections.

Margaret Walker’s epic poem This Is My Century: Black Synthesis of Time provided exhibition curators with phrases that guide a thematic journey through 170 works by 119 artists in the museum’s most diverse exhibition to date. Artwork labels with artist head shots reinforce that diverse quality. State outlines on labels distinguish Mississippi artists and reflect the population of the community whose stories the exhibition explores. Time is circular rather than linear here (echoed in the exhibition logo, which also calls to mind a camera lens); concepts of reckoning and reconciliation continually emerge. Salient quotes by artists, writers and leaders offer more avenues for insight and contemplation.

New Symphony of Time opens with the art equivalent of a dawning sun, warm and blazingly vivid in the Gwen-dolyn Magee quilt Our New Day Begun.

Works by African American, Caucasian, and Native American artists in the Ancestry and Memory galleries prompt strong new conversations in a no-barriers space. “Who are your people?” an introductory panel starts, and a sweeping glance confirms they are all there, in a shared history that can be painful, complicated, and captivating.

A colonial man’s outline peels back to reveal the face of a woman of African ancestry in Titus Kaphar’s Darker Than Cotton. In another Magee quilt, When Hope Unborn Had Died, a sack of cotton extends beyond the quilt’s edge, becoming a three-dimensional anchor to an enslaved woman’s anguished silhouette as her child is carted away. Sculptures Feral Benga by Richmond Barthé and African Head by Lonnie Holley counter that image gazes in the direction of Jason Bouldin’s portrait of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, with his coat off and sleeves rolled up for the activist work that cemented his legacy and made him a target for assassination. Surrounding the portrait, photographs from the civil rights movement flesh out the era. A quilt of a new flag design, by Geraldine Nash of Crossroads Quilts and Dennis Sullivan, with students from Chamberlain-Hunt Academy, is a colorful reminder of youth, the power of symbols and the possibility of change.

“Art has the power to change hearts, to be the spark that ignites conversations,” Monique Davis, managing director of the Mississippi Museum of Art’s Center for Art & Public Exchange (CAPE), said at the exhibition’s opening in September.

With this expansive, accessible and inclusive survey, and its abundance of emotional truths and fresh perspectives, New Symphony of Time may spark the museum’s richest, most layered conversations yet.
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We welcome submissions by a single artist or multiple artists presenting engaging artwork that is attuned to contemporary practices and social issues. Work in all media is considered, including installation and presentations of socially engaged projects.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

Beverly + Sam Ross Gallery
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