

# Local Arts Network Newsletter

ARTS & CULTURE FOR ALL

## Bringing in your Community to help you Thrive

You just never know who you are going to sit next to on a bus tour. At the beginning of March, Mital attended the Creative Placemaking Summit in Atlanta, and on a tour of the Beltline she happened to sit next to Vanita Keswani, Education and Exhibitions Manager for the Smith Gilbert Gardens. As they sat in typical Atlanta traffic, Vanita shared how the garden is acting as an arts incubator, piloting innovative programs across the city. As a smaller city in a state that ranks second to last in the county for public arts financing, Kennesaw is utilizing its arts and culture assets to engage all residents.

The gardens have always been home to the arts, with a history rooted in artists community and 30 permanent sculptures for visitors to see. Although nature and history are more predominantly known, the gardens created Art Blooms to engage more artists and help visitors better understand what is available. One of the newer programs—a collaboration with Kennesaw State university (KSU)—is an immersive theatre experience for young (and old) audiences.

**The goal of the program: think outside the black box.**



KSU students learn that there is no one way to do theater. They hone their skills in foundations of acting, learn how these skills can be applied to young audiences and adapted to outside environments, as well as improvisation (kids can do all kinds of crazy things). In addition, arts integration specialists come talk to the students about how to offer the best accessibility and the most participation as possible. The program is ever evolving, with each audience engaged in evaluation for continuous improvement. The gardens get to show that their space is versatile and all the different forms it can take. The initiative aims to educate students about the ecosystem and community involvement, harnessing the power of nature as the stage.

**Photo Credit: Karl Moore @Mooreshots**

**Photos from performance of Opossum and the Season Stone, second production in the Gardens**



**Left Image ALT Text:** a group of children sitting on the grass in a park watch performers



**Right Image ALT Text:** a group of children and adults dance together in the grass

## AFTA Opportunities

### Renewed Moments for Arts & Healing: Creating Shifts and Movements in Policy on May 14 @ 3PM ET

Learn about the research and practices in arts and culture that have surfaced in our communities as a response to coping with public health issues. The webinar will explore potential movements and shifts in policies and offer actionable ways to advocate for arts in the community. The Epi Arts Lab (University of Florida, Center for Arts and Medicine) and Project ReFocus (a collaborative effort between Howard University and UCLA) will present their research findings, showing the intersection between arts and health. Two local arts agencies: Appalachian Artisan Center and Downriver Council for the Arts will discuss the arts and health practices they have implemented in their communities. Join us as we learn more about arts and healing through the advocacy and policy lens!

**Register for free for this live virtual event [HERE](#).**

### First ever National Zoom-in Advocacy Week May 13th-17th

Do you want to get involved in federal advocacy but maybe don't want to do it on your own? Good news! AFTA staff and local district captains are here with guidance. If you did not have the chance to attend live, prepare for the Zoom-in Advocacy Week by watching the **Advocacy 201** and **Advocacy 101 webinars**. The most recent training is on how to collectively reach out to your Member of Congress to support FY25 funds for the NEA, NEH, and arts education.

### Iowa Artists Craft Complex Visions of the Rural

The dominant stories we hear about Iowa—and the Midwest at large—flatten the region into a land of rural white farmers. But in actuality, the state is vibrant, diverse, and ever-evolving.

From Grant Wood's softly decaying Corn Room murals to Duane Slick's pitch-black grasslands, Iowa artists upend rural stereotypes to tell truer stories about the places they come from. [Read more here.](#)



Timothy Wehrle, Inner Kingdom Thieving Speedway, 2009, watercolor on paper, Des Moines Art Center, 2009.71

**ALT Text:** Multi-color painting depicting mobility and claustrophobia with cars, people and shops in watercolor, graphite, and colored pencil.

### **Resources**

- Local Arts Agency: [Bravo Des Moines 2023-2025 Strategic Plan](#)
- Artists and Culture Bearers: [Art of the Rural](#)



**Called Back:**  
**On George Morrison,**  
**Land Acknowledgements,**  
**and Returning Home**



AFTA CEO Nolen Bivens visited with the Seminole Tribe while attending the Florida Division of Arts and Culture Local Arts Agency Summit this past month. He connected with tribe artists and culture bearers who shared the importance of agency in remaining the leaders of their own story.

When Andrea Carlson sees the late George Morrison's work in a museum, she feels a deep kinship with the fellow Grand Portage Ojibwe artist. Her father grew up on the same shores of Lake Superior as Morrison, where the waters form a horizon without end. In her tribute to Morrison, Carlson explores the profound impact he had on her artistic career. By tracing both of their displacements—and return—to their ancestral homelands, Carlson asks, what would it look like for Indigenous artists to return home?



**ALT Text:** a group of people looking at artifacts in a museum

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**Healing, Bridging, Thriving: Reflections on Arts and Culture in Healthy Communities** on May 1 @ 2PM ET

A collaborative, integrated approach to health requires artists, designers, culture bearers, community members, and government to come together to advance local goals, to recognize opportunities where the arts can make a difference, and to consider the well-being of individuals and the community as a whole. Inspired by the recent White House/National Endowment for the Arts Summit "Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in our Communities," the NEA's Our Town Creative Placemaking Technical Assistance Program (CPTA) invites you to join an exciting conversation, moderated by Ben Stone, NEA Director of Design and Creative Placemaking, where they will take a deeper dive into *healing*, highlighting innovative work at the intersection of arts and health. **Register here.**

Featured speakers:

- Michael J. Bobbitt, Mass Cultural Council
- Dr. Tasha Golden, International Arts + Mind Lab at The Johns Hopkins University
- Joe Wilson, Jr., Art, Culture, and Tourism for the City of Providence
- Sussy Santana, Poet, Cultural Organizer, and Performer
- Julie A. Garreau, Cheyenne River Youth Project
- 179, Muralist and Teaching Artist
- Benny Starr, hip-hop artist

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REACH OUT  
FOR A CHAT

**Let's chat!**

GET TO KNOW  
US BETTER

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