

Local Arts Network Newsletter



ARTS & CULTURE FOR ALL

There's no denying it—things are moving fast, and there's a lot to keep up with in the world right now. In the midst of it all, art has been a grounding force, offering both reflection and relief.

This month, some of the AFTA staff visited *The Shape of Power: Stories of Race and American Sculpture* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) in Washington, DC. The exhibit brought to mind for me *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, a powerful exploration of how trauma reshapes the body and brain—and how creative practices like drama, yoga, and meditation can help restore balance. The sculptures in the exhibit at SAAM were more than just reflections of struggle; they felt like a release, transforming pain into something tangible and shared.

Lately, I've been leaning into fiber arts as a way to process these turbulent times. Textile traditions, particularly quilting, have deep roots in American history and in women's stories—turning the everyday into an act of remembrance, love, and resilience. Art, in all its forms, is a superpower, both for personal healing and collective strength.

And the [data](#) backs it up:

- ✦ 86% of Americans believe that arts and culture improve community quality of life.
- ✦ 60% say the arts have helped them cope with emotional distress.
- ✦ 72% agree that arts and culture provide a safe space for sharing ideas, even when perspectives differ.

I hope each of you are finding pathways to rejuvenate when you can, utilizing the community assets that already exist. In this issue, we'll be sharing examples, resources, and inspiration at the intersection of arts and mental health. Whether it's through visual storytelling, performance, or hands-on creativity, art is an invitation to reflect, to connect, and to heal.

✧ Local Arts Examples ✧



Image Description: Video thumbnail of a Moses Muliro Community Health Worker from Bluegrass Community Health Center. Click the thumbnail to view the video.

The KY Foundation for Women funded two Appalshop staff to get certified in Mental Health First Aid through the [National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#). This has been a very helpful resource to draw upon with the most recent floods their area experienced. The work has continued with Appalshop's Community Media Initiative releasing [Bridging the Gap: Kentucky's Community Health](#)

[Workers](#), a brief documentary released in conjunction with the Kentucky Department for Public Health. Bridging the Gap looks at community health workers—who are not doctors, but specially trained and certified community members in six Kentucky cities (Harlan, Hazard, Beattyville, Lexington, Louisville, and Hopkinsville)—and shows their distinct role in closing the divide between medical services and social services of underserved and often marginalized communities. Read more [here!](#)



On July 27th, ArtStart, the [City of Rhinelander](#), local artists and youth skaters partnered to create "Push Against Loneliness," a day celebrating community and belonging in Rhinelander, WI. The event kicked off with a Skate Jam celebrating the proposed location for Rhinelander's new skate park, petitioned in 2021 by youth activist and skater group, Over It! Attendees then engaged in a "March Against Social Isolation" to the site of the new, interactive public sculpture, designed by artists Witt Siasoco and Norma Dycus Pennycuff. Following the sculpture dedication, the day featured various art activities, a tree planting, and concluded with a community meal and entertainment by local performing artists.



Image Description: Table with a printing press set up and a finished card to the left printed with the words "Miss talking to you"

Image Credit: Arts for Everybody website

Watch . Read . Listen



Image Description: Video thumbnail of Dr. Jill Sonke from her Ted Talk. Click the thumbnail to view the video.

Something we're watching

Although almost 10 years old now, Dr. Jill Sonke gives a passionate Ted Talk on why medicine needs arts. Come join Dr. Sonke, along with Dr. Lisa Wong and Dr. Nisha Sajjani at [AFTACON Pre-CON!](#)

Something we're reading

Authors Tasha L Golden, Stacey Springs, Hannah J Kimmel, Sonakshi Gupta, Alyssa Tiedemann, Clara C Sandu, and Susan Magsamen explore the deep connection between music and helping those with serious mental illnesses, as well as what more is needed from the field of art and research.

The Use of Music in the Treatment and Management of Serious Mental Illness: A Global Scoping Review of the Literature



Image Description: Video thumbnail of two young singers on either side of Jordin Sparks, smiling while they record Songs for a Healthier America. Click the thumbnail to view the video.

Something we're listening to

[Hip Hop Public Health and the Partnership for a Healthier America](#),

whose honorary chair is former First Lady Michelle Obama, came together to create the "Songs for a Healthier America" album. As part of the First Lady's "Let's Move!" campaign to encourage children and their families to eat healthy and stay active, the 19-song

album also included accompanying live-action and animated music videos. It was developed by a multidisciplinary team of musicians, physicians, public health researchers, entertainment industry professionals, health advocates, and school-aged children. This multi-genre musical compilation album touches on a variety of themes like fitness, mental health, and healthy eating.



Artist Spotlights



Stacie Aamon Yeldell is the founder of [Amöntra](#). She is a best-selling author, award-winning vocalist, speaker, and music psychotherapist with over 15 years of experience in mental health treatment. Her Amazon bestselling [workbook](#), "Choose Yourself: A 12-Week Journey To Becoming the God of Your Own Heart" is available on Amazon!

Image Description: Stacie smiling big while wearing a bold necklace in front of an orange wall

A collaboration between the students of Goodrell Middle School, Des Moines Public Schools, The B. WELL Foundation, Polk County, Jill Wells Art LLC + AXA Mentorship, and Price of a Hug Photography—[Jill Wells'](#) project, [the wellness room](#) at Goodrell Middle School in Des Moines, Iowa, caters to individuals of all abilities and combines biophilic and sensory design, bringing nature's calming visual and sound elements indoors to reduce stress, enhance creativity, and improve overall well-being.

"We worked together on creating a more effective space through a sensory approach to design to offer an enriching environment that aids educational and social/emotional development." - Jill Wells



Image Description: Jill smiling, wearing a dark plaid shirt and her buzzed hair parted on one side



AFTACON Pre-CON Spotlight

Some of the top women in STEAM are leading AFTACON's [Arts and Health: Exploring the Possibility of What If Pre-CON!](#) Dr. Nisha Sajjani, Dr. Jill Sonke, and Dr. Lisa Wong, will bring their lived experience as researchers, educators, practitioners, and artists to this future-thinking Pre-CON. What if the arts could heal our communities? Join us to find out more!

Image Description: Poster inviting folks to join us at AFTACON 2025, with images of Dr. Nisha Sajjani, Dr. Jill Sonke, and Dr. Lisa Wong from the shoulders up, all smiling broadly, the yellow and black logo in the top left corner, and purple banners on the top and bottom

REACH OUT
FOR A CHAT

Let's chat!

GET TO KNOW
US BETTER

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