



Local Arts Network Newsletter

ARTS & CULTURE FOR ALL

This year's Creative Placemaking summit, The Power of Community, was a mighty and energizing experience. Set in downtown Montgomery, Alabama, the conference was incredibly walkable — allowing participants to connect with both people and place. My colleague Dr. Genna Styles-Lyas and I were able to attend with a cohort of folks from Alabama including Denise Tucker ([Augusta Arts](#)), Angela Montgomery ([Mobile Arts Council](#)), Commission Merceria Ludgood ([Mobile County](#)), and Natalie Mathis ([City of Montgomery Department of Cultural Affairs](#)).

[Bryan Stevenson](#)'s keynote set the tone for the entire summit and much of the work that lies ahead. As Genna reflected, *"His words will stay with me forever—powerful truths about justice, memory, and proximity that burned into my brain in the best way. It was a grounding and galvanizing way to begin."*

Mr. Stevenson offered four guideposts that continue to shape how we think about change:

- The Power of Proximity – We must affirm the dignity and humanity of others by being close enough to witness their realities firsthand.
- Change the Narrative – Fear and anger feed injustice. We must challenge the narratives that dehumanize through labels, deny history, and perpetuate racial inequality—and find the courage to tell the truth about what holds us back.
- Stay Hopeful – Hopelessness is the enemy of justice. Hope is our superpower in the face of long odds.
- Embrace Discomfort – Real change requires discomfort. "I do what I do because I am broken too," he shared, reminding us that justice begins with seeing the full humanity in others—and in ourselves. Creative expression can illuminate that humanity when words alone fall short.

In this issue of "the LAN," we highlight local projects that embody these principles—initiatives rooted in proximity, powered by truth-telling, fueled by hope, and bold in their creative discomfort. We hope they offer not only inspiration, but a sense of direction and possibility in these unstable times.

Local Inspiration



Migration & Memories

As part of The Sculpture Center's community-engaged large-scale exhibition with Puerto Rican artist Edra Soto, Cleveland's Latinx residents shared their experiences of migration with the artist. Prompted by memories of home, participants were invited to write about their experiences. Participant writings will be included in a journal that accompanies Soto's public art piece in Clark-Fulton, a predominantly Latinx neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio.

Image Description: A collage of five images depicting community members attending and participating in Migration & Memories: A writing workshop with visual art Edra Soto at Future Ink Graphics in Cleveland, Ohio. The workshop was a part of Soto's work creating "La Distancia," a neighborhood outdoor sculptural installation and immersive gallery exhibition at The Sculpture Center in Cleveland, Ohio, to be displayed in 2025.



Mapping Trans Joy

Mapping Trans Joy—a trans-run, joy-as-resistance mobile and multi-venue project—combines physical interventions, public art installations, public events, and oral history collection in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and at partner sites across the Southeast. Mapping Trans Joy is a direct response to the onslaught of anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation many are facing around the country. It celebrates trans life, trans joy, and trans resistance to erasure and elimination. Trans joy is beautiful. Trans joy is meaningful. Trans joy is necessary. Trans joy is resistance. [You can share your own story or pass along for others to share here.](#)

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If we use art, media, and culture to reverse stereotypes about gender, race, immigrants, and the unfamiliar, the beliefs we pass on to future generations reflect the complex and dynamic world we live in.

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–Shahzia Sikander

Havah...to breathe, air, life

Artist Shahzia Sikander created a major new public art project on the theme of women and justice for a multimedia exhibition, "Havah...to breathe, air, life," co-commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy and Public Art of the University of Houston System. The outdoor exhibition was on view in Madison Square Park and then opened on the campus of the University of Houston in February 2024. The work was met with pushback and sparked conversation. Through her work, the artist addresses systems of justice and injustice by situating women in positions of power.

Ditty Bops: The Art Of Listening



Image Description: Video thumbnail of people standing around a table. On the left side, folks are filling out a form, while on the right, others in orange jumpsuits wait to collect the forms.

A multi-phase project that employs the arts to advocate for veterans through the story of one Vietnam-era veteran in Oklahoma City. Centered on the captivating story of Dr. Neil Chapman, a renowned photographer in Edmond, Oklahoma, this project unveils the sacrifice and struggle behind his prestigious career. From his days as a Morse Code interceptor during the Vietnam War

to his battle with the devastating effects of Parkinson's Disease caused by Agent Orange, Chapman's journey represents the hundreds of thousands of veterans whose voices remain unheard. Through Morse Code-infused music, dynamic choreography, theater, rap, and visual art, audience members experience the profound impact of "Ditty Bops The Art of Listening," set against the backdrop of Chapman's powerful Mannequin photographs. The program invites audience members to embrace their community's power, redefine the art of listening, and create lasting change.



Global Action

Inside Out Project by JR is a global participatory art initiative that encourages individuals to share their portraits and statements on what they stand for, aiming to promote social change and unity. Participants can contribute by uploading their images and messages to the project's platform or creating their own group action by pasting portraits in your community.

Before I Die by Candy Chang is a participatory public art project that invites individuals to reflect on their aspirations by completing the prompt: "Before I die I want to..." It began on an abandoned house in New Orleans and has since inspired over 5,000 walls worldwide. The project fosters community engagement and introspection. Add a wall to your community today!



Advocate

Stimulating Local, State, and Federal Advocacy for the Arts

You are not alone. Americans for the Arts stands with you alongside millions of artists, local and state arts agency leaders, teachers, community leaders, business people, elected officials, funders, and other arts professionals. We are experiencing this challenging time alongside you. Our work together as local advocates and national partners is what makes us strong!

On our [Advocacy Hub](#) you will find tools, resources, and information to help make your case for the arts and arts education, as well as ways you can take action today.



Join our biweekly webinar series focused on current events and public policies impacting the arts in Washington, DC and nationwide. Recordings of past office hours and registration for the upcoming sessions can be found on the [Office Hours webpage](#). The next session is this Friday, May 2nd at 2 PM ET.

Image Description: Logo with "Office Hours" in bold and "Series" italicized above an orange and purple ombré half circle sun setting behind a light blue diagonal sea with both Americans for the Arts and Arts Action Fund logos as white text in the foreground.

[Take our 6 minute national survey—](#)
Deadline to submit is May 9, 2025



Americans for the Arts has launched a new National Pulse Survey to better understand how recent policy developments—at the federal and state levels—are affecting the health of the arts and culture sector. From changes in funding to shifts in education policy and support for public institutions, this survey is designed to capture the real-time effects these changes are having on your work and your community. The survey is available in English and Spanish.

With the results we will provide a free, public-facing dashboard so users can explore results by geography, organization type, artistic discipline, and more. Together, we can build a clearer picture of what's happening and how to respond. We hope you will also share this survey with your network.



AFTACON UPDATES

Pay Structure and Programming Updates

We're transforming [AFTACON 2025](#) (June 11-14 in Cincinnati, OH) to ensure our community can unite, learn, and strategize together as the arts and culture sector faces new challenges. Our complete program, including plenary speakers and session schedule, will be announced soon.

New Registration Fee Structure:

- Pay-What-You-Can registration starting at \$0
- Full or partial refunds available for existing registrations (email refunds@artsusa.org)
- Travel scholarships for those impacted by federal cuts or cancelled grants (email convention@artsusa.org)

Enhanced Programming to Meet This Moment:

- NEW Civic Action Pathway sessions will focus on protecting arts education, fighting censorship, developing funding solutions, and legal strategies for arts advocacy.
- NEW [ARTventures](#) Added: Join us for the Grassroots Organizing Clinic, Restorative Sound Bath ARTventure or My River, My Roots, My Freedom ARTventure.



REACH OUT
FOR A CHAT

Let's chat!

GET TO KNOW
US BETTER

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