

# Local Arts Network Newsletter



## **ARTS & CULTURE ARE PART OF EQUITABLE LABOR FOR ALL**

When I think of a time of year that honors workers, my mind usually goes to the end of summer—Labor Day. I remember attending Labor Day parades with my family, celebrating the union workers my mom represented as a union lawyer. But spring, and especially May Day, holds a different kind of power—a deep, historic well of inspiration for art that explores work, labor, and social justice.

The roots of May Day stretch back more than a century, to a pivotal moment in U.S. labor history. In the 1880s, workers and unions across the country organized for better conditions, including the now-standard eight-hour workday. In May 1886, one of those demonstrations in Chicago turned deadly when a bomb was thrown during a rally, prompting violent retaliation from police. In the aftermath, several labor activists—many of them immigrants—were convicted and later honored by the labor movement with an annual commemoration on May 1st. Today, a sculpture in Chicago's Haymarket Square bears a simple, powerful inscription: "Dedicated to all workers of the world."

This long-held tradition of labor organizing and remembrance continues to find expression in artist-led community events. Just this past month, [South Minneapolis hosted its 50th annual MayDay Parade](#)—a vibrant, grassroots celebration featuring giant puppets, stilt walkers, live music, and spontaneous street performances. First launched in 1974 by In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre, the parade became a community-run event in 2023. Volunteers and local artists now keep the tradition alive, culminating in the Tree of Life ceremony at Powderhorn Park, where a sun-bearing boat crosses the lake—an offering of renewal, resilience, and collective imagination.

This month's newsletter is a reminder that the power of collective action is alive and growing—through art, organizing, and community care. Below you'll find local projects building this power brick by brick, and resources to help you advocate for arts and culture on the federal level. Because, when we act together—creatively, intentionally, and in solidarity—we're stronger than any one of us alone.



## ***A Good Listen***

The Battle for America's Memory Part 1 & 2 with  
Kimberlé Crenshaw



**Image Description:** Green and yellow box with a turquoise "X" with "Intersectionality" in white and "matters" in black inside. "With Kimberlé Crenshaw" underneath the "X"

# Local Projects



**Image Description:** Inside a wood shop, a Black person wearing safety goggles and headphones, cuts a 2X4 with a table saw.

Dorchester Industries is a manufacturing platform that creates using exceptional but often overlooked materials sourced throughout the City of Chicago. ***This project has a dual mission: to create beautiful things well and to train its employees to pursue careers in the building trades and creative industries.*** The objects produced through the collaborative creative process are sold under the Dorchester Industries brand, with proceeds supporting the mission to promote culture-based, artist-led, neighborhood-driven community revitalization.



**Image Description:** A diverse group of people stand in a line watching a performance. Closest to the camera is Shaun Durbin, a member of The Guild, in a yellow tank top with sunglasses hanging from the neck line and a paint splattered baseball cap. Next is a person in a white short sleeved button down, then a person with a black top with flowers and sunglasses on their head. There is a bunch of people in a fenced area as the background.

“ If I were to give back anything to the people around me, it would be that, art. ”

Life After the Guild, with Shaun Durbin

The Guild is a paid apprenticeship program within Mural Arts Philadelphia. ***Projects within the program work with those who were formerly incarcerated or on probation*** to learn job skills through painting murals, carpentry and mosaics with aims to reduce recidivism and enhance employment readiness.

The St. Louis Teaching Artist Institute, run by the Regional Arts Commission (RAC), ***trains teaching artists focused on grades K-12 using a curriculum inspired by the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education.*** Participants benefit from peer learning and individualized coaching.



**Image Description:** Two people sit at a table engaging in a creative practice while attending a celebratory event hosted by the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis



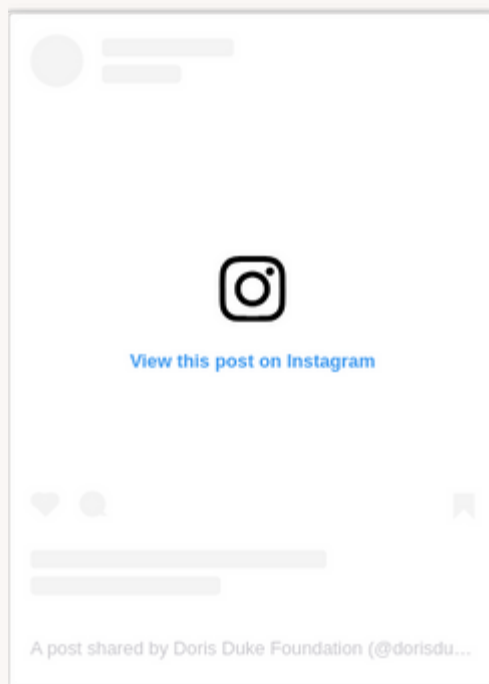
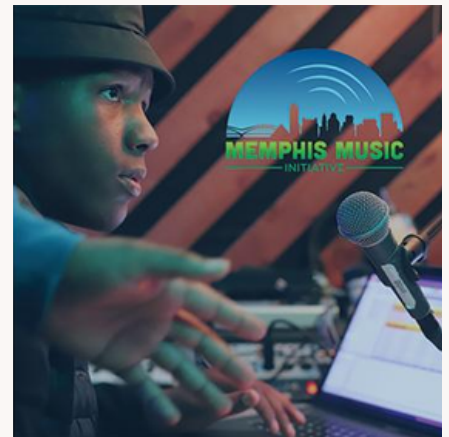


**Image Description:** Three artists stand together showing off their recent prints on fabric. The artist on the left has on glasses and an apron, they are holding a towel with yellow tomatoes printed. The middle artist is wearing glasses and a pink shirt and patterned skirt; they are holding one corner of a towel printed with blue stars. The artist on the right is holding the other corner of the blue starred towel and is wearing a green hoodie with jeans. There are paintings on the white wall behind them.

**East Street Arts (ESA)** provides creative workforce development through artisan training programs, workshops and community interactions for artists with disabilities. ESA provides instruction, assistance, product development opportunities and a shop for the artists who attend to create and sell their products.

**Memphis Music Initiative's** MMI Works program creates paid summer opportunities for youth to work at music and arts organizations, and offers equitable access to career training and professional/personal development.

**Image Description:** A young Black person works on producing music at a laptop and sound board. Another person's left hand is reaching in for the microphone. Memphis Music Initiative logo of Memphis's skyline is in the top right-hand corner.



**Image Description:** Video thumbnail from an Instagram post featuring attendees from the Creative Labor Creative Conditions May Day event speaking about "when artists go to work".

This past May Day, a participatory choral performance by Troy Anthony and the Fire Ensemble rallied support for artists and the power of the performing arts. As part of the Doris Duke Foundation's *Creative Labor Creative Conditions* portfolio, this event is part of a national coalition and campaign championing artists as creative laborers and the need to provide them with proper resources, compensation, and support to live and work.



**Image Description:** Logo in magenta, orange, and black. Words are stacked on top of each other, aligning on the left side. Creative Labor Creative Conditions.

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*Art is essential to society, revealing possibility in the world and connecting us to one another. Yet those who make art—artists—are often overlooked, and their labor is taken for granted.*

”

–Doris Duke Foundation



# Advocate

## Stimulating Local, State, and Federal Advocacy for the Arts

The attack on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), while not unexpected, marks the next step in a deeply troubling pattern of government disinvestment in the arts. This ongoing pattern of disregard not only threatens vital funding for organizations and communities nationwide—it challenges the very infrastructure that supports cultural expression, economic opportunity, and community well-being. We must respond strategically and in solidarity to protect what we've built and ensure the arts remain a national priority. [The NEA is essential.](#)

### TAKE ACTION NOW

We urge all organizations and NEA grantees to take these steps:

- **Connect with Your Elected Officials** - Remind them of the irreplaceable value of the arts in your community.
- [Share your story!](#)
- **Connect with your [local](#) and [state](#) arts organizations**
- [Download our social media toolkit](#)



**Image Description:** Logo with "Protect the National Endowment for the Arts" in bold text. Three off-white stars are in the top left against a vibrant blue background. Red and off-white angled stripes are on the right side.

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 30th at 2PM 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.

# POWERFUL MAINSTAGE SPEAKERS AWAIT AT AFTACON

## Art as Activism: A Historical Continuum

Join artists Charles Gaines, Steffani Jemison, Sandy Williams, and moderator Justine Ludwig from Creative Time for a dynamic keynote conversation on art as a force for political and social transformation. This cross-generational panel traces the lineage of artist-activists who challenge systems, inspire action, and move the cultural needle.

## The Arts as a Pillar of Democracy

In a moment of national transformation, the arts remain a vital civic resource. This session—presented in partnership with the Knight Foundation—will explore how artists and cultural institutions foster free expression, civic trust, and community resilience. Discover how creative work is shaping democratic life across the country.

## A New Chapter for Americans for the Arts

As the arts sector stands at a pivotal crossroads, join newly selected CEO Erin Harkey for an intimate and expansive dialogue on the role of the arts in civic life. This fireside chat will explore key priorities for the future of the arts in America, including strengthening trust and transparency across the national arts landscape, the evolving role of artists and cultural organizations in driving systemic change, and building sustainable infrastructure to support communities. It will also present a renewed vision for Americans for the Arts as a responsive, collaborative leader in the field.

**Check out the full**  
**AFTACON schedule here!**

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REACH OUT  
FOR A CHAT

**Let's chat!**

GET TO KNOW  
US BETTER

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