

NEA ARTS

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EXPANDING THE REACH OF THE ARTS



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What people know about the National Endowment for the Arts—if they know about the agency at all—is that the agency awards grants to support arts activities throughout the nation. And the Arts Endowment does a great job of that, reaching every Congressional district on an annual basis. What people don't necessarily know is that the National Endowment for the Arts does much more than that, bringing the arts to more Americans through special projects and initiatives.

For instance, the National Endowment for the Arts is a leader in the accessibility field, providing guidance to state arts agencies and arts organizations across the country to ensure people with disabilities can fully participate in the arts. The Arts Endowment has long supported arts programming in juvenile justice facilities, but has strengthened this commitment through a new component of the Shakespeare in American Communities initiative, which has brought high-quality professional theater productions to high schools for more than 15 years.

The National Endowment for the Arts is equally committed to bringing the arts to other underserved communities as well, such as those located in rural areas, where access to quality arts programming can be limited. Outside of awarding 13 percent of our grants for activities in rural areas, we have additional programs, such as the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design, which provides design expertise to rural communities. The Arts Endowment has also been a primary supporter of folk and traditional arts apprenticeship programs throughout the country, which often take place in more rural areas, helping to sustain the cultures of those communities.

And despite the "national" in our agency's name, the Arts Endowment also has international initiatives, bringing foreign artists to American communities that might not otherwise see such artists, and sending U.S. artists overseas, to share the vast, remarkable culture of our country with the rest of the world. One such program, the U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Fellowship Program, sends American artists to Japan for extended residencies. Next year, the program will support collaborations between American and Japanese artists, who will present art inspired by the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in summer 2020, the first time in the program's history that teams of artists will present completed artworks to the public.

This issue looks at some of these programs and initiatives you might not have associated with the National Endowment for the Arts. We hope it gives you a better appreciation of all the work this agency does to provide access to the arts for all Americans.

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About the cover: Dancers Riya Ashby, Maya Brenning, Lily Henry, Anasuya Lyons, and Khilton Nogmaithen in a performance of Dawn. Photo by Eric Kohls, courtesy of the Sutradhar Institute of Dance & Related Arts

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MAKING SURE NO ONE IS EXCLUDED

The National Endowment for the Arts' Leadership in Accessibility

BY REBECCA SUTTON



It was a history-making moment: on June 9, 2019, Ali Stroker became the first wheelchair user to win a Tony Award for her performance in *Oklahoma!*, a revival that received support from the National Endowment from the Arts. But the stage at Radio City Music Hall, which hosted the Tonys, was not wheelchair accessible. Stroker had to wait backstage while the Best Actress category was announced in case she won (which she did), and was unable to join her cast mates when they accepted the award for Best Revival of a Musical. It was symbolic of both how much progress has been made regarding accessibility in the arts, and how much work remains to be done.

It's a familiar dichotomy for the National Endowment for the Arts, which works diligently

to ensure that the progress outweighs the setbacks. "It's the goal of making sure that people with disabilities can access the arts with everyone else, that everyone can see it together, that no one is excluded," said Beth Bienvenu, the director of the Arts Endowment's Accessibility Office, which focuses on underserved populations such as people with disabilities, older adults, military veterans, and people living in institutions. Since the Accessibility Office's establishment in 1976, the agency has become a leader in the field, setting an example for state arts agencies and arts organizations across the country about the importance of making accessibility a priority. "Over the past 40 years, there's been a steady growth of expanding arts access for people with disabilities, and we've been a part of that," Bienvenu said.

▲ Mary Verdi-Fletcher dancing in a 2009 performance of *La Vie en Rose*, choreographed by Mark Tomasic. Photo by Dale Dong

An estimated 55 million Americans have disabilities, which encompass an incredibly diverse range of conditions. The Arts Endowment has sought to expand access in equally diverse ways: by educating the field through publications and convenings, by offering technical assistance to organizations looking to become more inclusive, and through grants that support programs that allow people with disabilities to more fully experience the arts. This might mean audio descriptions of visual art exhibits for people with vision disabilities, offering American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation at live theater events, or sensory-friendly performances for children with cognitive or sensory-processing disabilities and their families.

▼ Mary Verdi-Fletcher works with students during Dancing Wheels' 2019 Summer Dance Intensive. Photo by Sara Lawrence-Sucato/The Dancing Wheels Company

Another way the Arts Endowment has prompted organizations to rethink their inclusion efforts is by educating the arts field about accessibility requirements under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As the

nation's first legislation protecting people with disabilities from discrimination, this law requires that all entities receiving federal funds (which includes all Arts Endowment grantees) must ensure their programming is fully accessible.

The National Endowment for the Arts was one of the first federal agencies to develop regulations in response to this law. The agency continues to require that all grantees indicate how their project will be accessed by people with disabilities; grantees must also complete an accessibility self-evaluation.

"Initially when people think about accessibility, they only think of physical access, but it goes beyond that," said Lauren Tuzzolino, an accessibility specialist with the Arts Endowment. She noted that part of her role involves helping grantees expand their notions of what it means to be accessible. "It's about finding creative solutions and resources, and encouraging more partnerships with organizations who already are serving people with disabilities."



The agency also supports programs that allow people with disabilities to create art themselves, which Gayle Holtman, executive director of ArtMix, said is often neglected and yet is critically important. While many organizations that serve people with disabilities focus on healthcare or housing, “they either omit or they neglect the personal interests and the community connections that are what it means to be a human being,” said Holtman. With longstanding support from the Arts Endowment, “We’re helping people have an opportunity to express themselves, maybe for the first time, and helping them connect to other people.”

The Indianapolis-based ArtMix accomplishes this through adaptive arts classes for people with disabilities, as well as programs that use the arts as a way to build career skills. “For students where language may not be an option to express their understanding, there’s music and there’s movement and there’s drama and there’s image and creation,” said Holtman. “Once they come here, they can see themselves as a creator and see themselves as capable. That is a completely different self-image than what is frequently put on them by our society,” she said.

Professional artists with disabilities also continue to face barriers, and the Arts Endowment has striven to ensure they too have equivalent opportunities as their peers. This includes regular support for organizations like the Cleveland-based Dancing Wheels, which dancer Mary Verdi-Fletcher founded in 1980 as the nation’s first professional dance company to include dancers with and without disabilities. Arts Endowment grants have helped fund national tours, new commissions, the company’s dance school, and a new international exchange for dancers with disabilities.

“When I started dancing, there were no wheelchair dancers that I could emulate,” said Verdi-Fletcher, who was born with spina bifida and uses a wheelchair. Thanks in large part to her pioneering efforts, “Today a child with a disability that wants to pursue [dance], whether it’s for recreational purposes or for formal training, they know that it’s possible,” she said. “Setting an example of possibilities is really the key to opening people’s minds and [allowing them to make] choices in their lives.”

For Verdi-Fletcher, dance is an ideal vehicle to change not just a dancer’s sense of possibility, but audience members’ as well, and to show the huge range of physical and



emotional capabilities of a population too often defined in terms of limitations. “Movement crosses all boundaries of language,” she said. “We love when audiences say, ‘The disability disappears. We don’t see the differences in people. You’re all dancers.’ Not that I want to hide my disability. By no means. But I don’t lead with my disability. I’m a woman and I’m a dancer and I’m an artist. It just happens to be that I’m disabled.”

While she lauded how the athletic world has many competitions for athletes with disabilities, she said it’s rare for a sports event to mix disabled and non-disabled together, as

▲ ArtMix teaching artist Carrie King (right) works with students at the ArtMix studio. Photo courtesy of ArtMix, Inc.

her own integrated dance company does. “In the arts, the beauty is that we’re working together, we have different strengths, we have different talents, and it all melds together to make a statement, whether that be a critical statement about inclusion or disability or access, or just a statement of equitable performance onstage,” she said. “You don’t have to preach about access and inclusion when you can see it firsthand.”

Seeing and celebrating access through grantees like Dancing Wheels and ArtMix helps the Arts Endowment make the case for why accessibility is not only important, but obtainable. Although the passage of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 removed many physical barriers for people with disabilities, there remain attitudinal barriers that can be difficult to hurdle. “A lot of the challenges that we see in the field are that organizations are just not making accessibility a priority,” said Tuzzolino. “Organizations still need that leadership buy-in and flexibility to better understand the needs of their community.”

To accomplish this, the Accessibility Office continues to give arts organizations the tools

needed to reframe their mindsets and practices so that they can better include the full scope of their communities—including those community members with disabilities. For example, in August, Bienvenu and Tuzzolino both led sessions at the Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability Conference in Denver, Colorado, and in the coming months, a new online toolkit for artists with disabilities will be published on the Arts Endowment’s website.

With each presentation or online resource or phone call with a grantee, the agency is helping move the needle on what it means to access the arts in America. “We’re making a difference, even if it’s a small difference in some cases,” said Bienvenu. “When we say that we want people to have access to the arts, this is one key way to do it.”

Rebecca Sutton is the editor of NEA Arts.

▼ ArtMix participants display their finished works. Photo courtesy of ArtMix, Inc.





Being Small and Thinking Big

CITIZENS' INSTITUTE ON RURAL DESIGN

BY VICTORIA HUTTER

Like their urban counterparts, rural communities are distinct from one another, with their own assets, challenges, histories, and visions for a better future. As such, their community design—and design challenges—are equally diverse, with solutions taking shape in vast and varied ways.

The National Endowment for the Arts' initiative Citizens' Institute for Rural Design™ (CIRD) honors these differences by empowering residents to leverage local assets to build better places to live, work, and play. A partnership among the Arts Endowment, the Housing Assistance Council, and buildingcommunityWORKSHOP, CIRD accomplishes this by offering competitive funding

▲ Architect Jim Leggitt created live sketches and plans of Valentine, Nebraska's, Main Street throughout the town's CIRD workshop. Photo by P&W Photography

to small towns and rural and tribal communities to host multiday community design workshops. The goal is to provide communities with populations of 50,000 or less with the resources and expertise needed to convert their own good ideas into reality.

“CIRD awardees share a commitment to make change happen while preserving their quality of life and small town charm,” said Cynthia Nikitin, the senior vice president of Project for Public Spaces, which along with the Orton Family Foundation, was a CIRD partner from 2012-2018. “They have a team of devoted individuals eager to engage with the NEA and the CIRD staff to produce a workshop that will move them forward in meeting the design challenge they’ve identified, and they have clearly articulated goals and know what success looks like.”

CIRD is just one aspect of the Arts Endowment’s longstanding commitment to providing access to the arts for Americans in rural areas. Nearly 300 agency grants, totaling approximately \$8 million, are awarded for activities in rural communities on average; often, these grants are the only arts funding available. The Arts Endowment has also initiated or supported research reports such as

Rural Prosperity through the Arts and Creative Sector: A Rural Action Guide for Governors and States and Rural Arts, Design, and Innovation in America, which give the field a better understanding of how the arts can impact rural areas.

This impact is made tangible through CIRD, which can transform the very fabric of a community. “To even apply for the [CIRD] award, a community needs to come together beforehand to assemble a competent team, clearly articulate a design challenge, demonstrate a commitment to broad outreach, and make space for all voices at the table,” Nikitin said. Once a grant is awarded and a project is underway, communities continue to work together and grow.

Since the program launched in 1991, CIRD has convened more than 80 workshops in all regions of the country, bringing together local residents with teams of design, economic development, creative placemaking, and other arts and culture professionals. Together, they develop solutions and strategies that will guide the future development of their community.

“Rural design relies on many of the same principles as urban design,” said Nikitin.

▼ A scene from the Valentine, Nebraska, CIRD workshop. Photo by P&W Photography



STORMWATER DRAINAGE

Problem: flat street distributes water + ice + puddles against curb

Goal: move water away from pedestrians + off the road + walkways

Options:

- 1 Drain to curb
- 2 Drain to mid-point of parking
- 3 Drain to point btwn street + parking
- 4 Direct runoff to rain gardens

4th + Main Intersection

TL: Improve visibility for drivers, decrease damage from trucks, increase safety for pedestrians

S: trucks' turning radius + low visibility not enough traffic to warrant signal

we considered:

- hunks out properties to more space
- would give extra room!
- properties owners won't love the idea
- a secret option for streets with large turning vehicles
- would cost 30' sidewalk, not necessarily desirable
- 3rd is wider - would eliminate parking @ 3rd
- would access parking to clearly - owner issue.

Sidewalk

Crosswalks



“However, the scale is vastly different; geography is a huge factor, the availability of broadband is as important as fresh air and clean water, and the primary industries (agriculture, logging, mining) continue to define most local economies and account for much of the built landscape.”

A CELEBRATION OF A RIVER AND ITS COMMUNITY

Sixty-five miles east of Santa Fe is the former railroad town of Las Vegas, New Mexico, with a population of about 13,000. The town is bisected by the Gallinas River that early in the area’s history was the physical division between the well-to-do Anglo Americans on one side and the less-advantaged Hispanic population on the other.

The Hermit’s Peak Watershed Alliance is a local, environmental nonprofit specializing in watershed restoration. The Alliance hosted a CIRD workshop in October 2018 to develop a design for a new Gallinas River Park. The park is intended to showcase a restored river, reflect the diverse ethnic backgrounds of all its residents, and build bonds among the town’s different communities and between the people and their river.

Elizabeth Juarros is the education director of the Hermit’s Peak Watershed Alliance. For her, one of the key benefits of the workshop was the communication and connection that it sparked. “The workshop gave us an opportunity to get ideas

about how to best engage people,” said Juarros. The resource team assembled for the Las Vegas workshop “were just amazing at knowing how to make a conversation that is two-way.” As a result, “We can refer to the workshop as the time when the community came together and started this process clearly of making a community-designed place.”

The resource team for Las Vegas included experts in plants native to the area, river health, and green infrastructure, in addition to skills in community engagement. Workshop activities included creative visioning, hearing from local experts, learning about creative placemaking, and creating a conceptual design plan for the park. That design has since been the lodestar, guiding post-workshop conversations and decisions.

New Mexico Senator Peter Campos was able to work with the state legislature and have funds designated to the project, which together with funds from San Miguel County, totaled \$100,000. In addition, the project has received support from many community organizations that have made donations for the park.

Juarros notes that, “The key is that I haven’t observed many projects where the whole community, including the surrounding areas, the county, and the state all have the same vision, the same focus.”

A HIGHWAY RUNS THROUGH IT

Running north/south, Highway 83 extends from North Texas to North Dakota. It passes through the town of Valentine, Nebraska, which means that Main Street is a major state highway. The challenge that Valentine addressed during its October 2018 CIRD workshop was how to balance downtown economic revitalization with an imminent state-led reconstruction of the road to meet requirements for traffic safety and efficiency. Finding solutions would entail navigating relationships between municipal leadership, current and prospective downtown business owners, and the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), as well as coming up with different scenarios for before, during, and after road construction, which is scheduled to begin in 2022.

Valentine’s leadership wanted to take advantage of this necessary but disruptive highway work to benefit main street businesses and residents. They sought to create a more cohesive sense of place as traffic moves along the road and people hopefully stop for a visit.

◀ Las Vegas, New Mexico’s CIRD workshop included hands-on activities for participants as they visualized the future of a new Gallinas River Park. Photo by Laura Torchio, Project for Public Spaces



▲ A young boy enjoys the Gallinas River in Las Vegas, New Mexico. The town's CIRD workshop focused on restoring the river's watershed, and designing a new Gallinas River Park. Photo courtesy of Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance

Kyle Arganbright is the mayor of Valentine. He was and is deeply involved in the CIRD project and the town's development. He noted, "This project was interesting because the city was inserting ourselves a little more forcefully into a conversation that typically happens at the state [level], because this is a state highway."

The resource team included experts on surviving Main Street road construction and how a community can meld residents' interests,

traffic engineering, and good streetscape and landscape design. "The resources were outstanding. The people were phenomenal, their experience, the way they thought about it," said Arganbright. "They thought about systems. We would not have found those people if it were not for the CIRD process."

Valentine's CIRD workshop made clear to NDOT that the town was serious about doing quality redevelopment. "Number one, this [CIRD workshop] really helped us develop credibility with the state that we were taking it seriously," Arganbright said.

As a result, the town has developed a strong relationship with NDOT headquarters' staff in addition to the district engineer. In fact, the community engagement that happened through CIRD has become a model for NDOT, as it works with other communities in the state.

EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Every CIRD workshop works in a different location with very different circumstances and issues to resolve, but all of them leave behind the same result: an empowered rural community. And that is why the National Endowment for the Arts is committed to bringing design expertise to rural America: helping local communities find solutions to their specific design challenges makes them better communities to live in. Through CIRD, all residents are given a voice in the planning process, and every community has the opportunity to prove to

themselves—and others—that they have the capacity to effect their own change.

Victoria Hutter is assistant director in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts.



WHAT LIGHT THROUGH YONDER CORRECTIONAL FACILITY WINDOW BREAKS?

Shakespeare in American Communities Goes to Juvenile Correction Facilities

BY ANTONELLA NICHOLAS

When Shakespeare was writing *Romeo and Juliet*, there was no way for him to know that in a few hundred years, his tragedy would become an educational resource and inspiration for millions of teachers and students, much less for youth in detention centers.

Yet, that's happening every year thanks to Shakespeare in American Communities, a national initiative funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and administered by Arts Midwest. The program brings Shakespeare performances and educational activities to

▲ Youth perform a scene with Shakespeare Behind Bars. Photo by Holly Stone

thousands of disadvantaged students across the nation, including those in the juvenile justice system.

Shakespeare in American Communities launched in 2003, funding touring activities of seven Shakespeare companies that performed across the United States and at military bases. The initiative has since evolved into a youth-based program in which professional Shakespeare companies perform for middle- and high-school students and collaborate with educators to integrate Shakespeare-oriented activities into the academic curriculum. This year, the initiative has also reintroduced a juvenile justice component, which will allow eight companies to serve youth in juvenile corrections facilities through activities such as acting workshops, text analysis, theater games, and performances by participating youth.

For young people living in detention facilities, theater lends itself to rehabilitation because it requires actors to understand the identity and truth of the characters they portray. Furthermore, prison theater-arts practitioners find that Shakespeare's deep understanding of the human condition allows incarcerated youth

to identify themselves in his plays. In this way, Shakespeare inspires young people in juvenile justice facilities—many of whom are healing from traumatic experiences—to explore their own growth and their own voices.

“The reason that I use art, theater, the works of William Shakespeare, and original writing is that trauma can't heal until the human being who's experienced it finds language for it,” said Curt Tofteland, founder of Shakespeare Behind Bars, which recently received a Shakespeare in American Communities grant. “Shakespeare gives them language, and then as we rehearse, and as we talk about what's happening to each individual, eventually they begin to find their own language for their trauma, and that's when healing can happen.”

Tofteland discovered his passion for prison arts while performing one-man shows and conducting workshops at Luther Lockett Correctional Complex in Kentucky. He founded Shakespeare Behind Bars in 1995 while serving as producing artistic director of Kentucky Shakespeare. This will be his 25th year working in corrections.

▼ Youth perform in a production of *Measure for Measure* with the Actors Shakespeare Project. Photo by Nile Scott Studios



Through the Shakespeare in American Communities grant, Tofteland plans to study a medley of Shakespeare's texts with boys ages 12-18 from September to December at the Illinois Youth Center in Chicago. At the end of the program, there will be a performance for the facility, invited guests, and family. This will be Tofteland's first time working in Chicago; most of his experience has been with incarcerated juveniles and adults in facilities in Kentucky and Michigan.

Connecting with youth in the justice system, especially in an unfamiliar city, requires prison-arts practitioners to bridge major social differences between them and the teens they serve. According to Tofteland, the key is to create a safe space for the boys to share their stories. Importantly, he notes that he and his staff go into justice facilities not to "fix" incarcerated youth, but to listen to them.

"It has to do with building a circle of trust, and most of the individuals that we deal with have had their trust violated," he said. "They, in turn, often have violated the trust of others, and so it's really going back and creating a family, creating a community, that is nonjudgmental and has unconditional love and is deeply interested in them."

Another veteran prison-arts educator, Michael Forden Walker, echoes the need for practitioners to meet youth where they are. Walker is the director of youth programs at Actors' Shakespeare Project, based in Charlestown, Massachusetts, which recently received grants for both the juvenile justice and school components of Shakespeare in American Communities.

"It's incredibly important to really want to see and hear these young people because they often hide in plain sight," said Walker. "What we try to do is just give them an opportunity to speak and be seen using both their own language and Shakespeare's language."



With the Shakespeare in American Communities grant period spanning the entire academic year, the Actors' Shakespeare Project hopes to weave itself into the fabric of the community and give their teens meaningful exposure to multiple Shakespeare plays. Longer residencies also afford students more time to acquaint themselves with Shakespeare's language and characters.

"Shakespeare obviously provides us with characters who are fully and brutally honest about what they need, want, care about, dislike," said Walker. "Identifying with a Shakespearean character, and being able to use that identification to further reflect on your own experience and circumstances is an achievement that you can see they feel."

Arts-based programs like Shakespeare in American Communities also offer hope to incarcerated youth and their families, not only because they provide powerful tools for self-reflection but because they are associated with lower rates of recidivism.

"The participants in our program act differently, and their behavior is observably different," said Tofteland. Shakespeare Behind Bars boasts a recidivism rate of 6 percent; the national recidivism rate is over 76 percent. "The only way that you can address change is for the person who's committed the crime to go back and understand where the crime came from,"

▲ A youth plays Titus in a production of *Titus Andronicus* with the Actors Shakespeare Project. Photo by Nile Scott Studios

he said, explaining that this self-examination allows individuals to dig into who they want to become.

But the juvenile justice program is not the only piece of Shakespeare in American Communities that serves as a vehicle for introspection. The school component gives students a platform to connect with Shakespeare's characters, and in turn, develop a deeper sense of their humanity.

"There are moments of true discovery," says Adam Perry, vice president of strategy and programs at Arts Midwest, the regional arts organization that is responsible for administering Shakespeare in American Communities grants. "Kids grow and they grow together because they're experiencing [live Shakespeare] with each other; they're not isolated, and their face isn't in an iPad for two hours," he said.

The school component requires grantees to perform at ten or more schools, the majority of which must educate students who lack access to the arts due to being historically underrepresented, disabled, economically disadvantaged, or geographically disadvantaged.

This means that thousands of students receive access to high-quality Shakespeare performances and educational workshops who otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity.

Educational activities vary by company, school district, and the chosen play. For example, Actors' Shakespeare Project, working within the Boston public school system, brings Shakespeare Words and Tactics, or SWAT, workshops to schools to prepare students for the Shakespeare performance. In these workshops, company members administer a variety of activities, such as acquainting students with Shakespearean language.

In combining the workshop preparation with the performance, companies like Actors' Shakespeare Project ensure that the theatrical element of Shakespeare is not lost in the classroom, where much of the time is spent on reading the plays and writing essays about them, rather than performance.

"We go into classrooms and partner with [English and language arts] teachers and get the texts of Shakespeare off of desks and slowly into the bodies of the students," said Mara Sidmore, director of education programs, projects, and partnerships at Actors' Shakespeare Project. "A lot of these young people have not had their voices fully expressed and/or heard before

in their lives. Many of them are living with challenging conditions in the inner city, and we want them to have a platform from which they can feel like they are seen and heard."

This opportunity to be seen and heard—and to see and hear others—lies at the heart of Shakespeare in American Communities, regardless of whether it's taking place in a school or juvenile justice setting. According to Tofteland, the program will give him, his staff, and the youth he serves the opportunity to exercise compassion for themselves and others. "To give voice to our suffering, to listen deeply to others, to find ourselves in another human being's story," Tofteland said, is what the grant is all about.

Antonella Nicholas was an intern in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts in summer 2019.

CONNECTING GENERATIONS

The National Endowment for the Arts' Support for Apprenticeship Programs

BY JEHAN NARIELVALA



Anila Kumari in the pose of the goddess Devi.
Photo by Edwin Remsberg, courtesy of the
Sutradhar Institute of Dance & Related Arts

“O

ne of the things that tends to separate [traditional arts] from fine arts is that they're usually learned through observation and imitation and close one-on-one work with a master artist," said Josh Chrysler, a folklorist with the Wyoming Arts Council, discussing

the state's apprenticeship program, one of the many supported throughout the country by the National Endowment for the Arts. Traditional arts apprenticeship grants were awarded by the Arts Endowment beginning in 1978, and have been a significant tool of folklife programs at state arts agencies since the 1980s.

"You're probably not going to get an MFA in a traditional art form," Chrysler continued. "The apprenticeship program allows us to support informal learning in a way that makes sense to the communities that hold those traditional art forms."

Through the Arts Endowment's continued support of state folklife programs and their apprenticeship awards, the agency ensures that traditional artists have the opportunity to pass on the techniques and cultural knowledge of their art forms, which can be as diverse as Mexican ballet folklórico, Northern Arapaho beadwork, gospel singing, and taiko drumming. The Arts Endowment also supports apprenticeships directly through its own grantmaking. Since 1975, the agency has awarded \$135 million through its folk and traditional arts program, which has supported—in addition to apprenticeships—projects such as workshops, festivals, and documentation efforts.

The Arts Endowment's Director of Folk & Traditional Arts Cliff Murphy noted that the formal element of a government grant has been helpful in motivating master artists to prioritize passing down their traditions, as opposed to simply practicing them.

"Apprenticeship grants were intended in some ways to incentivize taking time out of a very busy life to make sure that these traditions get passed on, so that the processes don't get lost in the crush of the daily grind," he said. The goal of



Nilimma Devi, founder of the Sutradhar Institute, in a 'nayaika' or heroine pose. Photo courtesy of the Sutradhar Institute of Dance & Related Arts

the apprenticeships is to encourage “a real commitment to continuity of tradition over generations—that people in four, five generations have a sense of connectivity to their ancestors.”

The generational connection has been especially tight for Nilimma Devi, a Kuchipudi artist and founder of the Sutradhar Institute of Dance & Related Arts in Silver Spring, Maryland. Both Devi and her daughter Anila Kumari have received apprenticeship awards through the Maryland State Arts Council to preserve and pass down Kuchipudi, a classical dance style that originated in Andhra Pradesh, India. Both women have gone on to teach Kumari’s own daughter, Riya Ashby, the art form, making her the family’s third generation of Kuchipudi dancers.

Ashby explained that being able to practice Kuchipudi is her connection to India. If she didn’t have Kuchipudi, she said, “I would only have a surface knowledge of where my grandmother was from and what her culture means.” Her mother agreed, and explained that teaching Ashby Kuchipudi has created “a kind of wholeness and inner empowerment that my daughter can carry with her into college and into her life.” She added, “When you’re in a dominant American context where diversity is a byword, to really live your diversity in a sense that feels authentic, you have to honor these traditional pathways.”

But learning traditional art forms can empower even those whose backgrounds might not link directly to the tradition. Kumari recounts a time when one of the institute’s students took the microphone at a post-performance panel discussion and explained all of the ways that Kuchapudi was not native to her. Kumari remembered the girl saying, “I’ve not been raised in India. I’ve not been raised in this tradition. I don’t speak Hindi. But the spiritual strength that I get now, I really take it into my heart.”



Kumari explained that for such impactful stories to exist, “We need to have guardians of classical traditions.”

Apprenticeship awards can be a way to honor these guardians, whose long years of artistry often take place in obscurity, and whose talents are frequently unknown beyond their own community. By bringing the public’s attention to the artist, the grants also showcase art forms that might not have previously been celebrated as part of American art. “They help people recognize that the arts are not just things like opera and ballet,” said Chrysler. “They are grassroots, creative practices that grow out of every community across the country. Supporting these programs across Wyoming and the country is a way of recognizing the creative contributions of every American.”

Although the internet has opened new pathways for how people might discover and learn a new art form—traditional or otherwise—there are certain cultural and emotional elements that cannot be gained from a screen. “The tangible part of dance you can perhaps learn okay,” said Devi of studying an art form on the internet. “But when a [dance] is being contextualized, and contextualized in the environment we are living in, a good teacher can redefine [it].” Devi noted that the apprenticeships “are validating the personal touch of a guru, so to speak—the personal transmission of the art.”

▲ Riya Ashby of the Devi Dance theater as Queen Satyabhama. Photo by Tony Ventouris, courtesy of the Sutradhar Institute of Dance & Related Arts

Throughout this transmission, Murphy noted that something else is at work: the closing of a generational gap, particularly at a time in history when older adults are frequently separated from society in retirement facilities or nursing homes, instead of enmeshed in the daily lives of their children and grandchildren as was once the case.

“If you’re spending the day with somebody learning how to play blues guitar, yes, there’s going to be a time where you are focused intently on the technical skill of guitar playing,” Murphy said. “But there’s also going to be a lot of time spent hearing about the life of the master artist, hearing stories about how they came up and how they learned and who they learned from and why they learned and why they love this. That context helps to draw the apprentice into some sort of deeper understanding of where this art form comes from, what sorts of things our seniors know that we will never experience.”

Through the apprenticeship programs, there is also a deeper understanding that can develop among master artists themselves. Murphy described how events that feature apprenticeship

teams, such as folk festivals or the annual National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowships Concert, which celebrates some of the nation’s most prestigious folk and traditional artists, have allowed artists from different communities to see themselves reflected in one another.

“I have seen African drum makers and Chesapeake Bay decoy carvers find a sense of shared purpose,” Murphy said. “Their ancestry might be very different. But they learn that they have shared techniques. They learn that they have shared challenges in terms of trying to pass on tradition. It’s a powerful thing to witness the realization of a sense of cohesion and shared purpose.”

Kumari agreed that discovering common ground is incredibly powerful, and is perhaps the most important reason that she, her mother, and her daughter have worked to practice and preserve Kuchipudi. For her family, Kuchipudi is not just an art form or a tradition: it is a lens through which to see and celebrate our shared humanity.



“As small as this institute is, all of its work has gone towards building bridges so that people come together in the spirit of friendship and love and at least a modicum of understanding that we are under the skin the same,” she said. “We are the same. Our job is to love and respect one another. If we can do that, we transform our world.”

Jehan Narielvala was an intern in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts in summer 2019.

◀ 2019 National Heritage Fellow James F. Jackson carving leather in Sheridan, Wyoming. Jackson is also a recent recipient of a Folk Art Mentoring Project Grant from the Wyoming Arts Council. Photo by Josh Chrysler, courtesy of Wyoming Arts Council

▶ Darrell Lonebear (Northern Arapaho) dancing at a powwow in Fort Washakie, Wyoming. Lonebear was recently awarded a Folk Art Mentoring Project Grants from the Wyoming Arts Council to teach his son Koleton Lonebear about their community's sweat lodge songs. Photo by Josh Chrysler, courtesy of Wyoming Arts Council





The Art of Cultural Diplomacy

A Look at the U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Fellowships

BY PAULETTE BEETE

▲ Children in Onishi, Japan, peer into the mobile art studio built by Sue Mark and Bruce Douglas. The studio invited Onishi residents to create clay tiles and reflect on their community. Photo by marksearch / Sue Mark

In the decades following World War II, the United States and Japan worked to rebuild and repair the friendship between the two countries. One of the results of that effort was the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission (JUSFC), a federal agency charged with maintaining that bilateral friendship through “the promotion of scholarly, cultural and public affairs activities between the

two countries” as noted in its founding legislation.

To that end, the JUSFC has worked with the National Endowment for the Arts since 1978 to facilitate the U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Fellowships program. In the past 41 years, more than 200 U.S. artists have traveled to Japan as fellows to engage in experiential learning, artistic collaboration, and the creation of

enduring cross-cultural friendships. In a special residency for 2019-2020 inspired by the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, artists were asked to propose a collaboration with a Japanese artist on a project that reflects the following themes: unity, collaboration, and the longtime friendship between the U.S. and Japan. The projects range from music and dance to creative writing and visual arts, exploring subjects such as the martial arts, the 2011 Fukushima disaster, and sustainability through the lens of food and agriculture, and will be presented in Tokyo next year at the same time as the Olympic games.

According to Niharika Chibber Joe, who directs the fellowship program for the JUSFC, “We’ve seen that it’s important to have an understanding of another culture by being exposed to it, being immersed in it, having the opportunity to learn the language. As a federal grantmaking agency, we support people-to-people understanding and partnerships that advance common interests between Japan and the United States.”

Each year, up to five artists are chosen for the fellowship from a pool of roughly 120 applicants. Fellows come from a range of artistic disciplines, such as literature, photography, filmmaking, and music. The residencies generally last three to five months, and the artists choose where in Japan they’d like to spend their residencies to best suit their artistic interests. Fellows also have the opportunity to stage performances and presentations, or use gallery space at the International House of Japan—a Tokyo-based partner—during their residencies.

The married artist team Sue Mark and Bruce Douglas received their first fellowship in 2016. The duo—collectively known as marksearch—center their art practice around social memory and cultural preservation. Having learned about the Creative Artist Fellowships through a mentor, the duo was interested in going to Japan because of the country’s focus on preservation. They were also interested in the ways that the experience of interacting with Japanese artists and cultural practitioners would transform their existing way of working.

“Before we applied [for the fellowship], my impression through my initial research was that Japan excels at different types of preservation, from the neighborhood scale to larger-scale preservation through intangible cultural heritage designations, as well as a range of museums dedicated to preserving different aspects of history,” Mark explained.

“We wanted to explore all of these various preservation scales, to learn and grow from this knowledge—and we were curious to see what we could extract from these strategies and apply to the work that we’re doing here.”

Mark and Douglas, who traveled with their second-grade son, divided their time between Kanazawa, a city on Japan’s main island known for its well-preserved cultural districts and crafts industry, and Onishi, a rural town in Gunma Prefecture that is home to an arts residency for international artists.

In Onishi, the couple’s work was based around the town’s traditional Japanese kiln. As Mark explained, since their work is relationship-based, not object-based, activating an arts project around the kiln gave them a way to have a deep interaction with the town’s residents. “The work that we do, no matter where we are, is all about the stories that people tell about the places they live in, how they understand change, and then

▼ Bruce Douglas and his son create a mural from the clay tiles made by Onishi residents. Photo by marksearch / Sue Mark



▼► As part of their U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Fellowship, Sue Mark and Bruce Douglas invited residents of Kanazawa to pose with their favorite housecleaning products. Photos by marksearch / Sue Mark



we work with a specific context to manifest the stories in a way that has relevance for a particular place,” she said.

To encourage that communal storytelling, the couple built a mobile art studio, utilizing Douglas’s newly acquired skills in traditional Japanese woodworking. They then invited the community to reflect on its history by creating clay tiles bearing an impression of textures that could be found in the local area. To help residents become comfortable with the project, Mark and Douglas also worked with a local artist—with whom Mark still maintains an active friendship—to facilitate introductions and help build their relationships with the residents.

In Kanazawa, Mark and Douglas developed what they call a “participatory neighborhood conversation” around *machiya*, a Japanese style of wooden townhouse that is slowly disappearing from the country. This time, the couple used the idea of housecleaning—essential for traditional *machiya* maintenance—to spark storytelling within and about the community. The project resulted in a neighborhood celebration of community traditions, along with portraits of residents with their favorite housecleaning tools, which were displayed in various ways in the community.

“I think that’s one of the most beautiful things about the fellowship opportunity, that you propose some ideas of what you would like to learn and how you would like to research, and then you really have free rein to do what’s most meaningful for you while you’re there,” said Mark.

The fellowship is generally a one-time experience, but Mark and Douglas will return to Japan for a second residency thanks to the special initiative that was inspired by the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic games in Tokyo. Mark and Douglas plan to work with Natsuka Endo and Hiro Abe, a Tokyo-based wife and husband multimedia artist team whom they met during their initial fellowship.

Working in tandem, the families—Endo and Abe also have a school-aged child—will construct a mobile writing room and travel together to Fukushima, an area devastated by a nuclear power plant accident in 2011. As they make the pilgrimage—based on a similar one by the 17th-century Japanese haiku master Bashō—the artists will engage with schools, community centers, and senior centers to invite people to write haiku in the mobile writing room. The haiku will become part of the writing space, and as Mark described, “It will grow to be a haiku experience,



a massive collaborative haiku from everyone who participates reflecting on hopes for healing and revitalization for Fukushima. The project is an act of radical caring, to recognize and honor Fukushima's vanguard residents and rebuilders."

Though the fellowship brief is atypical for 2019-2020, Mark noted that the spirit of experimentation and learning that is at the heart of the Creative Artists Fellowships, and the opportunity to build relationships through shared experiences, remains the same. "I'm sure there will be unexpected epiphanies, and how the project will evolve will surprise us. We're really excited and honored to be able to do this work, which will be very challenging and emotional, and is so very necessary."

Paulette Beete is the social media manager in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts.

▲ Kanazawa residents learn more about Sue Mark and Bruce Douglas's project. Photo by marksearch / Sue Mark

Kat Edmonson and her band bow at the end of their performance to a standing ovation at the Freeman Stage, Selbyville, Delaware. The performance was supported through Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation's 2019 Special Presenter Initiatives program. Photo by Graham Miller



In a special online audio feature,

we look at the National Endowment for the Arts' support for the Regional Touring Program that is administered by regional arts organizations to bring performing arts companies to areas of the country where such performances might not be readily available.

