Arts InFocus

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Each month, ArtsGreensboro brings you stories about artists, arts organizations, and individuals whose lives are infused with creativity. Join us in celebrating our vibrant city.

ArtsGreensboro is dedicated to elevating the arts by creating awareness and promoting the vibrancy of our city; amplifying the impact the arts have in building strong and thriving communities for all citizens; and supporting arts organizations, artists, and teachers through grants, shared services, and technical assistance. For more information visit artsgreensboro.org

Antoine Williams, *There Will Be No Miracles Here Series #10*, mixed media, 9”x12”
I am an interdisciplinary artist born and raised in North Carolina. I use the radial Black imagination to investigate themes of power, the body, and the monstrous. I’ve created my own mythology of social monsters about the complexities of contemporary Black life and I’m heavily influenced by science fiction film and literature.

I work in a variety of media, from painting, collage and drawing to assemblage, installation and sound art. I work with whatever materials and processes that most effectively convey the concept or idea I’m trying to express.

This allows for a certain amount of exploration and play in the studio. Recently I’ve created a number of site-specific large-scale wheat-paste installations. One is on view at SECCA’s Drawn exhibition. Another, which is a wheat-paste and sound art installation is currently on view at Duke University’s Rubenstein Art Center. At the moment, I am working on a series of sculptural paintings set to be on view at the Mint Museum this year.

Learn more about Antoine’s work at antoinewilliamsart.com and follow Antoine on social media at @antoinesart.
In November, Creative Greensboro, the City’s office of arts & culture, launched a new initiative, Public Record, illuminating the lives and stories of artists, makers, and creative people in Greensboro. Public Record was created by RJ Hooker through a Creative Catalyst Fellowship, made possible by the Kenan Institute for the Arts with support from the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation. Twenty individuals have been included in the first phase of Public Record – including an incredible array of backgrounds and disciplines. Each profile includes a portrait, video interview, and biography. Two profiles are released in each edition of the Creative Greensboro e-newsletter, sent on the first and third Friday of each month. To sign up for the Creative Greensboro newsletter and be among the first to celebrate these creative individuals each month, visit www.creativegreensboro.com.

Among the group of highlighted individuals are Beka Butts, Jim Gallucci, Princess Johnson, Raven Stanley, Josephus Thompson III, and Christy Wisuthseriwong. Creatives share generously about their individual practice, the intersection of creativity and community leadership, their sources of inspiration, navigating work through the Covid-19 pandemic, and more. Take a moment to learn about the amazing creativity happening in Greensboro, and catalyze your own creativity in the process.
2020 Is in the Rear-View Mirror. But Trouble Still Looms Large for the Arts.

There is no question 2020 was a bad year for the arts. Cancellations, shuttering museum and gallery doors, theaters empty of live performances, and increasing uncertainty about when things will get back to normal. However, here is the thing: I don’t think things will get back to pre-2020 normal, nor should they.

What 2020 brought into clear relief is that the nonprofit model for arts and cultural organizations is a remnant of the past. It developed in the last century, when a handful of organizations dominated, receiving consistent patronage from individuals, corporations, and foundations. Earned revenue was great, but the emphasis was placed on fundraisers, contributed income, and sponsorships. As cash flows ebbed and waned, deficits needed to be filled. Then began talk of changing the business model for arts-based nonprofits, but without a real appetite for challenging assumptions nor the professional expertise tweaks and cuts were made. Still, too often, we did not do the necessary deep dive needed to ensure our sustainability.

The pandemic has presented the impetus and opportunity to do just this. Now is the time for action.

In March 2020, I read A Sector in Peril: Philanthropy's Role in Responding to COVID-19 by Alan Brown, Principal, WolfBrown. The following excerpt was a clarion bell for me (bold highlights are mine):

> What seems obvious is that the long and capital-intensive process of rebuilding the arts sector after COVID-19 will be for naught if it merely restores organizations to the same precarious under-capitalized situation that they faced before it. Somehow, we must come out of this with an entirely new appreciation for the role of capital in protecting both artists and nonprofits from risks that are both predictable and unpredictable.

Brown continued,

> For arts funders, the moral dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis are heartbreaking but unavoidable.

> Who will survive? Should women and children be given the first seats on the lifeboats, or is it every man for himself? Which cultural assets should be preserved, and which should be allowed to perish? When is it morally justifiable to send large amounts of money to endowed institutions with privileged access to philanthropic resources?
Thinking both equitably and strategically about capitalizing the sector at this moment in time will require funders to look at the sector through an ecosystem lens and make distinctions between threats to individual actors and threats to entire species.

Most importantly, now is the time for arts funders to think and act collaboratively. The first step will be committing to a collectively adopted framework for deploying capital into a highly stressed sector, with one eye on the short-term and the other fixed on a horizon not yet in view but considerably brighter.

I took this message to heart; it is part of the rationale for launching the Reentry and Reinvent Campaign for the Arts of Greensboro. There is a direct correlation with ArtsGreensboro's decision to engage the DeVos Institute for Arts Management to assess Guilford County's arts ecology. Michael Kaiser, the DeVos Institute's president, presented to our arts community eight recommendations for a healthier, more vibrant, equitable, and sustainable arts ecosystem. The recommendations were not earth-shattering, nor were they unexpected. However, taking action on them will be required to save jobs, grow diversity and inclusion, and ensure the arts are an essential attribute, culturally and fiscally, to our city.

Will the Troubles of 2020 be with us for another year? Perhaps, but now is the time to rethink our business models, how we invest in our missions, and serve a larger, more inclusive swathe of our community. Equally important, now is the time to address structural inequity in arts funding. There is hard work ahead, but as a community, we can break our silos, work together, and bring the arts front and center to our area's post-pandemic recovery.

Am I hopeful for the future? Yes. If we work with intentionality and in concert with our community and public partners, foundations, boards, and arts leaders, we will come out of 2021 with a stronger arts community. I am on board to do the work and partner with others to make a robust, actionable plan. I hope you will join me in this endeavor. Email me: I am ready to listen, hear, and act. Together.

CLICK HERE FOR THE DEVOS INSTITUTE FOR ARTS MANAGEMENT GUILFORD COUNTY ARTS ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT
As a young student, I remember telling my art teacher, Mr. Austin, I could not draw, nor paint and I didn’t want to try. But he was very patient and taught us that it wasn’t about the end-product, it was about enjoying the process. I remember falling in love with art after completing the famous elementary reflection water paint drawing. I felt so accomplished afterwards. Moreover, I had so much fun exploring colors and transforming “mistakes” into masterful additions to the painting. The impact of art is what captured me. Art helped me and continues to help calm my thoughts, reflect, explore imagination, be creative, and ultimately learn more about other people’s experiences.

In my professional world as a leadership and diversity trainer and consultant, I’ve witnessed people I’ve trained over the years gain an increased level of confidence by expressing themselves artistically. Whether it was watching youth from the Change Institute learn the traditional dances at the Pinelands Creative Workshop in Barbados or witnessing C-suite leaders create the most creative and architecturally savvy structures during competitions; art continues to give me joy.

Bringing people together is an art form. I like to research what people enjoy in a training experience and mesh that with what they need to grow. The goal is to catalyze growth and to have fun while growing, just like Mr. Austin advised years ago. I’m grateful to incorporate the arts in my work through visual photography cards, music, dance, human art structures and the Social Designs signature immersive Culture Wheel Card Game.

During the pandemic, incorporating the arts is essential for business. Even though we’re connecting with one another virtually, I have witnessed the positive impact of including the arts in the design of our work. Personally, the arts have been a saving grace this year more than ever. I’ve enjoyed listening to vinyl more often, painting, re-decorating my home and exploring more street art.
The arts connect us as a community through shared experiences.

Cancellations and closures are a stark reminder of our new reality and its devastating impact on Greensboro’s artists and arts organizations.

Your gift today to the ArtsFund and the Reentry & Reinvent Campaign will ensure that when this crisis is over, the arts will be here to enliven our city for generations to come. Please give today!

Ways to Give:

- Text ARTSGSO to 44-321
- Give online at ARTSGREENSBORO.ORG/SUPPORT/DONATE-NOW/
- Mail a check to: ArtsGreensboro PO Box 877, Greensboro, NC 27402