

IN THIS ISSUE: *Cultural Organizations Breaking or Losing Ground* | *Art and the Climate Crisis*
Hurricane Harvey and the Arts in Houston | *Legislative Roundtable on Climate* | *Climate Resources*



arts LINK

★ Americans for the Arts

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THE SOURCE FOR ARTS PROFESSIONALS IN THE KNOW

Arts Link Mission

Published three times a year for our Professional Members, *Arts Link* provides insight and expertise on the latest trends, resources, tools, and ideas in the field of local arts agencies and arts professionals. Written by Americans for the Arts staff and guest contributors, *Arts Link* brings together arts advocacy news, member spotlights, and highlights of artists and arts organizations from across the country so that our members can continue to create a world where everyone has access to the arts and their transformative power.

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CLOUD HOUSE by artist Matthew Mazzotta, located in Springfield, Missouri, photo by Tim Hawley.

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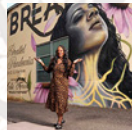
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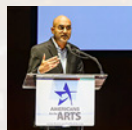
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From the President

The December holidays may mark the end of the calendar year, but for the arts and culture sector, it is the halfway point for a season of performances, exhibits, education programs, and more.



THIS IS THE TIME OF YEAR when the arts and culture scene hits its stride—providing entertainment, enlightenment, healing, and hope in communities around the country.

The bustling and creative month of December is also a good reminder that community is where the arts make a difference. My travels over the last few months have taken me to several communities where great work is happening every day, year-round.

In Denver, Colorado, I toured the RedLine Contemporary Art Center with Executive Director Louise Martorano and learned of their work fostering education and engagement between artists and communities to create positive social change. I also visited Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, which uses dance to

honor the African Diaspora, explore the human condition, champion social justice, unite people of all ages and races, and ultimately celebrate the complexity of life through movement.

In New York City, I toured the Hudson Square Business Improvement District in lower Manhattan, and saw the artwork they've commissioned, the parks and green spaces, and the public-private partnerships at the heart of their work. I also had the pleasure of talking with Ayesha Williams, deputy director of The Laundromat Project, and learned about their initiatives in artist communities of color.

These organizations are creating collaborations between artists, neighborhoods, and arts organizations to improve the places where we

live. I look forward to visiting more communities across the country to meet with local arts organizations and learn about your work firsthand.

This edition of *Arts Link* magazine focuses on the intersection of the arts and climate change and how to harness our networks with a shared commitment around preparedness, awareness, action, and impact.

Americans for the Arts has moved from our Strategic Realignment Process towards strategic planning and a transformative approach to our work in the new year. You can learn about much of this work [here](#) and we will continue to share more with you in 2023.

The arts are a national asset as well as a shared responsibility. I encourage you to find beauty this holiday season and into the new year through the art and culture your community provides. Go to a show, art exhibit, a child's performance, support a local arts organization, or find joy in your own creativity. Try something new, expand your horizons. I look forward to seeing you on that horizon in 2023 and continuing our journey together.

Sincerely,



Nolen Bivens with Cleo Parker Robinson and Malik Robinson of Cleo Parker Robinson Dance. Hudson Business Improvement District staff with Americans for the Arts' Amy Webb and Nolen Bivens.



Online

➡ **WHAT BETTER WAY** to spend the end of year than catching up on the [2022 Profile of Local Arts Agencies](#). This comprehensive survey tracks the budgets and programs of America's 4,500 LAAs.



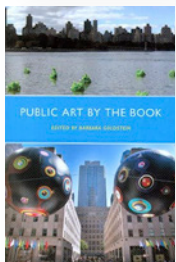
Trivia

➡ **"THERE IS NOTHING** in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humor." On December 19, 1843, Charles Dickens' classic story, *A Christmas Carol*, was published. From book to stage to film, this beloved tale reaches beyond Christmas or religion and continues to melt hearts.

BOOKSTORE



➡ **CREATIVITY, INC.** BY ED CATMULL AND AMY WALLACE is a book for managers who want to lead their employees to new heights; a manual for anyone who strives for originality; and the first-ever, all-access trip into the nerve center of Pixar Animation—into the meetings, postmortems, and “Braintrust” sessions where some of the most successful films in history are made. [Buy your copy today.](#)



PUBLIC ART BY THE BOOK EDITED BY BARBARA GOLDSTEIN is a nuts-and-bolts guide for arts professionals and volunteers creating public art in their communities. The definitive resource for information on public art for local government, arts agencies, arts professionals, and artists, this book includes examples from cities such as Charlotte, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, Portland, San Diego, and Seattle. [Buy your copy today.](#)

Editor's Note

➡ **FROM RISING SEAS** to hurricanes to fires, climate change impacts every corner of the world and is the most significant issue in generations. Through artistic practice, programming, cultural preservation, and disaster preparedness, the arts and culture sector is uniquely positioned to advance the conversation around climate justice.

For the first time in *Arts Link's* 20+ year history, we have dedicated the feature stories to one overarching topic—the impact of the climate crisis on arts and culture. Our cover image, designed by Alana Ladson, centers youth advocates protecting Mother Earth. Inside, you'll find stories and resources from artists and organizations working at the intersection of arts and the environment, including a mosaic of projects from across the country.

Artist **Xavier Cortada** challenges cultural organizations to prioritize climate work and ask ourselves if we're breaking ground or losing ground. Houston Arts Alliance Director of Disaster Services **Lauren Hainley** shares a firsthand account of how Hurricane Harvey changed the arts in Houston. And a **Legislative Roundtable** with federal, state, and local legislators examines how the climate crisis is impacting communities nationwide.

As Cortada writes in his article, “The climate crisis isn't someone else's problem to solve. It impacts every individual, young and old, and even those not yet born. It impacts every community, from Wall Street to Main Street. It impacts every state, rural and urban, coastal and inland. It impacts every nation, every continent, every ocean, every ecosystem. It impacts everything.”

I hope you enjoy the final *Arts Link* of the year and I look forward to bringing you more arts and culture news in 2023. Please email and let me know what topics you'd like us to cover next year. I'd love to hear from you!



Linda Lombardi, Managing Editor
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Photo by Jendayi Asha Creative.



Photo by James C. Gardner III (@thejamescreative).

COLORADO GENERAL ASSEMBLY ARTS ADVOCATE

Representative Leslie Herod



REPRESENTATIVE LESLIE HEROD

(HD-8) was elected in 2016 as the first LGBTQ African American in the General Assembly, while receiving the highest number of votes of any candidate running in a contested election. Since then, she has passed over 150 bills, addressing criminal justice reform, mental health, addiction, youth homelessness, business and the arts, and civil rights protections. Her legislative agenda underscores her commitment to improving the lives of all Coloradans, especially those caught in the cycle of poverty or mired in the criminal justice system.

Rep. Herod's district, House District 8 in Denver, encompasses economic and cultural diversity within its neighborhoods, and there are many examples of where her work in and out of the General Assembly has made Colorado a richer cultural experience for those who live, work, and visit the state. She has chaired the Arts Caucus, the Colorado Democratic Black Caucus, and is a member of the Colorado LGBTQ Caucus.

Americans for the Arts, in partnership with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), presented Rep. Herod with the [Public Leadership in the Arts Award](#) last year for her work in advancing arts and culture, especially during the pandemic to help artists and arts organizations survive.

As chair of the Colorado House Appropriations Committee, she has used her influence to ensure that arts and culture are not only seen as economic engines but are treated with the respect they deserve. Rep. Herod is fond of comparing the economic impact of the state's arts and culture sector to its ski industry. Aware that everyone in Colorado knows that the ski industry is huge in the state—supporting jobs and bringing in tax revenue—she notes that the ski industry is \$4.8 billion dollars, while arts and culture is a \$14.4 billion dollar industry, generating about three times more than the ski industry. She lets that sink in for the audience and then drives it home by emphasizing that this is why everyone should support arts and culture, as it is BIG business and deserves the respect that comes with that.

Read the complete spotlight on [Representative Herod](#).



Arts ARE Education

➡ **DURING NATIONAL ARTS** in Education Week (September 12–17), arts educators and advocates reflected on where arts education has been, and where it can go with some fervent arts advocacy. K–12 art students and educators have endured a rocky road through the pandemic, and their perseverance must continue as we head into a new reality of education in the United States.

The path to this new reality began with the complete shutdown of in-person learning. Most schools stopped useful learning activities in March 2020 for the remainder of the school year. Schools were forced to implement a virtual learning platform with no experience or instruction on how to instruct children away from the classroom. As administrators and parents rushed to identify how best to limit learning loss in subjects like math, reading, and English, students and educators felt the pinch in arts education as they considered how best to move forward past administrative and technological restrictions.

While schools throughout the country have resumed in-school learning and arts education programs are thriving in some communities, quality arts programs remain limited or unavailable in many schools. The [Arts ARE Education](#) national campaign acknowledges that all PreK–12 students have the right to a high-quality school-based arts education in dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts.

Arts ARE Education comes at a critical point in K–12 education. While a focus on learning loss experienced by our students is crucial, arts education must be part of that attention. The teacher shortage crisis and school budget cuts may put arts education programs on the chopping block. This campaign provides tools for arts education supporters to advocate with their community, administrators, and school boards. The time is now to advocate for arts education, and we celebrate the advocacy of those who understand its importance.

Celebrating National Arts & Humanities Month

by Georgia Gempler,
National League of Cities

➡ **THE ARTS ARE** fundamental to advancing community health and well-being.

At the [National League of Cities \(NLC\)](#), we know that the arts are essential to vital local partnerships, provide leadership in community engagement practices, foster community development, nurture health, and help improve social cohesion. The arts build community connections and help communities heal.

NLC celebrated National Arts & Humanities Month this year by highlighting how cities across the country support and are strengthened by their arts communities.

“The arts are our city’s life force,” said Mayor Jorge Elorza of Providence, Rhode Island, “they are what make Providence the “Creative Capital.” Through Providence’s Percent for Art Ordinance, one percent of funding from every publicly funded infrastructure project goes to integrating public art into our built environment, enhancing access to art, and promoting equity of experience. We support our artists, and they support our city through their creativity and important perspectives.”


This past National Arts & Humanities Month, NLC featured programs and leaders in cities like Providence. We are excited to show how the strengths of artists across the country contribute to our collective well-being.

Four “parachute murals” at [Davey Lopes Recreation Center](#) in Providence, Rhode Island, photo by David Santilli.





Xavier Cortada, "Flower Force" hand painted ceramic and tile, 8' x 4' x 4'; 2021, photo by Adam Roberti.



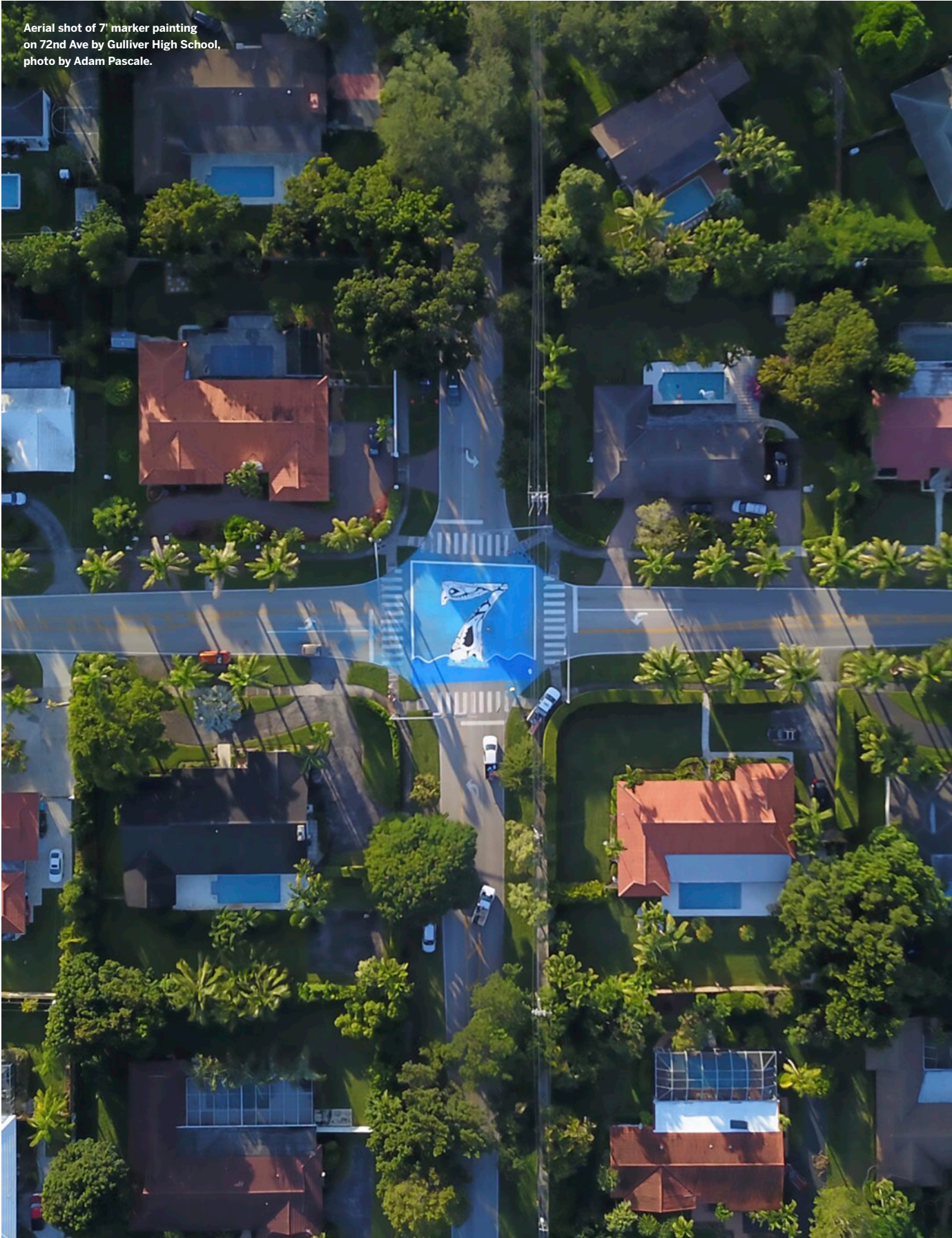
WHEN IT COMES TO CLIMATE, ARE CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS BREAKING GROUND OR LOSING GROUND?

by Xavier Cortada

Humanity currently faces an existential crisis that is born from the decisions of an infinitesimally small percentage of the global population. As fossil fuel executives and many political leaders continue to line their pockets and consolidate their power, climate change is ravaging the world with floods, droughts, storms, and wildfires. It is no coincidence that the people most affected by these disasters are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, People of Color, living in the Global South, who have historically contributed the least to the destabilization of our climate—injustice of the greatest magnitude.

ARE CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS BREAKING GROUND OR LOSING GROUND?

Aerial shot of 7' marker painting on 72nd Ave by Gulliver High School, photo by Adam Pascale.





Miami Senior High School students and their Underwater Markers, photo by Adam Roberti.

Equitably addressing the climate crisis and rapidly transitioning to renewable energy will not only require a groundswell of support for significant climate legislation, but also the inclusion of those whose interests have not been adequately represented in decision-making processes.

With powerful opposition to the policies that would accelerate this global shift, how can we cultivate a broad base of people who champion climate justice and help build the political will necessary for real, systemic change? The climate crisis isn't someone else's problem to solve. It impacts every individual, young and old, and even those not yet born. It impacts every community, from Wall Street to Main Street. It impacts every state, rural and urban, coastal and inland. It impacts every nation, every continent, every ocean, every ecosystem.

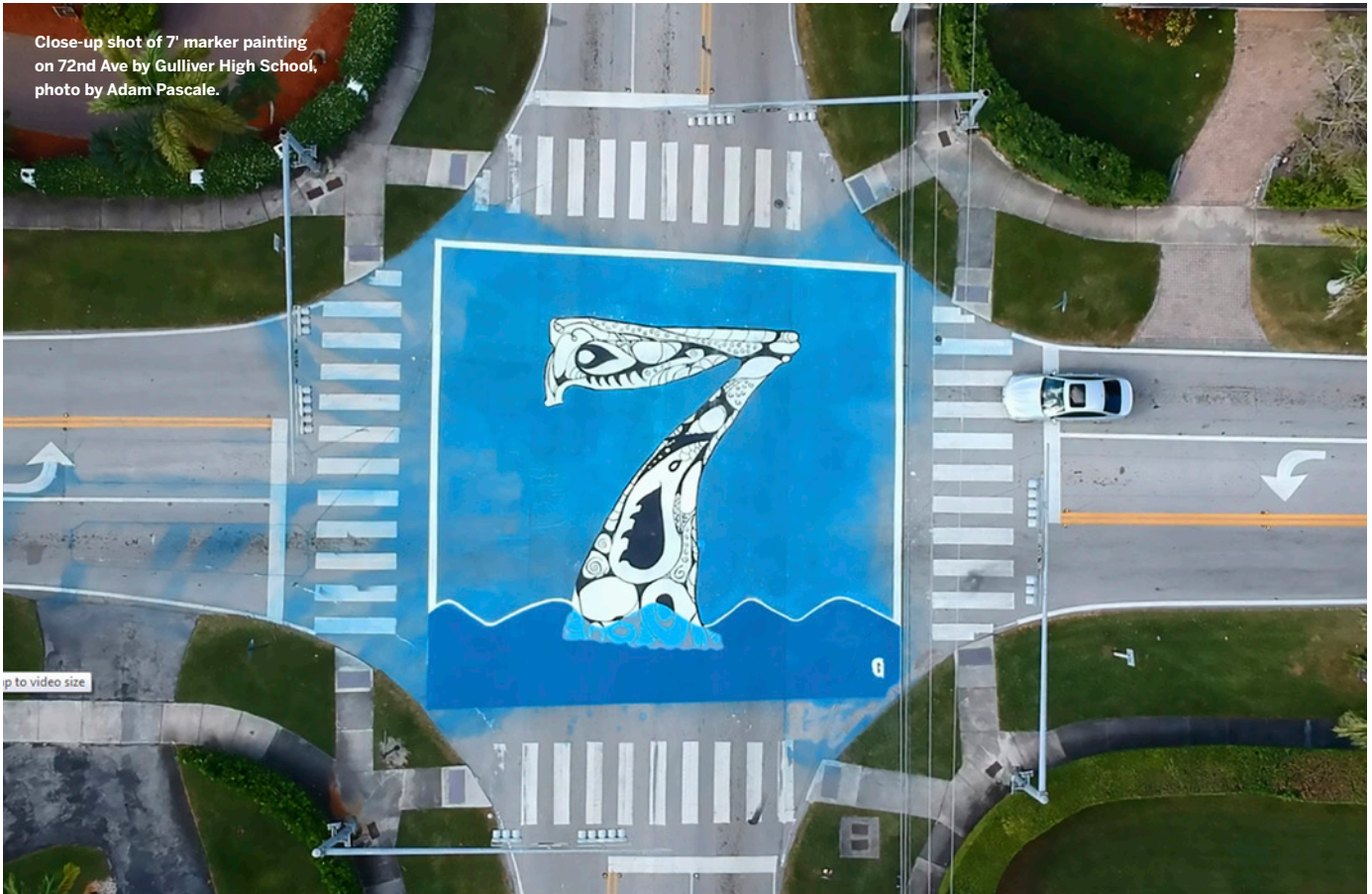
It impacts everything.

What role do the arts have in engaging society around the greatest issue of our time? How can artists and administrators meaningfully and strategically contribute to climate change awareness, mitigation, and adaptation efforts?

As an artist who has created climate art at both of the Earth's poles, collaborated with scientists to create socially engaged art projects that have mobilized communities around environmental issues, and been appointed as the inaugural artist-in-residence for one of the most climate-vulnerable places of the United States, Miami-Dade County, I see the climate crisis as a problem that the cultural community is uniquely equipped to help solve. Art has the power to break down barriers, bridge divides, and show us new ways of seeing so we can be

moved into action. In a world that is both polarized and paralyzed, art can be harnessed as a democratizing agent that helps individuals relate to one another, connect on issues they care about, build new coalitions, and work toward a more just future.

Cultural leaders have a unique responsibility and opportunity to understand the power they wield in transforming society. With dire projections of sea level rise, food and water shortages, and forced migrations due to climate disasters, our challenge is to lead by strategically facilitating creative ideas, modeling proactive behaviors, and providing individuals with a sense of agency in the problem-solving. We must accept the importance of this moment in human history so that we aren't simply showcasing and critiquing today's culture, but



Just as technology has revolutionized everything we do, climate will be embedded into every decision we make as it continues to disrupt every facet of life as we know it.

intentionally molding and shaping culture through time, thereby creating an ethos committed to saving the planet.

Funders, artistic and program directors, curators, collectors, and critics all have an inherent influence on the ideas and works that are produced as they determine the kind of art that is validated, elevated, and celebrated. Just as Walmart has a grip on the supply chain and influences suppliers to build products with particular specifications or standards, curators and producers call attention to certain concepts and themes that then guide the focus of many artists. Topics surrounding social and racial equity are extremely relevant today. What if environmental issues were given the same attention and platform? What if artistic practices centered around climate change were uplifted to promote the accompanying discourse?

What if exhibitions were created to make a tangible difference in the community where they're located rather than to please an art critic?

A cultural institution can have transformative effects that have nothing to do with ticket sales or the kind of metrics that directors or board members typically want. Cultural, executive, and programmatic leaders can push outside their comfort zone to make their institution more relevant to the local cultural ecosystem, and one that moves the needle. By approaching the work like a choreographer, for example, these leaders could bring in the dancers they know from government, the private sector, and education to create a dance that completely alters the way a community addresses the climate crisis. There needs to be a willingness to take risks and occasionally fail in



pursuit of these ambitious endeavors. Given the circumstances, this is no time to play it safe.

At an institutional level, it is essential to walk the walk before you talk the talk to maintain credibility and trust within the community. In some circumstances it may be easier to move a facility in a sustainable direction rather than using it to program a sustainability exhibit. Organizations can look at ways of reducing energy consumption, implementing waste diversion programs, eliminating single-use plastics, and incentivizing eco-friendly modes of transportation such as electric vehicles and public transit. Exploring these options and then proudly displaying these commitments shines a light on the direction that the institution is moving in, models a respect for the environment, and often coincides with long-term cost-saving measures.

Importantly, it prepares organizations for the programming that will inevitably come from cultural producers. Just as technology has revolutionized everything we do, climate will be embedded into every decision we make as it continues to disrupt every facet of life as we know it. Climate will become central to the focus of cultural producers. The question is only whether they begin to do so soon enough to lessen the harm to come tomorrow.

Cultural institutions hold vast amounts of power that come from the faith and trust of their audiences. Institutions can help shape and marshal their visitors to confront our climate threats. In turn, these audiences can hold institutions accountable for their actions or inaction.

That power extends across all sectors of society, particularly through board

membership. By modeling behaviors and best practices that board members can take back to their own corporations, there is a domino effect of green initiatives. In this way, institutions can help catalyze a cultural shift that sees public art committees commission carbon-neutral sculptures or performing arts organizations fund productions that raise awareness about rising seas.

As chair of the Miami-Dade County Cultural Affairs Council, I launched the Green Task Force, and we created the Arts Resilient 305 initiative to encourage local cultural organizations to adopt more sustainable practices and develop programs that addressed resiliency. We collaborated with the county's Office of Resilience to develop a set of recommendations for Miami-Dade's 1,000+ nonprofit cultural organizations and created a website that provides

ARE CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS BREAKING GROUND OR LOSING GROUND?



9' marker painting at 67th Ave by Westminster High School, photo by Adam Pascale.



information and resources for artists and arts organizations involved in integrating and promoting sustainability. The Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs also provides commissions for artists to create temporary public art works or performance art works that raise awareness about climate change and highlight local advocacy opportunities for artists and organizations alike.

Through my time with the Cultural Affairs Council and in my own practice, I've found that people are most likely to engage with issues such as climate change if they are given a sense of agency. The feeling that they can help solve a problem or effectuate change is integral to inspiring their curiosity and motivating them to get involved.

In 2018, I worked with the Village of Pinecrest to develop a socially engaged art project that would raise awareness about sea level rise and empower residents into action. We called it the "Underwater Homeowners Association." Launched during Art Basel, participants in the "Underwater HOA" displayed their property elevations across the community. Using an app, residents discovered their property's elevation above sea level and then installed an "Underwater Marker" (a yard sign depicting their house's elevation) in their front yard. In addition to the personalized signs, I partnered with the Village of Pinecrest and local public high schools to paint elevation markers on four major intersections along Pinecrest's Killian Drive. These community-driven art installations garnered international media attention, but more importantly, led to monthly meetings where residents could come together, learn from relevant scientists and experts, and ultimately begin planning for a future impacted by rising seas.

In 2021, I used a public art commission from the Village of Palmetto Bay to blur the lines between private and public

art and engage the community in a large-scale ecological restoration project. Using the public art piece as the heart of the effort, I gave away wildflowers and ceramic wildflower sculptures to the first 200 Palmetto Bay families who agreed to plant the flowers in their yard and install the ceramic sculpture outside their home, thereby joining the "Flower Force." Through this process, a community-wide public art installation of wildflower sculptures and gardens radiated from the flower sphere at the Palmetto Bay traffic circle and extended throughout the Village. By activating the central sculpture with community members, discussions were generated about saving pollinators, transforming lawns into gardens that conserve water, decreasing the use of pesticides, and protecting ecosystems across South Florida.

Whether someone is participating in a socially engaged art project, watching a play, or looking at a painting, they are typically open and receptive to the artistic experience. It is a space that is generally disarming, contemplative, and allows for a shift in perspective. This is a tool that we know how to use. People have used art throughout history to catalyze responses to injustice, such as during the civil rights movement, but for our current environmental crisis, art is underutilized. As thinkers, innovators, and leaders of the cultural community during these uncertain times, we must ask ourselves—are we breaking ground or losing ground? [A](#)




XAVIER CORTADA (he/him) is an artist, University of Miami professor of practice, and the inaugural artist-in-residence for Miami-Dade County. [Read more.](#)

YOU BELONG HERE
MEMBER CENTER



Art & the Climate Crisis Across the U.S.


 **FOR THIS EDITION** of *Arts Link*, Americans for the Arts wanted to start a conversation with readers about the impact of climate change on the arts and culture sector and highlight artists and arts organizations working at the intersection of arts and the climate crisis. Over 60 people responded, including members and the broader arts and culture field, from across the United States and internationally. This mosaic represents work ranging from artistic practice to cultural preservation to disaster preparedness and resources. Visit the [Arts + Climate Mosaic webpage](#) to explore these projects.

All mosaic photos courtesy participants.
For a complete listing of credits, visit the [Arts + Climate Mosaic webpage](#).



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Megan Berner


 **AS ARTS & CULTURE MANAGER** for the City of Reno, Nevada, Megan Berner manages a public art collection of over 200 artworks, project manages all new public art projects, works with artists, manages the city's Arts & Culture Grants program, oversees the city's various gallery spaces, and serves as staff liaison to the City of Reno Arts & Culture Commission and their Public Art Committee. She is also a visual artist whose work is inspired by the environment. In a recent [Member Spotlight](#), Berner shared how climate change is impacting her work.

“**I already deal with somewhat desolate landscapes and the thoughts of how these places may shift with the acceleration of climate change show up in the depictions of these imagined spaces. For example, in making my series titled “Fading Light | Shifting Landscapes,” I was thinking a lot about climate change. It showed up in that series as mashed up landscapes—desert scenes with somewhat hazy, apocalyptic skies that could represent twilight or something darker depending on how you interpret it, or a scene with desert hills and snowcapped glaciers behind, a sort of hybrid space. There is a certain beauty in these imagined spaces but also a melancholy that I hope makes the viewer think about their connection to our natural world. My intention is not for my work to be scary or depressing—though I know climate change is very serious—but to connect people to their environment so they perhaps have more awareness of how they interact with the world.**”



HOW
HURRICANE
HARVEY
CHANGED
THE **ARTS**
IN HOUSTON
FOREVER

by Lauren Hainley

A photograph of the Houston skyline, including several prominent skyscrapers, viewed from a distance. The city is surrounded by a vast, flat floodplain. In the foreground, there are lush green trees and grasses, and a multi-level highway bridge spans across the scene. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, suggesting a bright but slightly overcast day.

Hurricane Harvey was a Category 4 storm that hit the Texas coast near Corpus Christi on August 25, 2017. Within 24 hours, the Houston metroplex was eerily quiet as the rain began to fall. The widest highway in the United States was dark and empty, the second largest port in the country sat idle with a skeleton crew, and the 7 million residents of the Houston metroplex waited for the storm to pass and the rain to stop. Each night new tornado warnings woke residents from their sleep, those lucky enough to be on high ground watched as friends and neighbors were rescued from their homes in boats, and we waited for the rain to stop. As each day passed it became more difficult to remember a time when it wasn't raining, the sound of rescue helicopters and flooded car alarms became our lullabies, and we waited for the rain to stop.

But the rain did not stop. For four days. In some parts of the city, it was weeks before the water receded.

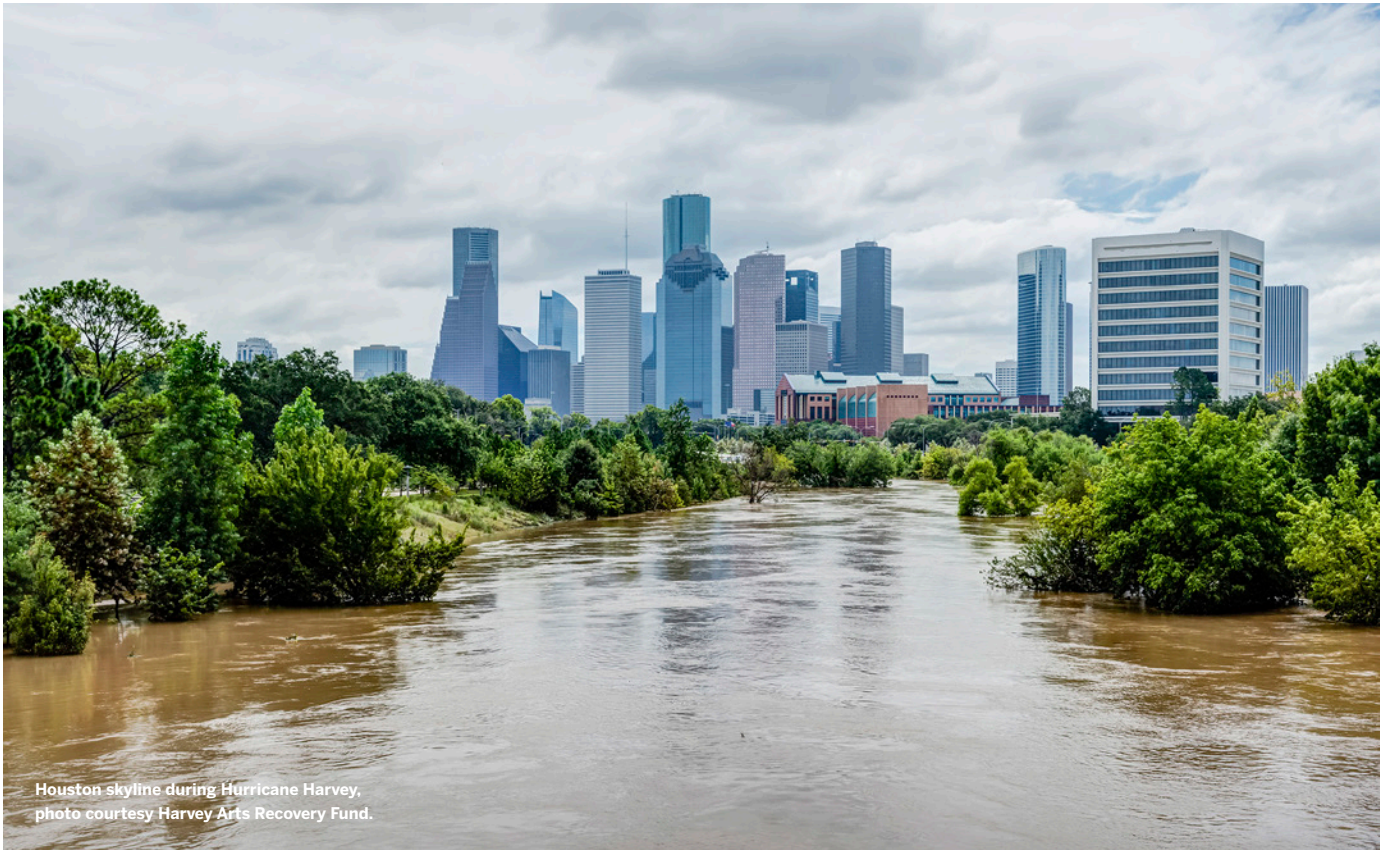


John Abodeely at the Association of Arts Administration Educators Conference at University of Houston Downtown, May 2018, photo by Lauren Hainley.



Houston Airports System employees in front of temporary installation at George Bush Intercontinental Airport, by San Antonio-based artists Sunny Sliger and Marianne Newsom, donated to Harvey Arts Recover Fund, photo courtesy Harvey Arts Recovery Fund.

In the aftermath of the storm, the artistic, cultural, and historic preservation communities were an integral part of making the community whole again. The cultural community provided music in shelters, held fundraisers for victims, and even volunteered to “muck and gut” the homes of those who lost everything.



Houston skyline during Hurricane Harvey, photo courtesy Harvey Arts Recovery Fund.

Total rainfall hit 60.5 inches. Flooding covered southeast Texas in an area the size of New Jersey. At least 88 people died. The sheer weight of the water depressed the Earth's crust, and Houston sank by 2 centimeters as a result.

"My final interview was scheduled for the day Harvey hit Houston," said John Abodeely, who started two months after Harvey as CEO of [Houston Arts Alliance](#) (HAA), the city's primary partner for arts grantmaking and public art management. "When I showed up one week later to try again, the debris was clear. Neatly piled on the edge of land lots, waiting for pick up. Foliage had been cleaned up. Walls were being scrubbed. Countless houses were being rebuilt. It was like, once the rain stopped, people stepped outside, broom and hammer in hand, and got to work putting their lives back together. And their neighbor's lives. And it made me fall in love with this city."

Five years after the carnage of Hurricane Harvey, Houston's arts community is not prepared for a similar disaster, thanks to a longstanding, national problem. There is a large, silent gap between existing emergency management efforts and the arts community. Artists are not on their list as professionals in need of recovery on par with, for example, a construction company. Nonprofits are not consulted on disaster resilience plans, though they may be in a neighborhood slated for millions in drainage upgrades. In most communities, these two industries do not talk, plan, collaborate, or solve problems together.

At Houston Arts Alliance, we are rectifying this problem.

Days after beginning his tenure in November 2017, Abodeely joined a group of local arts service organizations who created the Harvey Arts Recovery Fund (HARF). The historic collaboration

included city officials, several arts service organizations, one of the state's largest private funders, and others. Over 18 months, HARF distributed more than \$100,000 in relief to artists and small organizations in multiple counties.

Artists and organizations rallied towards recovery. Many were handling damage to their own homes, studios, and businesses, while they chose to focus on the needs of others. The cultural community provided music in shelters, held fundraisers for victims, and even volunteered to "muck and gut" the homes of those who lost everything. In the aftermath of the storm, the artistic, cultural, and historic preservation communities were an integral part of making the community whole again.

"After HARF was completed, we wanted to make sure the lessons we learned in response to Harvey weren't lost. It was clear our community needed

HOW HURRICANE HARVEY CHANGED THE ARTS IN HOUSTON FOREVER



"Houston Curtain" mural by Emily Ding, photo courtesy Harvey Arts Recovery Fund.



the same help given to other sectors to be more resilient before disasters and recover more fully after them.” said Abodeely. HAA hired Gary Friedel, founder of an emergency management consultancy and a retired fire chief, to lead an 18-month research project to document lessons learned and the needs of the arts community to withstand future disasters.

Research kicked off in early 2019, guided by a 27-person advisory committee consisting of artists, cultural organization staff, leaders of local cultural districts, and government employees, including emergency managers. Over the course of 10 months, committee members bridged the divide between emergency management and the arts. Arts leaders learned about response and recovery, and emergency managers learned about the arts. The committee guided Friedel’s research and signed off on key decisions, such as the definition of arts and culture, the intangible value of art, and many more.

“I learned so much about the arts, culture, and historic preservation in those meetings,” shared Caroline Egan, assistant emergency management coordinator of Sugar Land, Texas, “I had never thought about the challenges individual artists and cultural institutions faced when trying to recover. I would never have known without the research and the committee.”

Just weeks after starting the research, the clearest lesson emerged: emergency management and the arts had no way to talk to each other. Emergency managers did not know what services needed to be provided and cultural leaders had no idea of what help was available. When we asked Kathryn Noser, board president at Company Onstage, what type of help their small community theater needed during Harvey, she responded, “We just needed a place to go for help. Someone to take the stress off and tell us what we needed to do and how to get back on our feet.”

HOW HURRICANE HARVEY CHANGED THE ARTS IN HOUSTON FOREVER



Bill Coats Bridge over Brays Bayou during Hurricane Harvey and on a normal day, photo by Lauren Hainley.

This prompted us to establish the only fully staffed program in the nation dedicated to bridging the local gap between the cultural sector and the disaster response and recovery system. Since 2019, Houston has been defining the way our nation approaches resiliency in the arts community.

Once launched, the program was immediately activated to respond to disasters. The COVID-19 activation lasted 14 months. In the middle of the pandemic, the arctic freeze of February 2021 again challenged the community, resulting in additional damages and losses—\$97 million in lost income due to COVID-19 and more than \$5 million in damages due to the freeze. These dollars speak nothing to the tragic loss of life due to both disasters.

Each challenge offered an opportunity for us to grow, learn, and help. During the pandemic, HAA raised and distributed

\$375,000 in emergency relief to 600 artists and other arts workers—for food, healthcare, childcare, rent, and other dire personal needs. At the same time, we led a social media advocacy campaign for the arts, assessed and advocated for the arts' economic losses in the region, provided fiscal crisis coaching to nonprofits, and convened virtual Town Halls to decrease social isolation.

HAA proved our position as a leader in this space when the Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management asked us to run its response for the cultural sector, embedding HAA in the Office of Emergency Management. For the first time, the arts were helping their own recovery, but with the full force of the region's official disaster recovery mechanism.

As Houston Arts Alliance's director of disaster services, I have presided over

the research, design, and building of the program, which continues to expand and achieve the major milestones laid out in its founding research. The ongoing challenge persists: arts and culture entities lack the capacity to execute recovery efforts, and the county's lean emergency management infrastructure is unable to fully absorb that workload.

But a new partnership promises to bring each sector together to achieve what one alone cannot.

In November 2021, we released the results of their research, *Disaster Resiliency and the Arts in the Houston Area*. This report provides 21 key findings and strategic recommendations for initiatives and efforts to help the arts ecosystem become more stable in the face of disasters. The report also outlines how any cultural community can capitalize on the connections created with national experts and



Hermann Park during COVID-19, March 2020, photo by Lauren Hainley.



Residents look over their street from a balcony during Hurricane Harvey, photo by Lauren Hainley.


existing disaster response systems for the betterment of the community.

Every dollar of resilience spending saves \$6 in disaster recovery. A one-time investment to create the connection between the arts and emergency management is a solution that saves money, saves lives, and protects the heart of our communities.

In 2023, HAA will bring to life one of those important recommendations. The Houston-area Cultural Inventory will ensure that the emergency management sector protects arts and cultural assets on par with other community assets, sectors, and infrastructure. The Inventory will be defined by local communities, through dialogue that will identify each neighborhood's most important cultural assets. The program's first year, which involves planning, is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and local individuals.

The Inventory will define, identify, and document cultural and historic assets throughout the greater Houston region to create a critical, first-of-its-kind tool to better build resilience before disasters and more quickly recover after them. As a result of HAA's ongoing work, emergency management agencies have already committed to utilizing the tool to expand their resilience-building investments to the arts community so we are better prepared before a disaster. And they will use it to expand their recovery efforts after disasters to include the community's most important cultural assets. Once formally adopted, these cultural treasures will be eligible for federal and state disaster funding for the first time in Texas history.

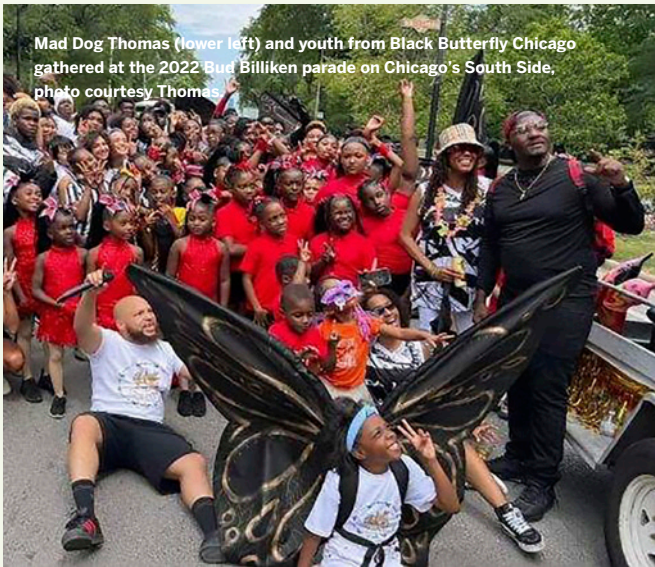
Houston Arts Alliance and the Harris County Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management are trailblazers in the arts and culture recovery arena.

As one of the few partnerships working to bridge the divide, we often operate in a reactive environment and create response plans, policies, and procedures in the wake of a disaster. To move toward a more strategic, proactive approach, the creative sector needs to expand its capacity to create programs that leverage the arts and culture community to assist in the greater community's recovery, create sustainable programs for arts response across the country, and ensure our arts and culture communities are sustained for generations to come. 



LAUREN HAINLEY (she/her) is director of disaster services at Houston Arts Alliance, where she ensures that the Houston area arts, culture, and historic preservation communities are ready and resilient when the next disaster hits. [Read more.](#)

Photo by David Brown.



Mad Dog Thomas (lower left) and youth from Black Butterfly Chicago gathered at the 2022 Bud Billiken parade on Chicago's South Side, photo courtesy Thomas

CHRISTOPHER “MAD DOG” THOMAS

Chicago Footworker, Freedom Fighter, Community Transformer

DANCE MAKER, Freedom Fighter, and Transformative Justice Practitioner. These are just a few ways to describe Christopher “Mad Dog” Thomas. He wields the power of Chicago Footwork, a dynamic dance form arising out of the streets of Chicago, to teach and organize community in areas of the city most adversely affected by inequality and racism. For over 17 years, his work has brought him into schools, parks, juvenile correctional centers, and the streets, taking up issues of gun violence, policing, the carceral system, and environmental racism. This year, Americans for the Arts honored Thomas as a 2022 [Johnson Fellow for Artists Transforming Communities](#).*

Thomas made his mark as lead choreographer and creative director for [Kuumba Lynx](#), a healing and culture-making organization working for liberation for Chicago’s youth and their families. He’s built an inclusive space grounded in critical thinking, artistic excellence, and popular education, and draws on personal experience as a wellspring for empathy and understanding. Chicago Footwork is at the center of that work.

Thomas has created a structured curriculum that connects this dance and music form to generational trauma and living conditions in which the body reacts by sharing stories with extremely fast movement. “The curriculum allows me to have deep conversations about why make art,” says Thomas, “and what are the living conditions for young folks that are creating the culture during that time. It also allows me to showcase community dance groups, DJs, footwork pioneers, battle cliques, and events; and showcase to the footwork community how we can be more involved in political and social movements.”

Throughout this year, Thomas manifested his vision in an initiative he conceived, called Juke for Liberation. Six dance crews, paired with established and emerging Juke producers and DJs, develop original, socially conscious, performance works to be presented at a wide range of public events.

“Earlier this year,” Thomas explained, “each dance group, plus DJs and producers, participated in a series of popular education workshops that included what I call ‘knowledge ciphers’—ways of discussing topics such as toxic masculinity, anti-Blackness, and gentrification.”

Over the summer, 175 young people apprenticed with one of the dance crews to improve their skills while learning through the workshops. Each group, led by a Juke producer and mentored by Thomas, created new original work. “The goal,” said Thomas, “was for the Footwork/Juke culture to be more politically involved in movements through dance and music.”

New performance works were presented throughout the summer, notably at Chicago Hip Hop Theater Festival and as part of the Bud Billiken parade celebrating the historic roots of African Americans in the South Side of Chicago since 1929. The fall season culminated with a Juke & Justice apprenticeship, in which 20 youth deepened their study of Juke culture and social justice movements while creating new dance works and activating many local events.

Juke for Liberation gave young people opportunities to meet with peers and perform around the city while developing their artistry, dialogue, and activism skills. DJs and producers got to create new music, get exposure, and gain experience working with youth. Thomas thrived in this ambitious initiative, bringing his own creative and leadership skills to a whole new level, and looks to sustain the model. Community Connector, Collaborator, Orchestrator, Transformer. These, too, describe Christopher “Mad Dog” Thomas.

* *Mad Dog Thomas shares the 2022 Johnson Fellowship with classical Cambodian dancer, Charya Burt, who was featured in the summer issue of Arts Link.*

Spotlight

Ayad Akhtar Delivers Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy

➡ **ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2022**, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ayad Akhtar delivered the 34th annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy to both an in-person audience at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and a livestream audience across the country. In a highly thought-provoking speech during a timely moment in our nation, Akhtar challenged notions of monetization and narcissism as it relates to social media, infotainment, and the arts. "Let me submit that art, at its best, the art that has us dedicating our lives to it, has always been about unity not difference...I'd like to remind us all of the importance of nuance. The argument here isn't against difference, it's against the primacy of difference. The argument isn't against measurable metrics, it's against the faulty notion that, ultimately, art's benefit can be measured in this way." [Watch the full speech online.](#)



Ayad Akhtar, photo by EPNAC.com, courtesy Americans for the Arts.



The Power of Culturally Specific Artistry

➡ **"AS ARTISTS** and makers, there are endless ways to share a story and our culture(s) are a part of that. The joy of the journey has been finding a way to tell mine. How do you tell yours?" [iLooking Bilingüe!](#), a storytelling platform for Latinés who feel *ni de aquí, ni de allá* (*neither from here nor from there*), focuses on Latiné empowerment and celebrates the Latiné community through storytelling, interviews, and conversation. Founder and Director Jade Cintrón Báez developed the platform through her work in theater and journalism. Visit [ARTSblog](#) for the full article.

Arts & Cooperative Economics

➡ **"THE OLD SYSTEM** cannot be dismantled and upheld simultaneously." Using one of The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa—Ujamaa or Cooperative Economics—arts organizations can enhance the economics of their community so that all share in reciprocal success. But what happens when that balance doesn't exist? How can we address (in)equitable advocacy when white supremacy culture continues to divide us? Visit [ARTSblog](#) for the full article.

Photo courtesy Lt. Governor Nungesser's office.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDTABLE

THE CLIMATE CRISIS

edited by Linda Lombardi



Across the country, federal, state, and local officials are working to pass legislation and support disaster preparedness and recovery work. *Arts Link* recently connected with [Commissioner Toni Carter](#) (Minnesota, Ramsey County), [Congresswoman Debbie Dingell](#) (Michigan, 12th District), [Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández](#) (New Mexico, 3rd District), and [Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser](#) (Louisiana) for a firsthand account of the climate crisis in their areas, the impact on local arts and culture, and how they're responding to the rise in natural disasters. This article highlights excerpts of the interviews. Full Q&As are available on [ARTSblog](#).



Photo courtesy Congresswoman Leger Fernández's office.



Lt. Governor Nungesser during Hurricane Recovery efforts in Lake Charles, Louisiana, August 2020, photo courtesy Lt. Governor's office.



From left to right: Official headshots of Commissioner Toni Carter, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández, and Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser, photos courtesy legislative offices.

“In New Mexico, 1 in 10 paychecks are tied to the arts. That’s why I introduced the Creative Economy Revitalization Act, to create a workforce grants program to employ artists and writers to create publicly available art.”

Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández

HOW HAS CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE-RELATED DISASTERS IMPACTED YOUR DISTRICT’S ARTS AND CULTURE COMMUNITY?

Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (DD): Communities across the nation are experiencing the effects of climate change firsthand, and Southeast Michigan is no exception. During Dearborn’s historic flooding in summer 2021, I heard from artists with flooded basements who incurred thousands of dollars of losses, not to mention the heartbreak seeing the damage to their life’s work.

Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser (BN): Migration away from the coast is generally not coordinated, but there have been a few cases of assisted relocation. One example: in 2016, Louisiana was awarded \$48.3 million in Community Development Block Grant funds to work with residents of Isle de Jean Charles to move them into a safer community while preserving their culture.

Commissioner Toni Carter (TC): Particularly for artists who consider natural sources, palettes/environments, or subjects, climate crises impact the availability of materials, sites, and subjects. For master artist Seitu Ken Jones who works on large-scale outdoor public art projects, the climate crisis is affecting work on site. Jones points out that when earth is disrupted,

so too are rare earth paints and other materials and supplies used by artists to create their works.

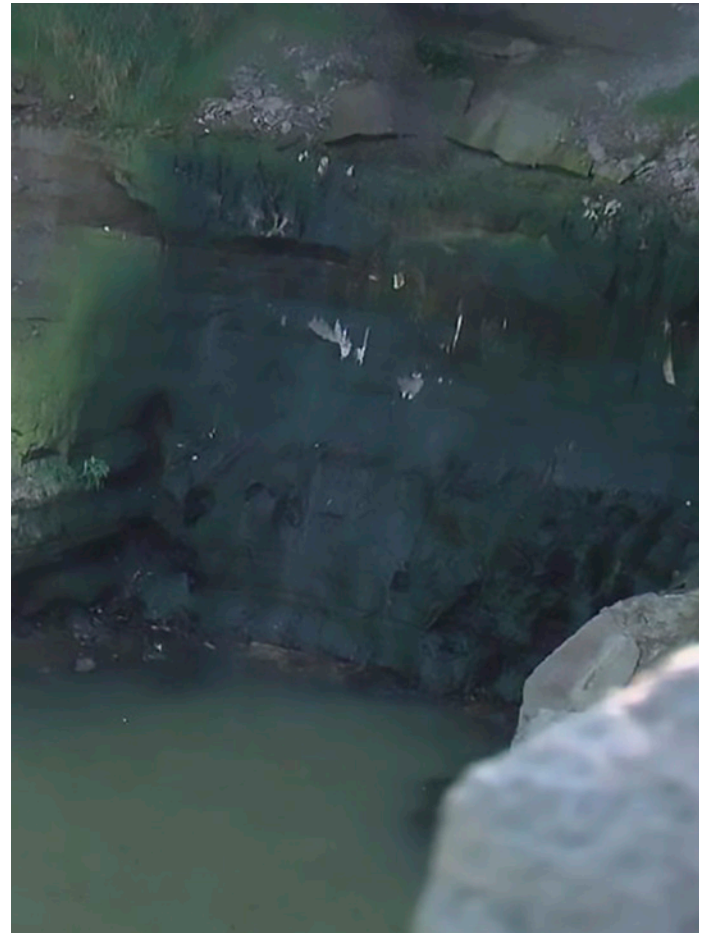
Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández (TLF): The people of my beautiful and beautifully diverse third district are uniquely tied to the land. I think it’s a common feeling for Nuevo Mexicanos. The Earth feeds us and I often say ‘agua es vida,’ water is life. I’d say climate change is chipping away at that cultural heritage. A place to live, eat, and watch the next generation grow, that’s not something we want to lose. We want to preserve the cultural heritage of our beautiful state, and that includes protecting our air, land, and water for generations to come.

HOW HAS ARTS AND CULTURE IMPACTED THE CONVERSATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

TC: Artists are creating works in all medias that communicate awareness of the current and coming climate crisis, and issue forth a cry for climate equity and protection of those who are most vulnerable. African American artists in particular are creating poetry, theater works, murals, and videos that speak to the disproportionate effect that the climate crisis will have on Black communities, and of the necessity of Black Leadership to address climate change, and to mitigate its impacts.



Past and present views of Minnehaha Falls, Minneapolis, Minnesota; photos courtesy Commissioner Carter's office.



BN: The Louisiana Folklore Society began the [Bayou Culture Collaborative](#) (BCC) in 2018 to provide a means to connect those interested in the human dimension, especially the impact on our culture. The Louisiana Division of the Arts Folklife Program participates by funding Passing It On workshops to help support south Louisiana traditions and culture, and Sense of Place and Loss workshops to help the arts and culture network become more informed.

TLF: Our diverse culture, intimately tied to the well-being of the environment, is what frames conversations on climate change in our community. Our ranchers and farmers are an important part of New Mexican culture, they feed us and contribute greatly to our economy. They are key voices at the table when thinking of solutions.

DD: We had an art exhibit in Ypsilanti—"Interdependence" at the Riverside Arts Center—that demonstrated the connectedness of every person, animal, and living creature on our planet. The [Huron River Watershed Council](#) has also partnered with arts organizations like the Michigan Theatre to screen films including "An Inconvenient Sequel," and host conversations on how we can engage at a community level to address these challenges.

WHAT CAN FEDERAL, STATE, OR LOCAL LAWMAKERS DO TO HELP EFFECTIVELY PREPARE FOR AND RESPOND TO THE RISE IN NATURAL DISASTERS?

BN: The federal government needs to respond more quickly and allow local municipalities and the state to spend FEMA money in the best way to rebuild their communities. The way FEMA is

set up now, it seems to waste time and money after a disaster. A great example would be for a state to have a temporary housing plan in place. It would save the federal government money.

TLF: Local responders are on the ground, they see firsthand the tragedy and the loss. Not only is it important to provide them with emergency aid, we must think about prevention and rebuilding. As lawmakers, whether that be on the federal, state, or local level, what we can do is fortify the safety net of these providers.

TC: Given our rapidly changing climate and impending crisis, government entities should plan and innovate to renew, restructure, replace, and retrofit public infrastructure to meet our community's needs and demands to mitigate for climate change.

July 2021 flooding in Dearborn, Michigan, photo courtesy Congresswoman Dingell's office.



DD: With the passage and enactment of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law last year, the federal government authorized targeted funds to invest in more resilient infrastructure that can still withstand natural disasters.

THE CONVERSATIONS ALSO COVERED DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PROGRAMS AND HOW POLICY CAN SUPPORT THE PRESERVATION OF PLACE-BASED CULTURES.

TLF: Our land and our people are intertwined. To preserve cultures, we need policies that center the environment, humanity, and the economy. In New Mexico, 1 in 10 paychecks are tied to the arts. That's why I introduced the [Creative Economy Revitalization Act](#), to create a workforce grants program to employ artists and writers to create publicly available art.

TC: Artists and artwork should be included to creatively plan, build, and implement a renewed public infrastructure and to support the preservation of place-based cultures as we address climate and climate-related disasters. The best prevention, recovery, and rebuilding strategies for neighborhoods and communities will be those that are co-created with the people who reside in these communities, focused on building and enhancing health and wellness within a supportive cultural context.

BN: In addition to participating in SouthArts disaster preparedness programs, Louisiana has [Creative Relief](#), a statewide system to respond to disasters. Each regional arts council has a means to receive donations to support arts organizations and artists. Within the Division of the Arts grants department,


conversations have begun around the topic of requiring some of the larger (according to budgets) arts organizations to have disaster plans in place as a requirement for eligibility. This may take a few grant cycles to implement.

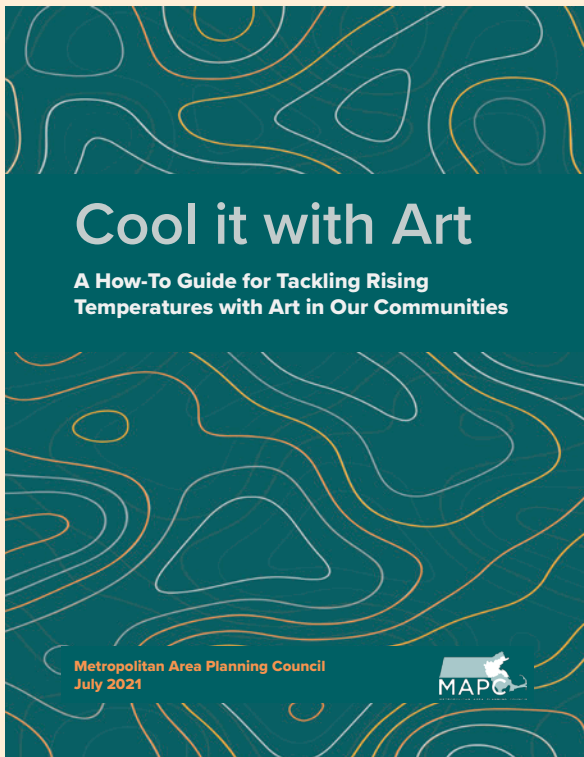
DD: Investments in infrastructure can prevent the risks and consequences of flooding, contamination spreading into surrounding waterways, and damage to critical environmental sites. Beyond this, it is important to establish federal protections for important sites that enable us to preserve these lands for generations to come. ➔

SPECIAL THANKS to each legislator, their office, and Americans for the Arts staff for making these interviews possible.


COOL IT WITH ART

A How-To Guide for Tackling Rising Temperatures with Art in Our Communities from The Metropolitan Area Planning Council

 **CREATED BY** The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) of Boston, Massachusetts, Cool it with Art: A How-To Guide for Tackling Rising Temperatures with Art in Our Communities is a guide for local governments, community-based organizations, and artists interested in working together to promote creative approaches to enhance resilience to all types of climate hazards; address climate-driven extreme heat impacts; and promote healthy, climate resilient communities. This guide contains information, resources, and practical guidance to increase awareness of heat risks and precedents for creative heat resilience interventions and to help support implementation of these types of projects. Plus, a slide deck of projects from Philadelphia, New Orleans, Boston, New York City, Los Angeles, and more!



Social Impact Explorer Fact Sheet Arts + Environment

 **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** like climate change, conservation, and rising sea levels are urgent issues, but the difficulty in mustering the political will to implement necessary changes continues to hamper environmental efforts. For decades, artists have been using their work to inspire and educate the public to change their behaviors to be more sustainable, whether through writing, photography, community engagement, performance, or innovative partnerships with scientists and environmental advocates. The arts amplify pro-environmental messaging and improve the clarity and impact of the message. Visually representing complex concepts can help people better understand the issue and how they can help. The arts positively connect and empower people, inspire advocates, and document change. The Social Impact Explorer's Fact Sheet on Arts + Environment offers impact points, examples of practice, and more resources.

Continuum of Impact in Action

Teaching Artists Addressing Climate Change Around the World

➡ **THROUGH ITS GROUNDBREAKING** [ITAC IMPACT: Climate](#) initiative, the International Teaching Artist Collaborative (ITAC) is supporting teaching artists around the world to engage students and their local communities on the pressing issues of climate change. Teaching artists from Brazil to Alaska to the Philippines and beyond are designing and leading innovative projects in schools and communities to raise awareness, educate, change minds and behavior, and to activate participation around local climate challenges. Having impact on this issue is imperative and evaluation is an integral part of the work for both ITAC and the teaching artists. To help, ITAC has embedded Animating Democracy's Continuum of IMPACT as a central tool for sharpening desired outcomes and indicators of change and guiding artists' evaluation planning, implementation, reporting, and communication. [Watch the free two-part series of webinars on ArtsU.](#)

Public art installation from teaching artist Raz Salvarita's [Unmasking Climate Injustices](#) project (Philippines), photo courtesy Salvarita.



Art & Environmental Justice Symposium

➡ **THIS TWO-WEEK** long series of events explored the intersection of environmental justice and art. Building upon the work of artists and activists stewarding this work across the country through the Arts and Environmental Justice Capacity Building Initiative, Mural Arts Philadelphia curated conversations, workshops, and events highlighting cultural practices and participatory public art that shift ecological, political, and social experiences of front-line communities. Learn more about Mural Arts Philadelphia's work on [their programs page.](#)



Climate Emergency

➡ **CLIMATE CHANGE** poses an existential threat to humanity and theatermakers need to be part of addressing it. HowlRound's [Climate Emergency](#) featured topic includes essays, videos, and podcast episodes about artistic work that engages with the climate crisis, as well as learnings about how to make theater practices more eco-friendly.



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ARTSVOTE 2022 CAMPAIGN

SHOUTOUT TO ARTSVOTE CHAMPIONS

across the country for empowering family, friends, and networks to make sure everyone made their vote count this election year!

The Americans for the Arts Action Fund is committed to advancing the ArtsVote campaign every election season to empower our members with valuable tools, such as updated educational State Voter Factsheets and creative Get Out the Vote social media materials. Our goal is to engage new and existing voters as a way for the arts community to lift up democracy.



▶ [CLICK THE IMAGE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WORK THIS ELECTION SEASON.](#)