



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Economic Development Division

Urbana Arts & Culture Program Monthly Progress Report

2nd Tuesday of the Month– January 12, 2021

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Introduction

The following Urbana Arts & Culture Program Monthly Progress Report describes activities of the Arts & Culture Program for the Urbana Arts & Culture Commission. The report includes information regarding projects that are in progress, recent requests and recommendations from the public, staff activities, and upcoming events.

COVID-19 Crisis Impact

- **Suspension of Programs/Events:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program is continuing to suspend the majority of in-person events and programs in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Staff are following guidelines set forth in the Illinois Five-Phase Reopening Plan and consulting public health guidance. Some events are being held virtually and Urbana Arts and Culture staff are working to share relief program information, resources for local artists, and continue various initiatives.
- **Staffing Changes & Accommodations:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program staff continue to work from home with minor visits to the office as needed. The program welcomes a number of new Arts and Culture Interns. Leo Wiltfong and Tia Radanavong are new high school student interns through the Urbana School District #116 Executive Internship Program; Madison Willcoxon joins Urbana Arts and Culture through Parkland College's Graphic Design internship course; and Hannah Darcy and Natalie Weiss are continuing their internships through the University of Illinois' CU Scholars Program.

Updates on Current Projects

- **Urbana Arts Grants:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program awarded \$88,000 to artists, arts organizations, and festival presenters for 38 creative projects that enrich the lives of Urbana residents and visitors in the 2020 cycle. Grantees continue to work with the Urbana Arts and Culture Coordinator to address planning issues arising from COVID-19. The 2021 Urbana Arts Grant cycle is now accepting applications and up to \$90,000 is available in grant funding to artists and art organizations. **The application deadline for 2021 Urbana Arts Grants for Tier I, II, and Arts in the Schools Grants has been extended and applications are due Sunday, January 24th at 5PM CST.**

City staff of the Urbana Arts and Culture Program offered informational workshops and drop-in grant support to those interested in learning about this funding opportunity. The grant workshop is designed to give applicants opportunities to explore the grant application, best practices for grant writing, and an overview of the application process. Staff also share information about other opportunities within the City of Urbana's Arts and Culture Program. The Arts and Culture Coordinator recently gave and recorded the 2021 Grant Workshop. A video of the Arts Grants Workshop, hosted by the Arts and Culture Coordinator, is available for viewing on Urbana Public Television and social media.

Along with various Community Development departments and programs, Urbana Arts and Culture Program will soon be using Neighborly, a software that will help streamline grant applications, jury processes, and reporting. The program will be first utilized as part of the 2021 Urbana Arts Grant Jury process.

- **The Great ARTdoors: Works on display as part of** The Great ARTdoors, a collaboration between the Spurlock Museum, the Urbana Park District, the Champaign Park District, the Urbana Arts and Culture Program, and 40 North Champaign County Arts Council have been de-installed. The full list of selected artists and installed works were as follows:

Barry Abrams | *Tensegrity* | MLK Trail | Champaign
EKAH | *Points of View* | Lierman Neighborhood Community Garden | Urbana
Greg Stallmeyer | *Rainbow Connection* | Kaufman Lake | Champaign
Ja Nelle Pleasure | *Seeds of Injustice* | Randolph Street Community Gardens | Champaign
Keenan Dailey | *Unchained* | Douglass Park | Champaign
Kinsey Fitzgerald | *Mother & Child* | Chief Shemauger Park | Urbana
Lisa Kelsner | *Prairie Dance* | Sunset Ridge Park | Champaign
Michael Darin | *Catapult Earth* | Anita Purves Nature Center | Urbana
Nathan Westerman | *Transfiguration* | Victory Park | Urbana
Sierra Murphy | *Bread and Roses* | South Ridge Park | Urbana

While the works are no longer on display, Urbana Middle School teachers are encouraging students to participate through curriculum and engagement opportunities inspired by the program. The planning committee is currently exploring a second round of The Great ArtDoors this spring and additional engagement opportunities.

- ***Art Inspired in Urbana Highlights:*** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program and The Urbana Free Library are collaborating to produce weekly highlights of local artists on social media. Each post includes a digital image of their artwork, a portrait, a comment from the artist, and weblinks to purchasing the artist's work. Posts appear Mondays on social media.
- **Urbana Poet Laureate and Youth Poet Laureate Programs:** The City of Urbana's Mayor's Office and the Urbana Arts & Culture Program are proud to announce the second Poet Laureate in City of Urbana history, Ashanti Files.

Ashanti Files was born in Chicago, Illinois and moved to Urbana in 2004, where she lives with her husband, Ryan, and three daughters, Camille, Kayla, and Cadence. Files works as a registered nurse at Rosecrance in Champaign, where she works in mental health and addiction services. She has published her poetry and fiction writing in journals including, most recently, the Northern New England Review and their FRONT/LINES: Poetry of Nursing and Pandemic Perspectives and the For Colored Girls Graphic Novel (forthcoming 2021). In 2019, she published her own collection of poetry, Woven: Perspectives of a Black Woman. She is the Founder of Writers of Oya, a writer's program for middle school girls of color in Urbana School District #116 exploring intersections of poetry, spoken word, mental health, social issues, and resilience. Through her mentorship, Writers of Oya participants have performed on CiLiving.tv, Poets in the Park, Pygmalion Poetry Marathon, A March for Nonviolence, and most recently, Station Theater's #ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence. The girls have also appeared in Luminous magazine, Art Now! mini-documentary series, Talks with Tari on 104.5 Radio Free Urbana, and the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center's Sounds Like Community. Participants in Writers of Oya are publishing their first collection of poetry, Unmasked (forthcoming 2021).

Her one-year term begins January 13th, 2020. Files was selected through a competitive application and interview process by a panel of literary experts. The poet laureate receives a \$2,000 honorarium for the one-year term, funded by the City of Urbana's Arts and Culture Program. The City invites the public to a virtual reception to celebrate Urbana Poet Laureate, Ashanti Files on January 21st, 2021 at 5pm (register to attend at www.urbanainillinois.us/poet).

- **Urbana Youth Poet Laureate Program:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program is still accepting applications from teen poets between the ages of 13 and 19 years old for its inaugural Youth Poet Laureate. For more information including eligibility and application guidelines, visit: www.urbanainillinois.us/poet.

- **Young Artist's Studio:** In collaboration with The Urbana Free Library, the Urbana Arts and Culture Program continues to offer Young Artist's Studio workshops virtually using Zoom. Participants are asked to register on The Urbana Free Library's website to obtain the link and password. The upcoming workshop features local artist, DJ Silkee (Ja'Naea Modest) presenting *Kid's Learn to DJ!* on Sunday, January 24th. All upcoming Young Artist's Studio workshops will take place virtually until further notice.
- **Urbana Sculpture Project:** The City of Urbana Arts & Culture Program collaborates with Public Art League to select sculptures for placement in the City of Urbana. Urbana Arts and Culture Commissioners selected their favorites and staff continue to work with Public Art League to confirm sponsorship and placement. *Peek Between the Trees, Races, and Ice Pops* are soon due for removal.
- **Art for Nourishment Program:** Urbana Arts and Culture Program is partnering with local food distribution programs to present Art for Nourishment, a program to share the creative work of local artists in the spirit of cultivating community and connection. A total of 300 local families will receive an art print. Art for Nourishment is organized by the Urbana Arts and Culture Program in collaboration with the following local mutual aid food distribution efforts: Bucket Brigade, Silver Hearts, and Tiger Market of Urbana School District #116.
- **Artist of the Corridor Exhibitions:** All exhibitions are temporarily suspended as a result of COVID-19 mitigations. The Urbana Arts and Culture Program staff are currently exploring alternative exhibition methods and venues to continue to offer exhibition opportunities.
- **Imagine Urbana Comprehensive Plan:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program will be supporting the City of Urbana's comprehensive planning efforts by offering some coordinated programming that invites the community to share their visions for Urbana through arts practices, as well as specifically envision Urbana's local arts and cultural landscape 20 years from now. Potential engagement opportunities include arts-specific listening sessions and sponsored programs this upcoming spring.
- **COVID-19 Relief for Individual Artists & Arts and Cultural Organizations:** The City of Urbana Arts & Culture Coordinator has been in close communication with the local arts and culture community to promote various relief programs and upcoming grant deadlines. There is a comprehensive listing of individual artist grants nationwide on the Americans for the Arts website here. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus-covid-19-resource-and-response-center> The Americans for the Arts Relief Guide is an excellent resource detailing COVID-19 resources here: shorturl.at/iwCDP.