



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Economic Development Division

Urbana Arts & Culture Program Monthly Progress Report

2nd Tuesday of the Month–June 14, 2022

Prepared by Rachel Lauren Storm, PhD., Arts and Culture Coordinator

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.

Staffing Update and COVID-19 Impact

- **Staffing Changes & Accommodations:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Coordinator continues a hybrid schedule in accordance with the Community Development Office's plan to limit the number of staff working in the office at once. While a substantial number of applications were received for the part-time Program Specialist position, the hiring process has been delayed and no interviews have been scheduled to date. The Urbana Arts and Culture Program received a \$4,500 Illinois Arts Council Summer Youth Employment Grant to hire high school students to work with the program over the summer.
- **COVID-19 Impact:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program continues to follow local public health guidance in response to COVID-19, utilizing in-person events and programs and making use of safe practices. Some events and meetings continue to be held virtually and Urbana Arts and Culture staff continue to share relief program information, resources for local artists, and continue various initiatives.

Updates on Current Projects

- **Urbana Arts Grant Program:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program and Community Development Office continues to utilize Neighborly as a new software for grant tracking for all grant recipients from 2021 onward. In 2022, a total of 30 projects were funded spanning theatre, dance, film, visual arts, murals, and more. A record number of festivals were funded and will take place in Downtown Urbana later this year.

Urbana Arts Grant recipients were offered an orientation meeting with the Arts and Culture Coordinator which gave an overview of grant guidelines and reporting expectations, as well as ways the program can support marketing efforts for grant projects, support increased accessibility, and offer best practices.

- **Urbana Arts Grants (cont.):** A number of 2021 and 2020 Urbana Arts Grant recipients have been able to complete projects recently after previous postponements due to COVID-19. Many 2022 projects have already been underway including Pops on the Prairie by Urbana Pops Orchestra, Fiddle Weekend by the Community Center for the Arts, and Poems Across Urbana by The Urbana Free Library.

Rose Bowl in Downtown Urbana continues to offer free weekend "After Market" concerts scheduled to follow Urbana's Market at the Square as part of their "Urbana Live!" grant-funded programming.

- **Urbana Sculpture Project:** In the absence of a national call for sculptures managed in partnership with Public Art League, the Urbana Arts and Culture Program has moved to renew the following sculpture rentals for another year: *Peek Between the Trees* by Mark Krucke and *Ice Pops* by Craig Gray. Both sculptures along with *What Is the Good?* by Gregory Stallmeyer will be repaired and restored this month as part of the renewal agreement. *Stranger Reduction Zone* will also be receiving a new art label this week.

Moreover, *Races* by Bobby Joe Scribner was also renewed by a generous donation from Eric Robeson of Public Art League. The long term plan for this sculpture is to move it to the southeast corner of Illinois and Vine Sts. later this year.

- **The Great ARTDoors:** Art in public spaces can create vibrancy, inspire engagement, reflect humanity, and provide a sense of belonging – with these roles in mind, 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, is kicking off a new cycle of awarding selected local artists stipends to create outdoor art installations in several Champaign and Urbana parks and community gardens. This program is once again guided by the belief that public art has the ability to visually and intellectually activate outdoor spaces by reinforcing social connectivity, providing a sense of belonging, and sparking dialogue. This project is also committed to compensating and validating local artists, prioritizing underserved communities, and ensuring accessibility for all. The 11 selected artists receive a \$1,000 stipend and the artwork will be featured in 1 of 11 designated locations.

This cycle, 6 artists have been selected for display within the City of Urbana, including Urbana Park District parks and community gardens. The 6th location will be the southeast corner of Illinois and Vine streets next to the City building. The following full list of locations will be featured this cycle: Chief Shemauger Park (1001 E Kerr Ave, Urbana); Victory Park (1000 E. Green St, Urbana); Crystal Lake Park (Corner of Broadway & Park, Urbana); South Ridge Park (3008 S Myra Ridge Dr, Urbana); Lierman Neighborhood Community Garden (Washington & Lierman, Urbana); Beardsley Park (1006 N. Walnut St, Champaign); Citizen Park (1311 Garden Hills Dr, Champaign); Randolph Street Community Gardens (1001 N Randolph St, Champaign); Skelton Park (101 E. Washington St, Champaign); Douglass Park (501 E. Eureka St, Champaign); Urbana City Building (406 S. Vine St., Urbana). This 6th site sponsored by the Urbana Arts and Culture Program will feature the work of Kathy Micek.

- **Utility Box Mural Program:** Urbana's Urbana Utility Box Mural Program launched by the City of Urbana's Arts and Culture Program invites the vibrant work of local artists to be installed on select utility boxes throughout the city--turning the ordinary into extraordinary works of art. The full collection of Urbana Utility Box Murals include: *Greenhouse II* by Megan Hind; *Convergent Evolution* by EKAH; *Guilt Trip* by BLACKMAU; and *Quiet Mend 3* by Lisa Kesler.

Urbana's latest Utility Box Mural is now on display at the Urbana Park District's Lake House in Crystal Lake Park in Urbana. *Quiet Mend 3* by Lisa Kesler is a vibrant piece comprised of acrylic paint and collage. Lisa Kesler Studio's mixed-media works on paper and canvas integrate printmaking, collage, and painting. View more of her work at lisakesler.com.

The next Utility Box Mural will be *Cloudscape 7* by Christopher Morris, which will be installed at the southeast corner of Race and Griggs Sts. in Downtown Urbana in July. The public is invited to attend a ribbon-cutting and unveiling celebration on Friday, July 15th at 4pm.

- **Sponsored Murals in Urbana:** A number of murals are now gracing the windows and walls of downtown Urbana buildings. The recent *Reading is Magic* mural by Langston Allston together with the community was installed last month on Cunningham Township Supervisor's Office. The installation involved the participation of over 65 community members and the resulting artworks celebrate Urbana's artistic and cultural diversity. A ribbon-cutting and unveiling ceremony was attended by over 100 community members marking our biggest unveiling celebration to date. The mural was funded by an Urbana Arts and Culture Grant given to the Urbana Free Library and supported by the Urbana Free Library Foundation.

A new mural is underway on Rose Bowl Tavern in Downtown Urbana. *Prairie Roses* by Kinsey Fitzgerald is sponsored by former Urbana Arts and Culture Commission Chair, Pat Sammann, who dedicated \$3,000 in donation funding to support downtown murals this year. *Prairie Roses* will span the north side of the building and will be completed this month. The mural pays homage to native plant life and the growth of live music at the venue.

Rafael Blanco, an Illinois based artist who hails from Aurora, recently visited the Urbana Adult Education Center to meet with students whose likenesses will appear in his Urbana Arts and Culture Grant-funded mural scheduled for installation on the Urbana Adult Education Center building later this month. The mural, organized in collaboration with the center and Urbana School District #116, will highlight the diversity of the Urbana Adult Education Center's student body and celebrate the work of this important local education program.

- **Sponsored Murals (cont.):** Local artist Lisa Kesler will be installing a vibrant abstract mural on the north side of 25 O'Clock Brewing Company with the support of an Urbana Arts Grant. The mural aims to be a colorful addition to the building that celebrates the local brewery. A ribbon-cutting and unveiling celebration will be announced next month.

With the support of an Urbana Arts Grant, local artist EKAH will be installing a augmented reality mural on the front facade of Broadway Food Hall. This unique and groundbreaking mural will incorporate augmented reality (AR) technology allowing the viewer to witness the mural come to life when viewing it through a device. This mural will be installed during the month of July and a ribbon-cutting and unveiling celebration will follow.

- **Cinema & Sound:** Cinema & Sound, Urbana's summer outdoor movies and music series will return to Boneyard Creek Crossing Thursday, July 14th at 7:30pm featuring a performance from Urbana Dance Company with musical and light installation accompaniment by Matt Harsh followed by a screening of *Pina* (2011) at 8:30pm at the corner of Race and Griggs in Downtown Urbana. The event will feature food trucks and the Champaign County History Museum's historic popcorn truck.
- **Urbana Poet Laureate Program:** In April of 2019, the City of Urbana's Mayor's Office and the Urbana Arts & Culture Program were proud to announce the inaugural Poet Laureate Program for the City of Urbana. Now in its second cycle, the City's Poet Laureate Program celebrates poetry by recognizing a resident poet who honors and serves our diverse community and elevates the importance of the creative writing art form through sharing their work with Urbana residents. While the search is underway for Urbana's next Poet Laureate, staff are proud to report on the impact of the program for past laureates:
 - Former Poet Laureate, Ashanti Files, relocated to Phoenix, AZ to work in a role that incorporates her nursing work with arts practice. She was recently awarded the title of 2022 American Academy of Poets Fellow, a national recognition. Her work was most recently published in *For Colored Girls Who have Weathered their Storms*, a poetry collection.
 - Former Poet Laureate, Will Reger, released his second book of poetry, *Kaleidescope*; is participating as poetry workshop facilitator in Poems Across Urbana; participated as a featured poet in the Urbana Poetry Walk, and released The Postcard Poetry Project, a collection of poetry and artwork from local writers and artists. Reger received a 2022 Urbana Arts Grant for a project designed to display poems and artwork commemorating our local rivers and streams.
- **Urbana's Youth Poet Laureate, Danyla Nash:** Sponsored in part by Urban Word NYC, the Youth Poet Laureate Program celebrates Urbana's youth by sponsoring an Urbana teen poet (ages 13 - 18) who serves as a youth ambassador for poetry and utilizes poetry as a means for civic leadership, artistic excellence, and social engagement. Inaugural Youth Poet Laureate, Danyla Nash, was selected for the 2022 recognition.

- **Urbana's Youth Poet Laureate, Danyla Nash (cont.):** Danyla Nash is a writer and spoken word artist from Urbana, Illinois. For over three years, she has been a foundational member of the Writers of Oya, a spoken word artist and writer's program for young girls of color. She has performed original poetry in local, regional, and national venues including Soul on Sunday, Talks with Tari on 104.5, ciLiving, Sounds Like Community, Art Now!, Pygmalion Literary Marathon, Hood Vote Neighborhood Transformation's civic events, Luminous Magazine, United Way's Teen Summit, Black Voices Theatre Production, and two National African American Parent Involvement Day performances. Her poetry is published in *Unmasked*, a collection of poetry from the Writers of Oya and its subsequent audiobook. She's a 2021 MLK, Jr. Creative Expressions Competition winner and presented her own workshop, "Spittin' the Unspeakable: Using Slam Poetry to Cope with Trauma" at the National Guild for Community Arts Educators. She has the ability to take her experiences and connect them to larger social, political, racial, and economic themes. Danyla is a Scholar award recipient at Urbana High School and when not writing, she plays flute and oboe, performs in color guard, and spends time with her family. She's working on her first poetry collection due out later this year.
- **Young Artist's Studio:** In collaboration with The Urbana Free Library, the Urbana Arts and Culture Program hosted *Music! Music! Music!* as the June Young Artist's Studio featuring local violinist and violist Cydnee Ossai, who led participants through musical activities and a demonstration. Young participants were given the opportunity to hold a violin and viola! Activities encouraged an appreciation for rhythm, musical notation, and a love of music.

The July workshop is a special feature held in collaboration with Illinois Shakespeare Festival! Families will delight in this production of *Much Ado About Quite A Lot* by Nancy Steele Brokaw and directed by Lori Adams as a part of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival's Theatre for Young Audiences. Young Artist Studio workshops will continue to be offered in-person over the coming months with masks and social distancing recommended.

- **ART NOW!:** This month's *ART NOW!* mini documentary series will feature Youth Poet Laureate, Danyla Nash, and airs on Urbana Public Television twice a week throughout the month and on YouTube. In recognition of the film and production work of *ART NOW!*, Urbana Public Television was the recently awarded the Award of Merit at the Best of the Midwest Media Conference. This is the second time UPTV has received recognition for this production created jointly with the Urbana Arts and Culture Program.
- **RAWTools:** From July 29th-31st, RAWTools is visiting Champaign-Urbana through the work of many local organizations coming together to envision creative solutions to ending gun violence. Turning guns into garden tools is at the center of the work of RAWtools. Their work "enables storytelling—stories of magnificent transformation as well as the deep trauma of grief and loss." The events taking place in Champaign and Urbana invite the community to participate in transformative conversations and arts practices to end gun violence. Urbana Arts and Culture Program will participate in promoting a Sunday event held 2pm-5pm at Cunningham Township Community Garden in Urbana focused on arts and community activities focused on creative change-making for people of all ages.

- **Art in Transit:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program is teaming up with CU MTD to pilot a new public arts initiative called Art in Transit, which will invite local artists to have selected artwork displayed on Urbana bus shelters. This first pilot program will feature the bus shelter at the corner of Illinois and Race Streets, adjacent to The Urbana Free Library. Selection and installation will occur this summer.
- **Artist of the Corridor Exhibitions:** Artist of the Corridor exhibitions have resumed with two exhibitions planned for this summer at the Urbana City Building and The Urbana Free Library, respectively. *Dee Brown: A Visual History*, a collection of photographs of the life of celebrated author of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and former University of Illinois professor, Dee Brown, will be on display later this summer at The Urbana Free Library. *Art is the Bridge*, a collection of acrylic paintings by Kathy Micek is on display now at the Urbana City Building in conjunction with her soon-to-be installed Great ARTDoors sculpture. Both exhibitions will be on display throughout the summer. As a note, the City of Urbana will have construction work completed on the hallway later this summer. At that time, exhibits will be put on pause until work is completed.
- **#ArtThrives Street Pole Banner Art:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program has launched a new street pole banner art initiative. This initial cycle welcomes selected art from Carlie Upchurch, BLACKMAU (Kamau Grantham and Stacey Robinson), Beth Darling, Ralph Roether, K Hieronymus W, Phil Strang, Marc-Anthony Macon, and EKAH. Street pole banners are now on display in Downtown Urbana.
- **Imagine Urbana Comprehensive Plan:** The Urbana Arts and Culture Program continues to support 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.
- **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.