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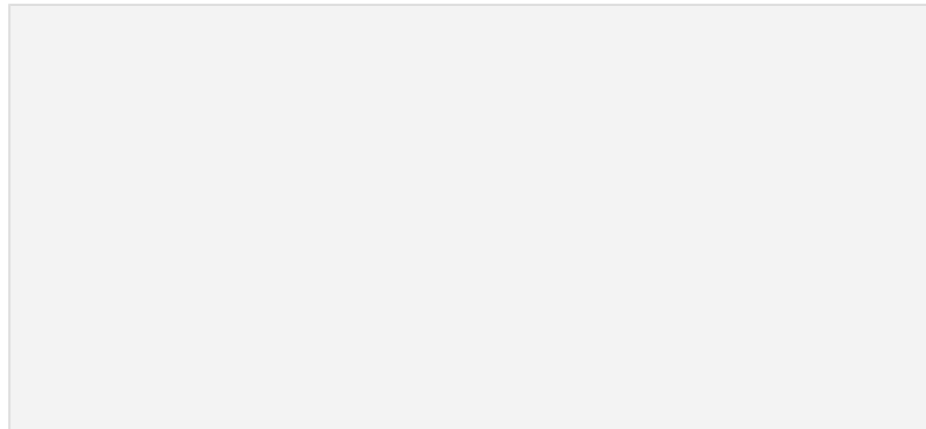
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ONE MILLION DOLLARS FOR ART

Posted on March 11, 2009 by revieweditor

Celebrating 10 years of support: The Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City



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It would be a challenge to find an art lover who has not seen an exhibition, performance, or film that has benefitted from the ArtsKC Fund of the Metropolitan Arts Council of Kansas City. For example, on First Friday in October 2008 at the Leedy-Voulikos Art Center, Héctor Casanova works on the collaborative "Fight or Flight" mural that brought action and experimentation to an eight-artist exhibition, "Renegades of Funk." Curator and participant-artist Gear was awarded an Inspiration Grant from the ArtsKC Fund to pull together the diverse styles of Casanova, Lori Rae Erickson, Adrian Halpern, Noah Moore, Sha9again, Matthias Soda Potter, Jessica Manco, and himself. Currently, the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City is holding its third annual workplace giving campaign, which helps provide the resources to enhance the work of local visual and performing artists, and on Friday, March 13 will host the sixth annual ArtsKC pARTnership Awards — recognizing businesses in the five-county Kansas City metropolitan area that have successfully partnered with the arts to benefit both the business and the arts organization or artist. Photo: T. Abeln

A version of this story appears in the Winter 2009 print issue of *Review*, available now.

by Blair Schulman and Tracy Abeln

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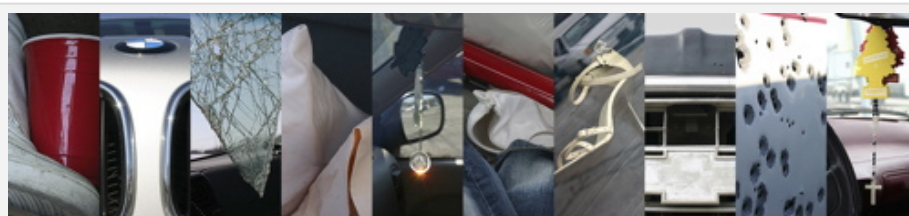
GRANDARTS

The Kansas City metropolitan community has proven it cares about supporting the arts. With its major museums — including two newer venues for contemporary art — anchor symphony, opera, ballet company, and repertory theatre, there are tiers of other museums and dozens of galleries, jazz groups, orchestras, dance companies, dramatic theatres, and, of course, thousands of individual artists.

For the past decade, in the midst of Kansas City, Missouri, has been a chrysalis, and the resulting butterfly shows itself off downtown as a transformed center for entertainment and commerce; a bit further south, the neighborhood once known as the Freighthouse District and an outpost of bohemia is firmly on the art-scene's radar as the Crossroads Arts District. Even mainstream USA Today, not known for its daring point of view, recently listed Kansas City as a top travel destination for 2009, thanks in part to this vibrant revitalization.

Changes in the skyline may be obvious, but dig a little deeper and you will see one reason our arts community has enjoyed success: the careful machination of the [Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City](#). Supporting the arts in a five-county region since March 1999, the Arts Council has helped ensure that local culture has the support it needs to remain viable.

In fact, when it announced its latest round of Inspiration Grants at the end of 2008, the council celebrated having distributed \$1 million to arts organizations, programs, and artists through the ArtsKC Fund since starting the fund in 2007.



Miki Baird, composite of "Tow Lot" series, which was supported by an Inspiration Grant. Photographs courtesy of the artist via ArtsKC

Ten years ago, the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City was founded as a result of a two-year study under the direction of the [Greater Kansas City Community Foundation](#) with the [Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation](#). This

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Community Arts Initiative noted early on that Kansas City was among only a few large urban areas in the U.S. that did not yet have a comprehensive regional arts advocacy organization.

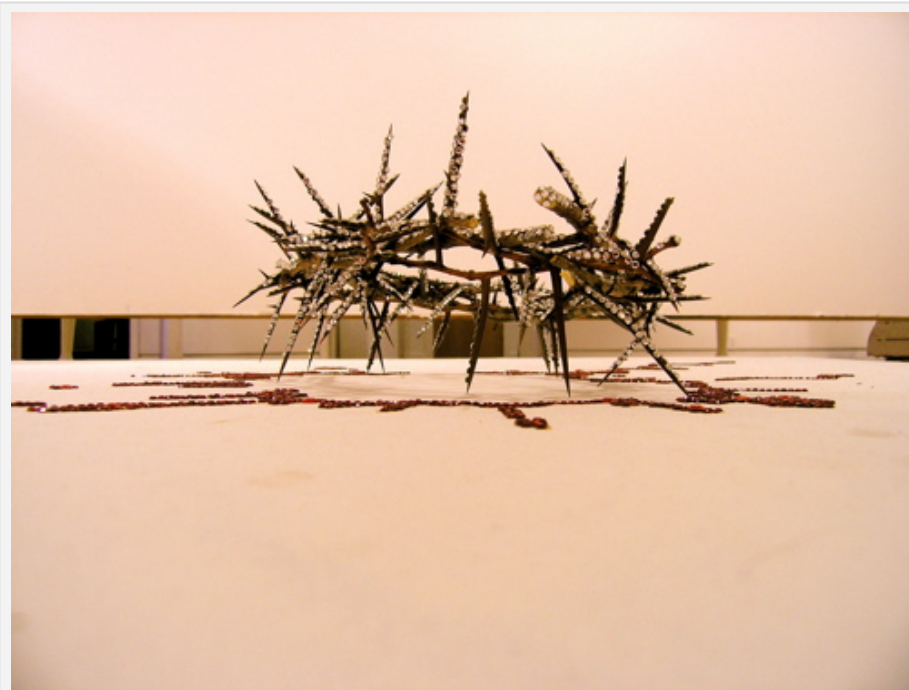
Hired as the Arts Council's first president and CEO, Joan Israelite has steered the development of a number of new programs since 1999, including research documenting the art industries' local economic impact, a system helping businesses partner more effectively with art organizations and artists, audience development and marketing projects, and, during the past two years, establishment of a new regional united arts fund that has raised more than \$1 million.



Rachelle Gardner's first public installation in September 2008 was "Dreamscapes," which presented two contrasting scenes of white, ceramic sculptures filling the preserved façade of the historic Jenkins Music Company in downtown Kansas City, Missouri. It was made possible by a 2008 Inspiration Grant and intended to infuse "otherworldly elements of daydreams with the hard-edged, fast paced urban landscape, reminding the passerby to slow down and take a deep breath." Image courtesy of the artist

Looking at the success of art funds she saw in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Charlotte, North Carolina, Israelite was inspired to link business organizations, civic leaders, and individual donors to collaborate like-minded thinking. The purpose of the ArtsKC Fund is to raise new money for the arts — not to divert someone's usual annual gift to a museum or young audience program but to provide a way for them to give more. "Support for the ArtsKC Fund represents all sectors, from business to non-profits," says Israelite. "This is a way to collectively come together as a metro area to support the arts."

In its beta-test year 2007, the ArtsKC Fund raised \$400,052 — an extraordinarily successful first year and the most successful new united arts fund in at least the last decade, according to the Americans for the Arts national arts advocacy organization. For the first time, our community had workplace giving campaigns focused on the arts: 34 businesses and employers participated, and more than 1,900 people pledged and donated their support, providing almost half of the total raised.



Dylan Mortimer, "The Most Ballin' Crown of Thorns EVER!!!," crown-of-thorns bush, rhinestones, paint, was part of "Ble\$\$ed," a solo exhibition at the Leedy-Voukos Art

Center in Kansas City, Missouri, in November and December 2008. Mortimer used an Inspiration Grant to expand his work both in concept and scale, exploring the relationship between Hip Hop and contemporary religious faith. Photo: T. Abeln

In 2008, the ArtsKC Fund included 72 companies and met its goal to raise \$725,205. The workplace giving campaign between February and April was matched with a \$100,000 grant from the Francis Family Foundation and enhanced by a number of high-level (\$10,000+) Renaissance Circle and other corporate and local government donations.



The ArtsKC Fund supports musicians, dancers, and other performing artists and art organizations, in addition to those working in the visual fields. This ballet performance at the Carlsen Center at Johnson County Community College was made possible in part by ArtsKC Fund support. Image courtesy of Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City

ArtsKC grants are distributed to applicants at the discretion of a panel of business and arts leaders, such as the heads of various chambers of commerce. A large

part of the funds raised, about 70 percent, goes to the Ovation category, designed to support firmly established and broad-reaching arts organizations like the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Starlight Theatre; another 25 percent is awarded from the Catalyst category for a broad range of arts programs and activities; and a final category, Inspiration, historically awards between \$500 to \$5,000 to individual artists or artist-teams for specific projects. Cross-referencing the list of artist recipients with exhibitions and events highlighted in these pages in recent months shows just how valuable the grants have been.

Israelite retired from her position at the end of 2008, leaving a legacy of drive and passion that has secured Kansas City's standing as a leader in arts funding. In a recent interview, she talked about how the Arts Council is in a strong position to move forward. "We have a very strong staff and a board that I think is the envy of many organizations," she says. Harlan Brownlee took the helm February 9, right before the third annual ArtsKC Fund workplace campaign began. He will carry on the partnerships, participation, and promotion that can keep the Kansas City metro area benefiting from an arts environment that thrives rather than one that is losing talented resources to cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles — or Cincinnati and Charlotte.

\$1,000,000 in two years for art

The ArtsKC Fund is a united arts fund in the metropolitan Kansas City area that raises new money to support a wide range of arts organizations and artists. Its purpose is to provide stable sources of new financial support for the arts, broaden access to high-quality arts experiences, and sustain excellence in the arts and arts administration.

Organization and artist recipients of ArtsKC funding in the Kansas City metro area in 2007 and 2008

Ovation Grants — to fund operations

American Jazz Museum, Carlsen Center, Coterie Theatre, Folly Theater, The Friends of Chamber Music, Harriman-Jewell Series, Heart of America

Shakespeare Festival, Kansas City Ballet, Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Kansas City Symphony, Kansas City Young Audiences, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Paul Mesner Puppets, Quality Hill Playhouse, Starlight Theatre, Unicorn Theatre

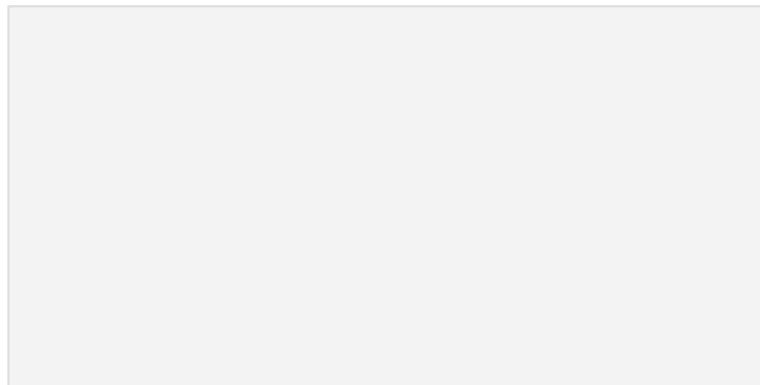


The 100 Drums program by Accessible Arts, Inc., is one way the organization "unlocks the arts for children with disabilities and advocates access to the arts," helping "children develop critical thinking skills, take risks in a safe environment and experience successes." Photo courtesy of Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas

City, which provides support to Accessible Arts, Inc., through Catalyst Grants.

Catalyst Grants — to fund operations and support projects

Accessible Arts, Inc., Actors Theatre of Kansas City, Arts Council of Johnson County, Arts Incubator of Kansas City, Art in the Loop Foundation, Barn Players, Chameleon Arts and Youth Development (Community Children's Theatre of Kansas City), Charlotte Street Foundation, Chestnut Fine Arts Center, Inc., Children's Museum of Kansas City, City in Motion Dance Theater, Inc., Civic Opera Theater of Kansas City, Excelsior Springs High School, Fine Arts Chorale, Heartland Men's Chorus, Horizon Academy, Images Art Gallery, Jellybean Conspiracy, Kaico Dance, Kansas City Actors Theatre, The Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City Artists Coalition, Kansas City Chamber Orchestra, Kansas City Chorale, Kansas City Clay Guild, Kansas City Jazz Orchestra, Kansas City Young Audiences, Kansas City Youth Jazz, Inc., Kaw Valley Arts & Humanities, Inc., KC Fringe, Inc., Kansas City Public Television, Mattie Rhodes Art Center, Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre, Mid-America Arts Alliance, Music Theater for Young People, Octarium, Owen/Cox Dance Group (formerly under Ko-Arts), Puppetry Arts Institute, Quixotic Performance Ensemble, reStart, Inc., StoneLion Puppet Theatre, Storytellers, Inc., The Theatre in the Park, Theatre for Young America, Unicorn Theatre, UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance, UMKC Department of Theatre, Wonderscope Children's Museum of Kansas City, Wylliams/Henry Contemporary Dance Company, Youth Symphony Association of Kansas City, Inc., YWCA of Greater Kansas City





Last spring, Brian (B.D.) Collier was teaching starlings to pronounce the name of the person who originally imported the nuisance birds from England; he intends to use an Inspiration Grant awarded in December to create a site-specific work at the University of Houston this month as part of "Systems of Sustainability." Photo: T. Abeln

Inspiration Grants — to support individual projects

Ahmad Alaadeen, Alacartoon (Erin McGrane, Christian Hankel, Kyle Dahlquist, Gregg Jackson); Miki Baird; Jeff Becker; Debra Di Blasi; Beau Bledsoe, Nathan Granner, Mike Hill (collaboration); Derrick Breidenthal, Alex Robinson, E. Spencer Schubert (collaboration); Marcus Cain, Peregrine Honig, Tiffany Thompson

(collaboration); Brian Collier; Patrick Alonzo Conway; Chris Dahlquist; Julie Denesha; Lisa Marie Evans; Stanton Fernald; Rachelle Gardner; Gear , Héctor Casanova, Lori Raye Erickson, Adrian Halpern, Jessica Manco, Noah Moore, Sha9again, Matthias Soda Potter (collaboration); Jane Gotch, Tiffany Sisemore (collaboration); Marcie Miller Gross; Kevin Hiatt; Peregrine Honig; Tex Jernigan; Herman Johansen; Anne Lindberg; Art McSweeney; Brendan Meara; Dylan Mortimer; Margaret Shelby, Michele Bridges (collaboration); Ascot J. Smith; Mark Southerland, Jeff Harshbarger (collaboration); Charles Stonewall; Caleb Taylor; Rodney Thompson; Bernadette Torres; Sandra Van Tuyl; Heidi Van; Jaimie Warren; Davin Watne

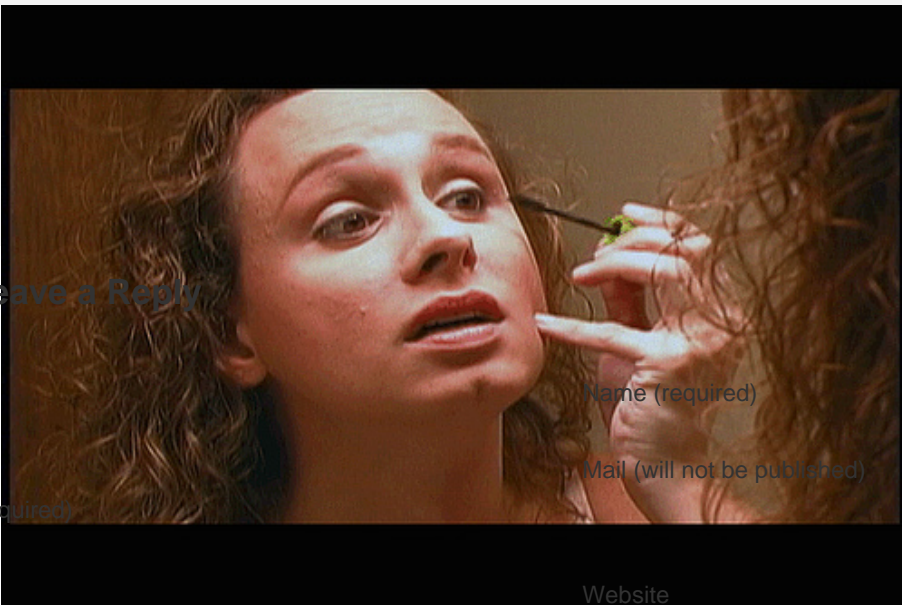
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Premiered at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival in Vancouver, Canada, "The Same but Different" by Lisa Marie Evans is a documentary exploring the life roles of four transgender people in the Midwest. Evans' Inspiration Grant supported post-production costs for the 65-minute film, which was also screened at the Tivoli Theater in Kansas City, Missouri, and at the image+nation film festival in Montreal, Canada .

Film still courtesy of the artist

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