



Annual Report

July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021

Presented to the AcA Board of Directors, November 27, 2021

Board of Directors,

As we all know, the summer of 2020 was a time of profound uncertainty and unrest in the world at large. The arts world, including venues, museums, artists, and performers, were some of the hardest hit and the last to recover from the lockdowns of the pandemic. But we also saw the heightened need for the positive role that arts and culture plays in our lives. For months, we could not come together as a community; we couldn't celebrate and enjoy the best parts of the human experience—the art, music, and culture that define and redefine us. We know that “life is better when we come together” because we all know the sadness and alienation of life apart. I hope we use that shared experience and strive to do better for those who continue to be left behind or set apart. As the arts council for Acadiana, we hope to do better through our own actions but also to set an example and expectation for others throughout the region, who learn and grow with us.

Never before has AcA's mission been clearer: we **must** foster art and culture in Acadiana because the risk of losing what we have is too great. Losing our culture means losing the quality of life and creative spirit that fills us with joy today and hope for our community tomorrow.

Below are a few details that illustrate some of the creativity, collaborative spirit, and resilience that the AcA has brought to bear on the multitude of challenges that came our way in an unprecedented time for our community.

Governance: AcA's Board of Directors made a concerted effort to increase minority representation among its membership during its annual nominating process, where any AcA member can be nominated for a three-year term on the governing board. The Nominating Committee received a historically engaged and diverse candidate group, however there was only one available seat to be filled on the 25-seat board. Instead, the board voted to change the total number of board members to 30, in order to make a significant and lasting difference in the board's representation.

Fundraising & Finance: In spite of a year of global chaos and economic instability due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AcA met and *exceeded* its contributed revenue goal of \$472,250 by raising \$477,800 from a combination of membership dues, program sponsorships, grants, and other fundraising activities. This incredible feat was supported by the board's Development Committee and allowed the organization to remain in-tact through the historic disruption of all earned revenue activities, including ticket sales, school district service contracts, fundraising events, and facility rentals. AcA also received stabilizing support from the Federal Paycheck Protection Program and



Shuttered Venue Operators Grant, as well as a variety of smaller emergency grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, and the Lt. Governor's Office. AcA staff and board Finance Committee worked collaboratively to reduce expenses by 25% from the previous year—notably without cutting staff positions (\$1,589,218 in FY21 vs \$2,144,283 in FY22).

Performing Arts & Visual Arts: In a typical year, AcA presents 12 new art exhibitions and 24 national touring performances, a variety of public and member-exclusive events. During the pandemic, booked performances were rescheduled to future dates, sometimes multiple times in order to be possible to present in-person. AcA set out to be a “gold standard” of safe public gatherings during the 2020-2021 year. Notably the organization re-opened its doors as a museum on June 5, 2020 and held its first live performance again on December 10, 2020. Performance was produced under a special permit with support from the Louisiana Department of Health and was notably only the second such permit issued in the State of Louisiana.

During restricted conditions, AcA pivoted from serving primarily as a live event venue into a production house that responds to the changing needs of the community. AcA invested in expanding the James Devin Moncus Theater's ability to serve as a full-fledged sound and video production studio for live performances. During that time, AcA hosted and co-produced a number of virtual events by community partners, including Festivals Acadiens et Creoles, the Downtown Alive! concert series, Acadiana Symphony Orchestra, and Festival International de Louisiane.

Through its art exhibitions, AcA focused on the topic of playfulness and mental health, as responses to the pandemic. AcA presented *The Healthy Artist*, which included a large community mural in the main gallery, and *The Illustrated Cafe*, an immersive installation within the 40-ft tall glass windows of the AcA, where drivers and passersby could view the artwork if they were uncomfortable entering the building. AcA also presented *Slammed!*, a national open call exhibition focused on the hype and culture of professional wrestling and public spectacle. The year concluded with the largest solo exhibition to-date of work by contemporary artist Stephanie Patton, titled *Comfort Zone*, which explored mental health and coping through the artist's playful and satirical view.

Arts in Education: In a normal year, AcA programs directly impact over 27,000 students and 1,000 teachers in 80 schools and also employ about 50 teaching artists. When schools closed in March 2020, AcA recognized that kids would need the arts more than ever. AcA is typically contracted by regional school systems through its Arts in Education program, where teaching artists are considered outside visitors. This meant that AcA was not allowed on campuses during the 2020–2021 school year; however, just one week after schools closed, AcA took its PACE arts integration program online, with teaching artists creating daily video lessons in Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade. Staying true to the program, the “Virtual Art Studio” was integrated into the curriculum in fun and grade-level appropriate activities using simple supplies that most kids have at home. Following that success, Lafayette Parish School System (LPSS) contracted AcA to provide this program virtually for the full school year. AcA's teaching artists used the district curriculum maps to be sure that the lessons they present connect to the exact standards being taught during that week,



and they produced nine new videos each week. Videos were made available to LPSS teachers via their intranet, with detailed descriptions of lessons, including supply lists so they could prepare ahead of time. In addition, these lessons were also all available publicly on the AcA's YouTube channel so that they could be accessed by anyone, anywhere. In that time, AcA completed a total of 468 video art lessons, all permanently free and publicly available.

Community Development: AcA works as a conduit for public and private grant dollars to support arts organizations and individual artists, musicians, and creatives in the eight parish region of Acadiana. Those grant programs total approximately \$278,000 in annual funding that goes to fund new projects by Acadiana artists and nonprofit organizations. Since project planning was so challenged by the pandemic, AcA worked with its state and local partners to convert much of this funding temporarily into relief grants. Over the course of the year, AcA put checks for groceries and basic necessities into the hands of 351 artists with check amounts ranging from \$200 to \$1,000. AcA also instituted monthly virtual "Cafe Conversations" for arts organizers in the region as a way to check-in with local partners and to share ideas, concerns, and strategies related to adjusting to providing arts services during the pandemic. This helped keep a spirit of collaboration alive and opened new opportunities for organizations to keep operating.

In closing, this organization and this community have been through a lot in one year. I take that experience as proof that we can rise to any challenge and come out stronger and more focused in our work.

I am greatly indebted to the Board of Directors of the AcA for their trust, guidance, and support through thick and thin, and for the unwavering excellence, perseverance, and creativity of the professional staff of the AcA. At the onset of the pandemic, I told the AcA's staff that I expected us to do work that would make us proud the rest of our lives, and I believe that has turned out to be true.

I look forward to the great work to come as we work to foster art and culture in Acadiana together.

Best regards,

Samuel Oliver
Executive Director