



Annual Report

July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022

Presented to the AcA Board of Directors, November 16, 2022

Board of Directors,

We have seen 2021 bring the arts and cultural sector roaring back to life, and AcA is no exception. Pent-up demand for in-person experiences and desire to reconnect with a sense of community have made for a non-stop year of activity. We have seen the return of life-changing encounters with art, both in the classroom and outside of it. We have seen people first tentatively return then rush to return to live concerts and performances of all kinds. We have seen communities re-invest in creative and cultural spaces as both central to the health of their people and critical to telling the stories that knit people together into a shared sense of community.

During this time, AcA's professional staff and volunteer board have worked, planned, dreamed, and schemed to make sure this organization is always pushing our programs and our community to be better, to do better, and to imagine what is possible for Acadiana. Art is an outpouring of creativity, and creativity is just that: creating a valuable something from virtually nothing. This creative practice is central to AcA's mission of "Fostering art and culture in Acadiana," where we strive to envision and create new and powerful things from the resources we have available to us; usually just our time, a little bit of money, and a big dream about what can be.

Our approach to all of this work is in collaboration with our partners, artists, and audience—because that is how we see ourselves moving the needle for this community. Collaboration does not make the work easier, but it does make its reach more extensive, and it makes our partners and us stronger and more connected so that we can continue to create, innovate, and push for a vibrant, inclusive, and endlessly creative Acadiana.

In pursuit of that goal, below are some key initiatives and ongoing programs that AcA has advanced this past year.

Louisiana Music Museum: AcA's Board of Directors began investigating opportunities to expand the physical footprint and programming of the AcA. In October 2021, the board reviewed and approved a project plan for the Louisiana Music Museum, a project that envisions creating a new program of the AcA—the Louisiana Music Museum—to complement the existing visitor destinations and to serve as a new permanent home for the many diverse stories of Louisiana music. AcA set out to envision, plan, and finance a \$5 million+ project in order to create a physical place where visitors and locals alike will gather for generations to come to celebrate the legacy of Louisiana's musical heritage as it deserves to be celebrated. On February 16, 2022 the Board of Directors authorized the



purchase of 121 W. Vermilion St. (the “Old Lafayette Hardware Store”) for \$595,000 to serve as the home of the Louisiana Music Museum. The Board created a new standing committee to steer this project forward, supported by the AcA Executive Director, with a preliminary goal of completing the project by 2025.

Lafayette Performing Arts Center: AcA’s Executive Director and Board President were invited to participate in a meeting on 8/10/21 to discuss a possible replacement of the Heymann Performing Arts Center with a new facility on a new site. AcA participated in these discussions and made a variety of recommendations regarding the governance of the project being tied to the control of the Lafayette City Council and the need for rigorous process in determining the scope, site, and financing for the new facility. LEDA commissioned an updated feasibility study for a future performing arts center, released 4/14/22, which showed many of the possible variations on scope, site, and financing but ultimately did not create a process for the City Council to make decisions about any of these key elements. AcA has made recommendations during this time to continue the work of bringing in public input and field expertise through a fair and open process in order to ensure that the most catalytic and inspirational version of the project is fully imagined—this is particularly important for a major project where broad public support and buy-in will be needed to carry it across a multi-year finish line.

Performing Arts & Visual Arts: AcA emerged fully from Pandemic levels of restrictions on in-person events and programming by July of 2021, and the year that has followed has demonstrated the public’s desire to engage eagerly and actively with the AcA’s offerings in performing and visual arts.

AcA hosted 10,290 daytime visitors for 14 original art exhibitions in a wide variety of media. In addition to this, AcA hosted ~500 students through school group tours and 6,902 visitors during the monthly free **Second Saturday ArtWalk**. Rooted in a desire to engage our audience more deeply with the work in these exhibitions and to create more frequent evening opportunities for local residents to visit the galleries, AcA launched a new members-only event series focused on building support and engagement with the Visual Arts program: the **Insiders’ Salon**, which hosted 405 attendees through four events. AcA partnered with targeted nonprofits serving target audiences of young professionals like The705 and Leadership Institute of Acadiana, black and brown communities like ACLA and Women of Wisdom, and college-affiliated groups like the UL Graduate Student Association.

The AcA’s premier exhibition program, the **Main Gallery** series, presented *Stephanie Patton: Comfort Zone* (6/1/21 to 9/30/21), *Brandon Ballangée: The Age of Loneliness* (10/12/21 to 1/31/22), *Eugene Martin: Heterochronic Collages*, (2/12/22 to 5/14/22), and *Leroy Evans: Painting Rent*, (6/11/22 to 8/13/22). These four exhibitions each featured the work of a single Acadiana-based artist with the goal of demonstrating the vast diversity of work within each single life’s work. Ballangée and Patton’s exhibitions were mid-career retrospectives, looking at work that spanned decades for two Acadiana artists, who continue to climb on a trajectory of innovative work and increasing national recognition. Martin and Evans’ exhibitions looked at the lifetime of work from two artists who passed away in 2005 and 2021 respectively but whose work and impact was under-recognized in their



lifetimes—Martin, a Black Postmodernist whose work was often sidelined in favor of his white contemporaries, and Evans, a prolific local painter, writer, and musician, whose struggles with mental health and housing instability are inseparable from the surreal and often disturbing images he painted in his lifetime. Other exhibitions included contemporary and experimental artwork by up-and-coming artists: *Jacob Todd Broussard & Emile Mausner: Fantasy II in Exile* (6/1/21 to 11/30/21), *Carrie Fonder: Little Labors* (12/11/21 to 3/12/22), and *Paige Barnett: 4-Letter Word*, (4/25/22 to 5/28/22).

AcA's hosted 5,053 ticket buyers over the course of the year through 21 original productions, averaging a sold capacity of 78% in the 304 seat James Devin Moncus Theater. This year was a triumphal comeback from Pandemic restrictions and rescheduling, and also featured AcA changing its performing arts season to a January to December schedule. Through the **Silent Seats** program, AcA continued to partner with area schools and social service agencies to increase access to life-changing art experiences by providing complimentary tickets to 80 targeted individuals. Partners included Affiliated Blind of Louisiana, Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Acadiana,, Boys & Girls Club of Acadiana, Comeaux High, and SLCC.

The **AllStars** series, founded in 2010, returned after two years of disruption with well-known artists, rising-stars, and newcomers to the area in a multitude of genres, including Billy Childs Quartet (07/06/21), Cedric Burnside (08/24/21), The Allman Betts Band (10/6-7/21), Del McCoury Band (10/14/21), Drive-By Truckers (11/21/21), The Milk Carton Kids (12/12/21). The 2022 season launched with Judith Hill (1/13/2022), Liz Longley (4/21/2022), and Bobby Rush (6/16/2022).

The **Louisiana Crossroads** series, which celebrated its 20th Anniversary Season in FY21, presented special concerts featuring artists with a musical connection that ties back to Louisiana and an on-stage interview with the series Host and Curator Roddie Romero, who began that role in the 20th Anniversary Season. The lineup included Jim Lauderdale & Sara Douga (07/21/21), The Williams Family Band (2/3/2022), David Egan Songbook (3/9-10/22), Sheryl & Russell Cormier with Joel Savoy for a special show at Vermilionville (5/7/2022), and *Femme II* on 6/23/2022.

Additionally, AcA continued its **Spotlight** series which features a broader spectrum of performing arts events, including a developmental residency by Helanius J. Wilkins Dance (6/18/22) which will culminate in a full production in 2023, and André Courville for a sold-out recital of French operettas for Bastille Day (7/14/2022). AcA continued its **NXT** series which gives local artists the stage alongside significant technical and marketing support in order to grow their professional careers in the arts. These performances included Chas Justus & Julie Williams on 12/22/21 and Dustin Dale Gaspard w/Sweet Cecelia on 5/26/22.

Arts in Education: AcA served 24,078 students in 79 schools through eight distinct programs in 2021-2022. This service came in the form of 5,256 sessions in visual art and creative movement led by AcA teaching artists in the Primary Academic and Creative Experiences (**PACE**) program in Lafayette Parish, 3,570 arts enrichment classes in Vermilion Parish, 63 unique in-school



performances, and 303 sessions in the Teaching Artist Program in both Lafayette and St. Landry Parish schools.

Six thousand attendees visited during **Student Arts Expo 2022**, which featured 30 performances and 30 exhibitions, and AcA hosted 20 school field trips, (Art Experiences), and 15 week-long Summer Camps with a variety of creative and arts focuses, including two weeks of trauma-informed creative movement for young people from migrant, homeless, and foster families.

AcA has continued its **Virtual Art Studio** creating 32 new, free arts-integrated video lessons. This program was originally created as an online class for pandemic-era education but has found continued success and support and has expanded the awareness and impact of AcA's high quality educational offerings.

Additionally 15 schools were served through the AcA's **Play it Again** program, which recycles lightly used instruments and places them in the hands of students who could otherwise not afford them. AcA added 23 new instruments to its inventory this year, which currently makes music education possible for 470 students each year.

Community Development: AcA provided 29 direct grants to area artists and nonprofit organizations through five grant programs, which awarded a combined total of \$148,066 for local projects. These grant programs included ArtSpark, creative entrepreneur investment program in partnership with Lafayette Economic Development Authority, the Jean Breaux Award, a privately funded scholarship for high school and college students, the Louisiana Project Grant, a fund for area nonprofits conducting arts activities in partnership with the Lt. Governor's Office, and the Lafayette Art & Culture Operations and Project grants, in partnership with Lafayette Consolidated Government. Public funding and support for these programs has been reduced during the Pandemic and still lags at historically low levels. AcA is pressing advocacy on all fronts to increase the funding available for these effective and much needed programs.

In 2022, AcA launched **Creative Acadiana**, a new professional development program, which served 127 artists and creative entrepreneurs through 10 workshops focused on core business and entrepreneurial skills. These activities included Artist Finances: Mindset & Money (2/1/22), Artist Finances: Financial Literacy (2/15/22), Artist Finances: Tax Planning (2/22/22), Instagram for Artists (3/3/22), Relationships and Ecosystems Part I (3/7/22) and Part II (3/14/22), Community and Opportunities Part I (4/4/22) and Part II (4/11/22), Social Media for Social Practice Artists (5/4/22), and the Future of Digital Storytelling Forum (6/29/22).

AcA also introduced a new outreach program to help identify and connect with new and diverse artists called the **Artist Roundup**. Through three events, AcA identified 55 new artists who were added to future communications for grant opportunities. The events each focused on different artforms, including Performing Arts in partnership with The Foundry on 1/26/22, Literary Arts on 4/6/22, and Media Arts in partnership with AOC on 5/25/22. As a casual, free networking event, the



Artist Roundup is envisioned as a low-entry access point for Acadiana creatives to meet one another and create connections that can advance their artistic careers.

Governance: AcA's Board of Directors again 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. AcA had five open board seats beginning July 1, 2022, (two previously vacant positions, one term-limited seat (Dan Hare), and two seats at the end of a term who are not seeking another term (Austin M. Shumaker and J'annine Sullivan). Additionally, the Junior League of Lafayette announced its intent to replace its representative Roya Boustany, who would be serving as president-elect of JLL. The Nominating Committee conducted interviews with all nominees and brought a slate of five individuals to the Board of Directors on May 18, 2021, who were elected unanimously. The new board members were Jess Allain, Dr. Jon Downs, Erica Fox, Nanette Heggie, and Mechelle Roberthon. Additionally, AcA introduced new statuses of Member Emeritus and Honorary Member, which recognizes past board members and non-board members, and formally returns them to the board in-perpetuity as a non-voting member. The first members to receive this distinction were Charles Walter Dobie (Member Emeritus), Ed Abell (Member Emeritus), and Cheryl Larkin Castille (Honorary Member).

Fundraising & Finance: In spite of lingering effects of the Pandemic, AcA saw a return to financial stability, finishing the fiscal year slightly ahead of break-even (+\$6,343), when excluding investment market volatility (-\$70,919). Even more significantly, AcA's functional expenses grew back above their pre-pandemic levels to \$2,898,739—fully 70% in growth from the previous year's budget of \$1,589,218 and still a full 12% increase from the FY19 pre-pandemic budget of \$2,599,000. This strong return of activity is visible in the AcA's return to significant and growing programming and impact in all program areas.

In fundraising, the AcA saw its significant goals for annual giving met and exceeded through a variety of sources including general support from membership dues totalling \$67,480 and fundraising events revenue totalling \$263,311, as well as critical support from grants and sponsorship of specific programs totalling \$452,632. This fundraising total exceeded the annual budget goal by \$111,173, which will allow AcA to reinvest in future programs of impact.

The year included the re-launch and whole-cloth creation of several signature events that raise funds for the organization's programs. AcA's largest fundraising event **Gulf Brew** (10/16/21) was successfully relaunched as an outdoor street festival, which nearly tripled in attendance to 5,400 people from its historic high and included many new elements of the event including a crafts market and competition for King and Queen of the Brew. AcA launched a new event the **Pelican Ball** (12/8/21) to serve as an elegant and fun gala evening while raising awareness and funds for AcA's Arts in Education programs. The gala also re-introduced the well-known Pelicans on Parade with a live auction during the event, featuring artists David Fox and Marshall Blevins. Another all-new event, **La Danse de Mardi Gras** served as both a fundraiser and an educational event highlighting the rural Courir de Mardi Gras traditions as celebrated uniquely in communities across Acadiana.



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In closing, this organization and this community continue to take on opportunities for new and exciting opportunities in arts and culture. All of these programs and initiatives have set a strong foundation for steady and transformational growth in how they impact the lives of people across this region. We have a lot of work ahead of us to see these many initiatives through, but it could not be a worthier endeavor given the impact it will have on thousands of lives for generations to come.

I am greatly indebted to the Board of Directors of the AcA for their trust, guidance, and support and for the unwavering excellence, perseverance, and creativity of the professional staff of the AcA, who are the backbone of all this incredible impact.

I look forward to many more great things as we continue our work of fostering art and culture in Acadiana, together.

Best regards,

Samuel Oliver
Executive Director