

A Year of Creativity, Collaboration, and Community

2022-2023
Year of the Artist

2022-23
THE YEAR OF
THE ARTIST



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
for the **ARTS**
arts.gov

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Introduction

City Council proclaimed the "Year of the Artist" before a full chamber on July 18, 2022.

In July of 2022, The City of Roanoke launched the “Year of the Artist,” an initiative to support creatives of all types, meet community challenges and further integrate arts into the city’s fabric.

In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the City of Roanoke invested more than \$300,000 in new community-driven and artist-led projects advancing Roanoke in a variety of key areas. Projects were funded by the City of Roanoke and through three grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), including an NEA American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant and two Grants for Art Projects. The programs advanced the role of artists in the recovery and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic as community builders and civic problem-solvers.

Our Goals

Throughout the year, artists, creatives, culture bearers, makers, collaborators and enthusiasts of the arts in the Roanoke community have been working together alongside Arts and Culture Coordinator Douglas Jackson and the Roanoke Arts Commission to establish and achieve the following goals:

- Integrate Artists into Civic Problem Solving & Advance Community Goals
- Build a Learning Community, Explore and Experiment,
- Boost the Arts Economic Ecosystem,
- Strengthen and Connect the Network of Artists
- Engage with a Sense of Play and Have Fun.

Through the various projects funded during the year, the community has explored and contributed to all of those goals.

- *WE ARE ART: The Roanoke Self-Portrait Project*,
- 2022-2023 Artist in Residence Program
- Art Matters Grants
- Southeast Greenway Gateway participatory mural project
- Grandin Village Art Walk
- and more!

Eighty-four (84) artists received funding for a variety of projects, and this report, developed by YOTA Chief Communicator and Network Builder Samantha Meyer, is a look at just some of what took place during *the Year of the Artist*.



[Visit roanokearts.org](https://roanokearts.org) for a list of all of the projects that took place during the 2022-2023 Year of the Artist

At A Glance

400

Registered Artists

1,300+

Weekly Newsletter
Recipients

51

Weekly Artist Trainings
(Jan 2022-June 2023)

34

Art Matters Grants

11

Artists in Residence

70+

Outreach &
Engagement Events

40+

Public Performances
& Exhibitions

48

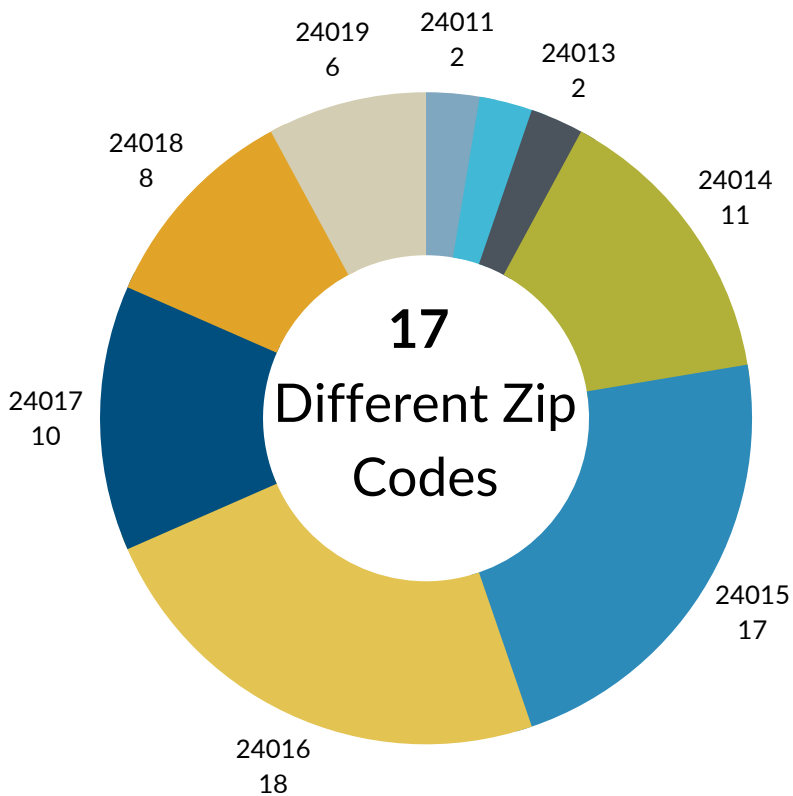
Self-Portrait Artists

\$313,000

Allocated for Artist-led Efforts

Demographics of Funded Artists

100 projects from 84 Artists

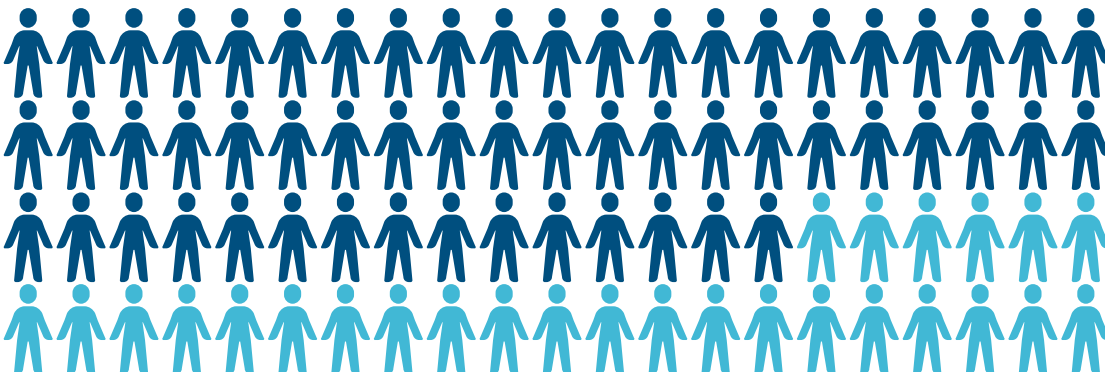


4
Speak English as a
Second Language

21
Black Artists

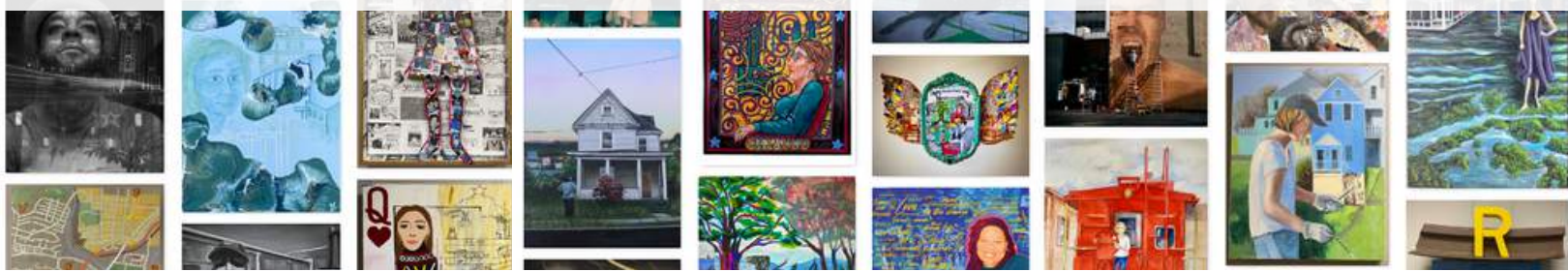
20
Artists in their Twenties

57
Women Artists





WE ARE ART: The Roanoke Self-Portrait Project



WE ARE ART: The Roanoke Self-Portrait Project kicked off the year. The call asked local artists to create a self-portrait that explores the impact of the community on their work and of their work on the community.

Forty-eight artists each received \$500 to create a new work reflecting on their engagement with the community. They were charged with reflecting on community assets goals, causes or qualities that they care about. Artists did not have to be residents of the City of Roanoke, but needed to demonstrate professional or civic ties to the city.

The self-portraits were exhibited in the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building from July 2022 through September 2023, at which point the work was returned to the artists. The 48 self-portraits were created in a variety of media including collage, painting, mixed media sculpture, digital drawing, photography, dance, musical composition, sculpture, poetry and more.

The works in the Municipal Building made a significant impact for our city workers. Originally located on the fourth floor, city officials, council members and community members attending City Council Meetings were greeted by these self-portraits. Due to construction taking place on the fourth floor, the exhibition was relocated to the first floor, a space that benefited from some much-needed vibrancy. As a group was gathered for a Monday night gallery talk, a city worker passed by and exclaimed, “This changes everything. I’ve been working in the basement for ten years and this changes it so much.” This project proved how displaying art in our city’s often overlooked spaces can benefit our community.



[Visit the online gallery.](#)



2022-2033 Artists in Residence Program & Art Matters Grants

From left to right: **Katherine Devine** (Artist in Residence & Artist Coach), **Brian Counihan** (Artist in Residence and Art Matters grantee), **Heather Marshall** (Art Matters grantee), **Samantha Meyer** (Artist in Residence & Artist Coach) **Simone Paterson** (Artist in Residence), **John Woodrum** (Artist in Residence & Art Matters grantee), **Christine Carr** (Artist in Residence), **Douglas Jackson** (City of Roanoke Arts & Culture Coordinator), **Polly Branch** (Artist in Residence)

Artist in Residence Program

With support from a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the City of Roanoke funded eleven artists in residence to engage in a year-long effort of inquiry, community learning, project development and implementation. The artists worked alongside city departments, commissions, committees, and collaborative efforts to develop projects that advanced the work of the organization, engaged the community in their work, and grew professionally.

Art Matters Grants

The Art Matters Grants were awarded to artists to pursue projects that advanced justice, wellness and inclusion in our community. Most of the grants were \$3,000. The grantees were required to exhibit, perform, or share a final product of their project in a public space. It was also important for artists to reflect on process as it engaged with the community and the potential for transformation at the individual and community level. With resources from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the City funded more than 30 projects led by local artists across several disciplines including theater, dance, music, poetry, painting, drawing, sculpture and more. Our artists collaborated with organizations, each other, and the community to spark thoughtful conversations and reflections, include the community in joyful and celebratory events, promote accessibility through the arts, teach individuals of all ages about art, raise awareness about important issues, and more.



Integrate Artists into Civic Problem Solving & Advance Community Goals

A family participating in a community mural at the Juneteenth Family Reunion at Eureka Park on June 17, 2023.

The arts can serve as a tool to advance community goals and enact change. Demonstrating that potential was a goal in *the Year of the Artist*. Artists can play an active role in solving issues in our communities and cities by raising awareness of important issues in creative ways, facilitating meaningful and positive dialogue and broadening our creative thinking to brainstorm new solutions for old problems.

We funded artists and creatives to pursue projects that engaged with the community to explore how to work together to solve problems and improve our city. These art-centered activities can increase residents' interests in getting involved in local issues and projects.



Roanoke Stormwater Artist in Residence Christine Carr

Christine partnered with Roanoke Stormwater to explore our city's waterways and storm drain system. She spent time taking samples from the Roanoke River, scanning trash and debris collected from the river and taking video footage of the water and flooding occurring in the area. From her water samples, Christine created *Greetings from the Roanoke River* postcards featuring various macroinvertebrates. These postcards became a tool to get the community interested in the river's living organisms and the health of the river as it is affected by stormwater runoff. Christine was able to bring awareness to the challenges that pollution present and inform individuals about what they can do to help improve and preserve the health of our waterways.

Christine at Roanoke GOFest 2022 with her benthic postcards

I pushed myself in new directions: working more in the community, working in a more collaborative fashion, working toward a goal of having public facing work, and learning so many new approaches and processes. My skill set has increased tremendously this year!"
-Christine Carr

Gun Violence Prevention Commission Artist in Residence Jane Gabrielle

Jane partnered with the Gun Violence Prevention Commission to address the issue of gun violence in our community and explore the ability to heal from trauma through the arts. Jane worked to bring the *Soul Box Project* to the City of Roanoke, involving our community in the national project that raises awareness of the U.S. gunfire epidemic. Through the project, communities create meaningful conversation by making and exhibiting thousands of hand-folded origami Soul Boxes representing victims of gun violence. Jane's passion for bringing light to this issue allowed for a month-long display of the Soul Box Project at the Valley View Mall, encouraging shoppers to reflect on the impacts of gun violence on our communities and neighborhoods.

"The greatest benefit I have received from my YOTA participation is my observation of the dawning of the integration of the arts as a civic problem-solving tool. The fact that my hometown launched this progressive idea makes Roanoke even dearer to my heart."

-Jane Gabrielle.



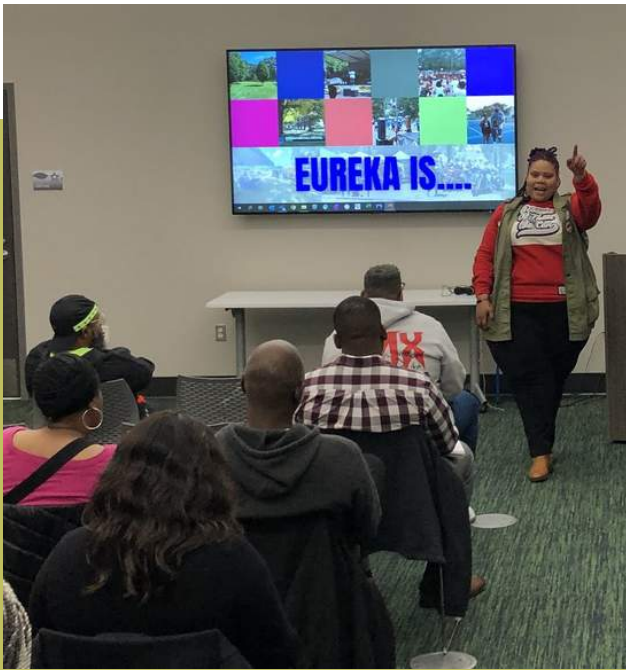
Jane Gabrielle at the Soul Box Project display at the Valley View Mall, June 2023



[Learn more about the National Soul Box Project](#)



["Soul Box Project on display at Valley View Mall", WDBJ](#)



Robyn Mitchell gathered input during a community conversation regarding redevelopment of the Eureka Park Recreation Center.

Eureka Park Artist in Residence Robyn Mitchell

As a self-described "Eureka kid," Robyn grew up in Northwest Roanoke, participating in events, playing, and gathering with her family at Eureka Park. Built in 1965, the community center in the park is ready for reinvestment.

As the Eureka Park Artist in Residence, Robyn provided support to Play Roanoke as the city's parks and recreation arm began the input and redevelopment process. Robyn's questions included 'how can the arts play a role in understanding and building upon resident's connection to the park?' and 'What does meaningful community engagement look like in a complex and time sensitive project?' Activities included explorations of community attachment, color, and even the painting of a small mural. The process is ongoing, and Robyn plans to stay involved.

"The greatest benefit I've experienced is a more established sense of community. Working inside of Northwest Roanoke and collaborating with artists, community members, and stakeholders throughout the city and beyond has been a joy. Throughout the Year of the Artist, I've had a chance to engage with new audiences, reach across sectors of Roanoke, and support as well as be supported in my efforts by community members driven to make a collective impact and forge unity within all communities."

-Robyn Mitchell

Hairfirmations Festival Marlee Coles

Concern about bias around natural hair styles prompted Marlee Coles to apply for an Art Matters grant to mark "Crown Act Day 2023" with a gathering at The Collective on 11th street. The *Hairfirmations* event included a hair wall art project, professional photography, merchandise, and a panel conversation to relaunch the *Hairfirmations* podcast.

Creating a sense of belonging was top of mind for participants, including a panelist of hair professionals. The Crown Act became law in Virginia in 2020 in an attempt by the legislature to prevent hairstyle discrimination. But much more can be done to celebrate everyone in the community by drawing on creativity and the joyful expression of self. Through the *Hairfirmations* event, Marlee celebrated both.



Marlee Coles at the Hairfirmations Festival in front of the Hair Wall.



Taye the Truth with local youth participating in the first Rise 540 Community Dinner hosted by the Kirk Family YMCA. The art they created was in response to the "Don't Blink" music video.

Project Don't Blink Taye the Truth (Dionte Hall)

Gun violence impacts our entire community. With 66 gunshot incidents in 2022, Taye the Truth (Dionte Hall) wanted to do more. He had already written and performed a song, "Don't Blink." And the artist wondered how he could do more.

With an Art Matters grant, Taye the Truth rallied a community of creative residents to help produce and act in a video for the song. Once developed, the artist engaged young people and the community in a series of workshops to have conversations about violence, where they feel safe and unsafe, and steps that each of us might take in reducing the impact of guns on our lives in the Star City.



[Don't Blink, Taye the Truth](#)

RESOURCES

In building a learning community, we've been intentional about exploring resources. We've held a book club, explored lessons learned in other communities and gathered weekly to explore toolkits from our national and statewide partners. Explore resources for arts-based community development on the [resources page](#).



COACHING STAFF

Key in shaping a learning community was the support of the coaching team. The team oversaw the training schedule, conducted trainings, and fostered the development of the YOTA network.

- Business Development Coach Katherine Devine
- Chief Communicator and Network Builder Samantha Meyer
- Artist Development Coach Kathryn Schnabel
- Movement Coach Pedro Szalay
- Team Development Coach Katie Trozzo
- Arts & Cultural Coordinator Douglas Jackson

Snapshots from the year!



Artists in Residence Lacey Leonard, John Woodrum, Brian Counihan, Samantha Meyer, and Katherine Devine representing the Year of the Artist at the State of the City Address in August 2022



Pastor Tim Harvey, Roanoke Gun Violence Commission and Helen Dean, Roanoke Arts. Council, making Soul Boxes at the Envision Center



A puppet at the Daisy Art Parade



Roanoke Stormwater's booth at GO Fest featuring artwork from Christine Carr



Community School students working on their singing tree



Roanoke Arts Commission member painting the community mural with young participant at Eureka Park Juneteenth Celebration



Build a Learning Community

Children participating in Simone Paterson's *Dreamin' Big* Art Program at the EnVision Center

As we explored and experimented, we were constantly learning what works and what doesn't in terms of further integrating the arts into our community. In turn, we are spreading this knowledge, and many of our artists are teaching others how to create. Together we're considering what being an "artist" can look like. Many of our artists have been working to use the arts as a way to spread knowledge and tell stories about our community.



EnVision Center Artist in Residence Simone Paterson

Simone partnered with the Roanoke Redevelopment Housing Authority's EnVision Center to provide an art awareness program for all ages that encouraged dreaming and process based art called the *Dreamin Big Art Program*. Simone developed and executed four seasons of workshops with a focus on community building and fostering a sense of belonging. Participants worked with a variety of different media and were encouraged to explore who they were as artists and how they connected with the world around them. The weekly workshops were free, increasing accessibility to the arts and art education. Simone kickstarted the arts programs in the new community center in the Melrose neighborhood and provided important resources to both children and adults as they learned how to expand their artistic skills and developed an interest in the arts.

Simone Paterson promoting the Dreamin Big Art Program at National Night Out in August 2022

"It's been wonderful to see the arts accepted and celebrated as a vital component of a healthy city. Any elitist notion that art is for a select few is not the face of art in Roanoke. It's more ART IS FOR EVERYONE." -Simone Paterson

Berglund Center: The Heart of Gainsboro Bryce Cobbs

Funded by an Art Matters grant, Bryce Cobbs explored the impacts of urban renewal on historically Black neighborhoods in Roanoke. Bryce worked alongside Berglund Center Artist in Residence Jordan Bell to interview members of the Gainsboro and Northeast neighborhoods who were directly impacted by the construction of the Roanoke Civic Center, now known as the Berglund Center, in the 60s and 70s. He then completed an oil painting featuring significant leaders in the Black community including Kathleen Ross, who refused to leave her home as the civic center was constructed around her property. The painting was then digitally reproduced into a large banner and installed onto a wall on the Gainsboro side of the Berglund Center. The original hangs inside the Center. Bryce's painting provides important recognition to members of the community whose stories have been overlooked and forgotten and sheds light on the painful impact that urban renewal had on our once vibrant Black neighborhoods.

"I really wanted to understand what the community was feeling. A lot of people don't know how bad urban renewal was and how much it impacted these people. I wanted to translate that into this painting." -Bryce Cobbs



Bryce Cobbs with his painting at its unveiling at The Heart of Gainsboro Dedication Ceremony on February 15, 2023



[The Heart of Gainsboro Dedication Ceremony, RVTV](#)

Exploring Housing Insecurity Victoria Van Tassel-McGrath



Vicki (right) holds a painting she did of Sirena and her daughter on her bed with a pile of stuffed animals. Sirena and her daughter are Habitat for Humanity home recipients.

Vicki was funded with an Art Matters grant to explore housing insecurity in the Roanoke Valley. She spent the last six months interviewing and building relationships with individuals and families who have struggled for housing. Vicki then developed a series of six paintings accompanied by blues harmonica melodies that reflect the stories and experiences of individuals in the Roanoke community who have faced housing insecurity. The series of work is being exhibited around the city, starting at the local Habitat ReStore. Her thoughtful representation of the stories of community members encourages thoughtful reflection and discussion about the prevalence of homelessness in our community. Her hope is that, as a result of looking at her art, listening to her music, and reading the summaries of her remarkable subjects, the perspectives of viewers on the issue of homelessness will be changed.

"I loved making a connection with Habitat for Humanity and having the ability to see first hand the positive impact of their presence in the community. My excitement was on fire when I presented Sirena and her daughter a first glimpse of the double portrait I created of them posed in their new Habitat for Humanity home. They were beaming."
- Victoria Van Tassel McGrath



[View Vicki's work](#)

I Heart SE Sculpture Project John Woodrum

Art Matters grants funded a wide variety of activities that helped build a sense of belonging and inclusion. John Woodrum used two Art Matters grants to host 3-D printing workshops at each of the six branches of Roanoke Public Libraries and then to create a sculpture for the front of Belmont Library in Southeast Roanoke. Exploring the power of technology and individual creativity in improving the community around us, John modeled the way for workshop participants who ranged in age from 7 to 70. The sculpture will be installed in October with gathering of neighborhood residents and workshop participants.



John Woodrum (second from left) and students participating in a 3D Printing workshop

Berglund Center Artist in Residence Jordan Bell



In a partnership with Berglund Center, Jordan Bell was hired as an artist/historian in residence. Jordan dug in deep with his existing knowledge of the Gainsboro neighborhood and uncovered images, stories, and artifacts about 'Tanktown,' the northeast section of the neighborhood destroyed to make way for Berglund Center during "the Commonwealth Project." The Commonwealth Project was the first transformation in Roanoke undertaken as part of Federally driven urban renewal policies. Listening to the stories of elders and archiving images and stories, Jordan partnered with Bryce Cobbs in the process that served as the foundation for a new community portrait and mural. As part of the overall project led by Berglund Center's Robyn Schon, three parlors were renamed for Ms. Katherine Ross, Mr. David A. Ramey, and Mr. Richard Chubb, a longtime and important educator for generations of students.

Jordan Bell (right) with Bryce Cobbs at the Heart of Gainsboro dedication ceremony

National Youth Poet Laureate Program Bryan "Harvest Blaque" Hancock

Hip hop performer, Carilion Clinic Healing Artist in Residence, and *Soul Sessions* founder Bryan Hancock is making a career out of using the arts in support of his community. With an Art Matters grant, Bryan, who performs as Harvest Blaque, is coaching young people, teaching Teen Speak workshops, and building a partnership with the National Youth Poet Laureate program. The program supports reading and literacy initiatives in the community and helps local youth to express their voices, learn about poetry, and have another way of engaging with the world around them. In October 2023, these elements will culminate in the designation of Roanoke's first Youth Poet Laureate at the inaugural *Rhythm and Rhyme* poetry festival in partnership with Roanoke Public Libraries.



Bryan Hancock with Adria Cintron at day 1 of the Teen Speak Poetry Camp. Photo from "[Local Spoken Word Artists Inspire Authenticity at Teen Poetry Camp](#)", *The Roanoker*



[Hear Bryan on the *If You Noke You Know* podcast.](#)



[Learn more about the Teen Speak workshops](#)

Song Circles for English Language Learners Joy Truskowski

Local singer-songwriter and ESL instructor, Joy Truskowski, used her Art Matters grant to combine two things she loves most: singing and teaching English. Joy led singing circles with English as a second language (ESL) classes with Region Five Adult Education, an organization that offers free English classes and GED classes. Joy taught twelve sessions and her lessons featured songs with simple melodies and easy-to-learn lyrics for English language learners. She also provided the lyrics in English and the various languages that students speak in the classroom. In addition, the songs contained vocabulary that was useful and had meaningful messages. Joy's work this year is an example of how the arts can be integrated into many forms of learning and education. She is able to improve individuals' language skills through music in a trusting and inclusive environment.



Joy Truskowski leading adult ESL students at the Burton Center for Arts and Technology on October 20, 2022



[Learn more about Joy's work with Region 5 Adult Education in this WSLs story.](#)

"Normally I would be too busy on the teaching end to dedicate time to singing with our students. To be supported as an artist really meant a lot to me, and I was able to provide something valuable to our students." -Joy Truskowski



LGBTQ+ Arts and Activism Workshops Lynsey Wyatt

Lynsey Wyatt provided the LGBTQ+ Teen Weekender Workshops at Cirquation Aerial Arts & Acrobatics. Teens were able to learn and try out different circus art forms including aerial silks, partner acrobatics, and flexibility while exploring life skills that help them fully participate in the world around them. The artist emphasized how expressing queer identity and engaging in community spaces is a creative process. Teens shared issues that mattered to them, including climate change, access for people of color with disabilities, and trans students' rights in schools. The group discussed the intersection of arts and activism and students expressed valuing having a space where their multiple identities can be honored and appreciated. The instructors shared examples of different circus artists and organizations that have used their art to amplify the social justice issues and build community. They then discussed the role of community building, the value of networking and the importance of adopting a growth mindset that acknowledges failure as a part of learning.

A series of summer engagements culminated in the LGBTQ+ Weekender Workshops. Each session emphasized how a group can foster a welcoming and productive space for learning.

"I really enjoyed this weekend workshop and loved meeting everyone. I am inspired to write a failure list, it actually seems extremely helpful. I felt very safe in this space thank you!"
- A Weekender Participant



Southeast Greenway Gateway Participatory Mural Project

Jon Murill and volunteers working on the 13th street mural

With a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the City of Roanoke partnered with the Southeast Neighborhood to strengthen two gateways along the Roanoke River Greenway. Bridges at key greenway intersections the 9th Street and 13th street bridges were ideal canvases for reflecting on the neighborhood and the natural environment.

The project involved the participation of Julia Sienkiewicz's public art class at Roanoke College in helping the neighborhood identify goals. Selected through a subsequent RFP process, artist Jon Murrill designed the murals and established a process for neighborhood participation in the painting process. In fact, nearly 60 volunteers helped paint the murals, now a local landmark and gateway to the neighborhood. Next up: the 13th Street Bridge site will become a fully accessible river access point, another reason for residents to say I ♥ SE!



[Learn more about the SE Greenway Gateway Murals](#)



Boost the Local Arts Economic Ecosystem

Participants of the "YOTA Artists, Makers, Movers & Shakers Grow your Business Roundtable" posed in front of Jon Murill's mural at the The Gathering Place at The LEAP Hub.

In the 2022-23 Year of the Artist, we wanted to emphasize the importance of paying artists for their work and show that the arts are a significant economic driver in a local economy. The funds allocated this year allowed artists to pay others for goods and services. Many local businesses and organizations benefited from ticket sales, fees to rent spaces for workshops or events, or the cost of supplies for projects. By funding artists directly so that they are able to afford venue spaces, many events were able to have free admission, making the arts more accessible for our community. Many artists raised additional funds and put the grant toward the payment of other artists in Roanoke's arts ecosystem.

By paying artists, we increased their confidence and encouraged them to keep pursuing creative endeavors. After years of pandemic restraint and limited opportunity, this encouragement and support is sparking a renewal of Roanoke's arts and cultural community, a foundation for economic growth, community engagement, wellness, and a shared sense of belonging.



Members of the Roanoke Ballet Theatre rehearse 'Poetry in Motion' at its studios in Roanoke. Through ASL, the position of the dancers means poetry or expression. Photo from "[A Roanoke dancer's vision - a ballet for the deaf](#)," *Radio IQ*



"[Innovative project interprets ballet for deaf people](#)", *Roanoke Times*

"Poetry in Motion" Deaf Accessible Ballet William Smith

Will Smith, principal dancer and choreographer with The Roanoke Ballet Theatre, received an Art Matters grant to create a production that was deaf- and hard-of-hearing accessible. Inspired by the 19th century poem and musical composition, *The Lark Ascending*, Will choreographed a performance in which dancers integrated ASL into the dance to allow audience members to "see" the music through sign. The performance also included a reading of the poem, the performance of an original choral work, and a trailer for a new movie about a deaf ballet dancer by fellow Art Matters grantee Kayla Saunders. The entire night was interpreted to ASL by Betsy Quillen. The funding allowed for the creation, rehearsals, and final production to take place, resulting in a significant arts event that was accessible to individuals in our community who are hearing impaired. Will was also able raise additional funds and circulate resources throughout the community by monetarily supporting those involved with his project.

Overall, funding individuals directly to pursue projects made a huge impact for our local artists. Here's what some of our artists had to say about being funded by the City and the National Endowment for the Arts:

"It was really validating to be paid to do what I really wanted to do- be a helpful part of our community's recovery from the fear, isolation and stress of the pandemic."

-Katherine Devine, Artist in Residence

This was an amazing opportunity for musicians like us who want to perform full-time. The prestige that comes from being funded by both the City of Roanoke and the National Endowment for the Arts will open a lot of doors for us that might have otherwise been closed to us. Thank you for investing in local artists and helping us connect more with our community!

-Josh & Julie Kinn, Art Matters grantees

"Paying artists was huge. Many individuals reported to me how much this matters and being able to witness the diversity and creativity of projects and collaborations that this support allowed was truly a high point of this year for me"

-Katie Trozzo, Art Matters grantee

"This grant series allowed performance work to exist in an unlikely container and flourish into its own life. Having funds allows for risk taking, which this entire project turned out to be. This project ended up acting as a love letter to the Roanoke farming community, which was only possible because Roanoke City loved its artists enough to pay them."

-Susanna Young, Art Matters grantee

Year of the Artist Visual Storytelling Project Olivier Bisanga

Funding via an Art Matters grant allowed local emerging artist Olivier Bisanga to create a series of drawings in response to the events taking place during the Year of the Artist. Olivier used reference photos and his creative imagination to represent artists and community members engaging in YOTA projects and events in digital drawings. The wonderful cover image for "A Year of Creativity, Collaboration, and Community" as well as the YOTA Newsletter was created by Olivier and combines snapshots from the Ginkgo Tree Festival and the SE Greenway Gateway Project in one vibrant visual story. The header image for the "Engage with a Sense of Play & Have Fun" section was also completed by Olivier and captures a joyful celebration (see pg. 33)



Sister Cities representative for Kisumu, Kenya presenting at Monday Night Gallery talk



Volunteers painting a SE Greenway Gateway Mural



Participants taking part in a movement warm-up exercise at a YOTA workshop

Snapshots from the year!



A collaborative arts krewe at the Daisy Art Parade



Participants at the artists' roundtable business workshop



Jon Murill and volunteers working on the SE Greenway Gateway Mural



Kathryn Schnabel volunteering at the Daisy Art Parade info booth



Individuals reflecting on a portrait in the We Are Art Roanoke Self-Portrait Project gallery



The nametag making station at the YOTA Winter Celebration



Strengthen the Network & Connect

Students at Community School creating the background of their Roanoke Singing Tree with Artist in Residence and Art Matters grantee Jane Gabrielle

This year we have been able to expand our existing arts network to include emerging artists and individuals new to the area. Strengthening the network was important to include in our initiatives because we felt it was essential to emphasize that the arts are for everyone, and we can do more to improve our community when we come together to create. In the 2022-2023 Year of the Artist, we wanted to connect to each other as artists and connect to our community.



Star Above the Mountain Kinnfolk

Art Matters grantees Josh and Julie Kinn of Kinnfolk Music developed a body of work exploring the history, geography, and folk legends of their town. Kinnfolk researched the history of the Roanoke area by having conversations with their friends from the Irish Session and those in the community who were historically involved in the Celtic Community. After talking to and connecting with community members, the music duo performed “Star Above the Mountain,” a collection of traditional Irish tunes and brand-new Celtic folk songs celebrating Roanoke, Virginia, to a sold-out crowd at The Spot on Kirk. Josh and Julie were able to form meaningful connections to other artists in the community and share their love of Celtic folk music.

Kinnfolk performing “Star Above the Mountain” at Spot on Kirk on June 30, 2023

“We’ve benefitted from meeting other artists (working in media beyond music) in the community! We might never have crossed paths with these new peers if not for the Year of the Artist, and we’re hoping that new collaborations, professional networks, or simply friends will come out of this as time goes on.”

-Josh & Julie Kinn



[Watch the livestream of "Star Above the Mountain"](#)

Roanoke Valley Sister Cities Artist in Residence Katherine Devine

Artist Katherine Devine partnered with the Roanoke Valley Sister Cities to explore the role that visual arts plays in connecting across communities and cultures. Katherine spent time learning about Roanoke’s seven sister cities and the power of personal connection. She worked to develop the inaugural Ginkgo Tree Festival, a celebratory community event in Century Plaza in downtown Roanoke where eight sculptures representing Roanoke and its seven sister cities reside. The festival featured live music from local musicians and art activities developed and designed by Katherine. Representatives from each sister city provided information about the different cultures across seas. Katherine also developed Monday night gallery talks at the Municipal Building where one sister city representative and Roanoke Self-Portrait artists were invited to discuss the connections we make through the arts. Through her residency, Katherine tied the arts community to the Roanoke Valley Sister Cities and worked to expand on RVSC’s mission of fostering peaceful and respectful relationships across communities.



Katherine Devine (far left) with representatives from RVSC during the Ginkgo Tree Festival in November 2022.

“The friendships and connections I found through the YOTA trainings and meetings were helpful and inspired me to create more opportunities for others to connect.” -Katherine Devine

The Singing Tree Project

Jane Gabrielle



The Roanoke Singing Tree of
Peace Pieced Together

Art Matters grantee Jane Gabrielle partnered with Community School to participate in The Singing Tree Mural Project, an international program that promotes connection through the arts by engaging individuals in collaborating on a mural for their community. The project emphasized unity through shared creative experiences and building peace through art. Jane facilitated sessions with Community School students where they reflected their personal desires and willingness to work toward a more peaceful world. The students completed the mural by framing it with flags they created that represented an issue important to them. Jane received a Roanoke Local Hero Award nominated Community School because of her arts activism. Next, Jane will work with a similar project with Round Hill Elementary School.



[The creation of the The Roanoke Singing Tree of Peace Pieced Together](#)

Artist Workshops for Sustained Engagement

Kathryn Schnabel

Funded through an Art Matters Grant, Kathryn Schnabel held a three-part artist series focusing on expansion within individuals' artistic practice with special attention to the work that was taking place this year. The free workshops Kathryn led brought local artists, many of whom were fellow Art Matters grantees or Artists in Residence, together to explore expansion of their ideas and efforts, working through tough challenges, and building upon their efforts through effective reflection. In the first of the three workshops, Kathryn challenged participants to think about their artistic practice in new ways and ask themselves questions about the motivations they have to make art. Kathryn provided significant support to the YOTA artists this year by encouraging them to reflect on their own processes and created a space for productive and meaningful conversation among our community's creatives.



Participants in Kathryn Schnabel's first workshop



[Access Kathryn's worksheets related to her three creativity workshops](#)

I am very happy with the heart-felt discussions among artists at my in-person workshops. I feel so much more immersed and welcomed in the arts community - even after only living here a year and a half. -Kathryn Schnabel



Marquee in Verse Amanda J. McGee

Local author and poet Amanda J. McGee was funded through an Art Matters grant to coordinate a public art installation called “Marquee in Verse” in partnership with the Grandin Theatre. Four couplets written by Amanda were displayed on the marquee and two free poetry events took place inside at the Grandin Theatre. Amanda hosted the “Poetry in Place” workshop that explored finding inspiration for poetry in the spaces around us and invited participants to think more deeply about poetry and their relationship to the community we live in. Amanda’s project actively engaged the community in the art of poetry and was inclusive to those both well-versed and just getting started in the art form. Through Marquee in Verse and the accompanying workshops, Amanda strengthened the network of local writers and poets and connected to her fellow creatives through the written word.

Amanda J. McGee in front of one of her Marquee in Verse installations. The poem reads
“Petal golden promise / cradle bee sleeping”

“I’m very grateful to YOTA and the City for this wonderful opportunity. It’s been really amazing to connect to folks with similar interests and to see all the awesome artists in our community. YOTA taught me about how to make an arts career more viable in the long term.”

-Amanda McGee

Neighborhood Centers Model Development Artist in Residence Polly Branch

Polly Branch aligned her creative energies with the neighborhoods of Gainsboro and 11th Street Northwest while tracking the development of Roanoke’s *Emerging Neighborhoods Vision Report*. The report identified vibrant neighborhood centers in the city and proposed how building blocks of their success in Southwest neighborhoods could be put in place to foster greater quality of place in other neighborhoods. Polly’s longstanding advocacy and partnership in Northwest Roanoke served as a foundation as she asked questions such as, ‘How can the City build trusting relationships with residents?’ ‘How can art help a neighborhood and residents feel seen and heard?’ ‘How can the City better engage residents in ongoing processes related to neighborhood development. Her activities included block party participation, physical improvement such as new paint on buildings or flower pots on streets, informal visioning sessions with residents and event attendees, and will continue into 2024.



Polly Branch engaging children in art making activities

“The YOTA programs have increased awareness of the potentials in artmaking and building relationships. I’ve witnessed the arts bringing people together towards a common goal and I have been very conscious of how the arts can approach community issues in very different ways.”

- Polly Branch



The Benediction Project Charlie Brouwer

Sculptor Charlie Brouwer has been exploring connections of community and faith with his *Benediction* Project. The project is the result of Charlie's realization that public art and many religious traditions have interests in helping the community. He wondered what ways art and religion could work together. Funded through an Art Matters grant, the sculpture *Benediction* traveled to nine different places of worship across the community and resided in a public facing manner in front of each site for 40 days. Participation in the project was free and the goal was to span a diversity of faith traditions or denominations, and for the project to appear in each of the city's quadrants and in the county. The sculpture offers a blessing to the Roanoke community and the residency at each site allows for the hosts to reflect on how they are serving their community. The *Benediction* Project is centered around art serving as a connection between places of worship and community.

Charlie Brouwer (center) moving *Benediction* across the Martin Luther King Jr. Bridge, December 2022



[Learn more about the Benediction Project and see the past sites of the sculpture](#)

Chief Communicator & Network Builder Artist in Residence Samantha Meyer

Throughout the year, Samantha Meyer has been working to get the word out about all of the events related to the Year of the Artist and to highlight the ongoing projects from fellow Artists in Residence and Art Matters grantees. Every week, Samantha created and published an email newsletter that reached over 1,300 people in the community. Remarkably, she created reliable content that encouraged an open rate of more than 45%. The newsletters played a key role in informing the community about the workshops, performances, exhibitions, showcases, celebrations (and more) related to arts and culture that were taking place this year - resulting in a large network of artists, creators and collaborators that showed up to support each other. Samantha also created this document, "A Year of Creativity, Collaboration and Community," capturing the goals, experiences, and learning outcomes of the year. It celebrates and reflects upon the hard work that has taken place during the Year of the Artist.



Samantha (right) with City of Roanoke Arts & Culture Coordinator Douglas Jackson at the Daisy Art Parade

"I am incredibly inspired by all of the projects that have taken place this year. I had no idea how much of an impact the arts can play when used to engage the community. The arts have always been a very important part of my life but my participation in YOTA has further solidified how essential the arts really are; not only in my life but in the happiness, health, and overall well-being of every community. It was so important to me to highlight that in this review and I hope I did this spectacular year justice."

-Samantha Meyer



Grandin Village Art Walk *Walls that Unite*

The mural walk in Grandin Village

Through a collaborative partnership between the Grandin Village Business Association, the Roanoke Arts Commission, and the Roanoke Natural Foods Co+op, a new series of murals was installed in historic Grandin Village. Dubbed “The Grandin Village Art Walk,” the outdoor installation of murals is located on the south facing wall of the Roanoke Natural Foods Co+op in historic Grandin Village, in the ally between the Co+op and Pinnacle Bank. *Walls that Unite* is comprised of nine mural panels, each painted by a different artist, the work explores the values that unite a strong community. The nine mural panels feature themes of love, inspiration, courage, family, diversity, gratitude, hope, respect, and strength.

“We have always believed that the historic Grandin Village is a fertile commercial district for public art, and that we had the space and desire to have more art for our residents, business owners, and visitors. The *Walls that Unite* project is a great example of how private neighborhood organizations and businesses can work together with the Roanoke Arts Commission to utilize public spaces to feature local artists and make our community more attractive through original art,” said Grandin Village Business Association President, Ian Fortier. “We believe the Art Walk is one of the largest multi-mural installations in the region, and we are beyond pleased to feature these artists and their works in the finest mixed-use, pedestrian, boutique commercial district we have in Southwest Virginia.”





Explore & Experiment

Participants of Katherine Devine's "Art of Owning a Business" workshops taking part in a warm-up movement exercise

The Year of the Artist has been twelve months of exploring and experimenting because the City of Roanoke has never had a program like this before. This year has proven that we are living in a community where where we can try new approaches, see what's possible, and give opportunities to artists to expand their practices and engage as community based artists. YOTA participants took on projects that were new types of projects, allowing them to go outside of their comfort zone. Alongside artists, residents explored how they participate in the arts as a creator, supporter, consumer, advocate, and more.



Casey Murano, *Restoring Faith*, 2022, gouache on canvas, 36" x 36". Donkeys began appearing in Casey's sketchbook after listening to a conversation about Habitat for Humanity. She sees donkeys as animals who teach perseverance in the midst of difficult times.

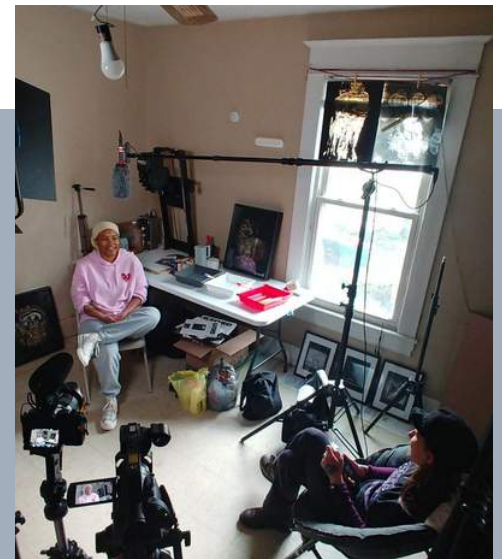
Roanoke Interfaith Pilgrimage Project Casey Murano

Art Matters grantee Casey Murano worked with religious communities in the area to create collaborative works of art reflecting on pilgrimage, interfaith community, and a resilient Roanoke Valley. Casey simultaneously explored her personal artistic practice and expanded her body of work. She developed relationships with many faith-based organizations across the Valley and engaged with themes of faith, art, and service in Roanoke, planting seeds with many different communities. She developed and delivered workshops centered around creativity and worship and learned that making art often invites vulnerable conversations and practice in listening attentively and nonjudgmentally. Casey explored her role as an artist, showing that another way of being is possible, one that is grounded in community, simplicity, prayer and service and filled with joy and beauty.

"Participating in YOTA has felt like a door opening, one that affirms and gives form to my inkling dream of growing into a community-based artist. I've been grateful for the practical tools to help make such a life possible and the commitment to exploring community-based approaches. I feel energized to know that there are creative folks in Roanoke who are working with a shared understanding of artists being active citizens, creatively engaged with the local community." - Casey Murano

Neighborhoods of Opportunity- Northwest Roanoke Artist in Residence Lacey Leonard

Artist in Residence Lacey Leonard explored the neighborhoods in Northwest Roanoke through film. Lacey developed the "NW x NW Documentary" which will feature artists, residents, and historians telling the story of the Northwest Neighborhoods of Roanoke. Through the history of the place, viewers will learn how the city became divided, how NW neighborhoods live now, and the community's vision for reimagining its future. As a collage artist, Lacey intends on creating the film like a collage. Community members are encouraged to submit their own footage and show their perspective. The footage will then be linked together by an larger storyline. Through her artist residency, Lacey gained more insight into her community, increased her professional and artistic skills, and made meaningful and long lasting relationships.



Lacey Leonard interviewing Northwest artist Jahni Quen

"The greatest benefit I experienced from participating in YOTA was the opportunity to learn a new medium which allowed me to connect with the community in a completely different and inspiring way. The funding and framework provided by YOTA gave me deeper insights into the lives of people around me that I can share with a larger audience through film."

-Lacey Leonard



Dancers performing "These Labored Hills"

Roanoke Harvest Dance Theatre Project Susanna Young

Funded through an Art Matters Grant, Susanna Young explored bringing dance and agriculture together. "These Labored Hills" was a three-part series of dance-theater expressions by The Star City Ballet and farmers and gardeners throughout Roanoke. Other collaborators include Star City Circlesingers, Katie Struble, Friends of Evan Spring, Verona Thomas, The Harvest Collective, Garden Variety Harvest with Lick Run Farm, and Roanoke Community Gardens. The performances took place at different community gardens or farmlands. Susie choreographed the dance to build a connection between art and nature, land, and food. In rehearsals, the dancers created movements from the poetry they wrote about gardening and working in community. The final performances were interactive and immersive. The audience and performers even got to share a bountiful salad made with locally grown ingredients.

"I'm floored at my community's willingness to do such a weird experiment. Their faith and trust in the process, a process which was based on emergence and not entirely clear until the week of the show, was humbling and really beautiful."

- Susanna Young

Oliver W. Hill Justice Center Youth Art Projects Heather Marshall

Art Matters Grantee Heather Marshall engaged local youth with art making by offering free workshops throughout the summer of 2022. Heather led six day-long studio workshops for City of Roanoke students between the ages of 13 to 19. The mission was to create a set of artwork for permanent display in the remodeled Roanoke City Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court waiting area. The students explored working with different media including acrylic, watercolor, pastel, charcoal, pencil, ink, and more as well as experimented with making art in different genres including abstract, non-objective, kinetic, mixed media, print, and landscape.



Students participating in the studio workshops

"I feel the overall vision of creating artwork driven by youth around the concept of bringing some mental and emotional relief to constituents who find themselves in the JDR court preparing to face often very difficult court proceedings is lovely and motivating. The kids brought in ideas and imagery I never ever would have selected. They brought in spirituality, fantasy, animals, color, and playfulness inspired by their own life experience. I have enjoyed finding common threads between their work to create connections from piece to piece." -Heather Marshall



[Visit the students' online gallery.](#)



Dorothy Gillespie Mural Restoration

BEFORE

AFTER

Before and after photos of *Accentuated Forms in Space*

Accentuated Forms in Space, a 44-year old mural designed by renowned artist, and Roanoke native, Dorothy Gillespie was restored between April 24 and May 12, 2023 to celebrate the Roanoke Arts Commission's 40th anniversary. Painted in 1979 from a 1975 design done in pastel by renowned artist Dorothy Gillespie, the work has been called "fluid and playful." For more than two decades, area residents and art lovers have called for a revival of the work. The mural was painted by Jack Fralin and Dana James of Best Bet Arts and Media. "I spent a lot of time researching Ms. Gillespie's color palette," said Fralin. "We think of the colors as pastel and muted. But they weren't. They were a vibrant look toward the future. While we're replicating the past with this mural, we're also looking ahead. We're always looking ahead, and I think that's a fitting posture for Roanoke."



[Read the full story about the Dorothy Gillespie Mural and its restoration.](#)



Engage with a Sense of Play & Have Fun

Drawing completed by Art Matters Grantee Olivier Bisanga of Otu Kojo, Katie Trozzo, and Pedro Szalay enjoying a drum circle at the YOTA winter celebration

It was important for us to have fun this year and recognize the joy that the arts provide is a valuable and essential part of life. Having fun is also key in creating a gateway experience. Fun gets us to try new things. Individuals who find joy in participating in the arts are more likely to keep pursuing creative activities and further imbed the arts into their lives.



Brian Counihan walking in the Daisy Art Parade



[Behind the scenes of the Daisy Art Parade](#)



[Learn more about the Daisy Art Parade](#)

Daisy Art Parade & Southeast Roanoke Artist in Residence Brian Counihan

Throughout the year, Artist in Residence and Art Matters grantee Brian Counihan worked to organize a large, upbeat, family-friendly event that showcased all of Roanoke's creativity. Working with different groups in the community including Community School students and SE Neighborhood residents, Brian lead workshops on paper mache puppet-making and giant puppet operation to prepare for the Daisy Art Parade. The parade took place on Saturday, April 15, which is World Art Day. During the sunny spring afternoon, hundreds of Roanoke residents of all ages gathered on Henry Street and sported vibrant costumes and showed off the props they had been making for the past several months. Ear-to-ear smiles, laughter, and immense joy from parade participants and audience members filled the streets of Downtown Roanoke that afternoon. Brian and others hope to make the Daisy Art Parade an annual event.

"The greatest benefit for me was being able to say the city recognizes the importance of the arts and that I was doing something that the city supports. Artists are often viewed as being flakey, self-indulgent or involved in trivial activities and YOTA helped our citizens accept us as doing something valuable."
-Brian Counihan

Singing Circles Katie Trozzo & Joy Truskowski

Art Matters grantees Katie and Joy of Star City Circlesinging partnered with five local organizations to offer circlesinging events and activities specially designed for their communities. Circlesinging is a spontaneous, improvisational community-singing experience. Leaders create improvised parts and lead the group in spontaneous song. The circlesinging sessions are open to everyone and individuals participating do not have to have any musical or singing experience making the activity very inclusive. Katie and Joy work to create an uplifting and empowering experience for participants of their singing circles and encourage them to step outside their comfort zone and just have fun.

"We incorporate a lot of games that help us connect with our inner child and help us to be playful again. It also helps us connect with each other because we're listening to each other in a way that we're not used to. When you're in the moment and making it up as you go along, you have to be present and connect with each other." -Joy Truskowski



Circle singing with ArtsReach youth



["What is circlesinging?"](#)



Back to Black Arts Show Toya Jones

On June 25, 2022 a daylong celebration of Black culture took place in Downtown Roanoke. The Back to Black Arts Show, spearheaded by Art Matters grantee Toya Jones, hosted over 30 vendors lined the streets selling food, clothes, and art. The event featured spoken word, music, visual art, and vendors all from local Black artists and entrepreneurs. Families enjoyed food, purchased art from members of their community, danced, sang, and more! The event successfully celebrated the creativity of Roanoke's Black community and allowed participants to come together for a supportive and uplifting event.

Local youth enjoying the Back to Black Arts Show

"It was important to shine a light on young, local Black talent in our area. Showcasing art in all forms. I didn't want to just stop there. I wanted to make it a fun, family friendly event for all walks of life."

-Toya Jones

["Roanoke community celebrates Black culture at first Back to Black Art Show"](#)



Drum Circles and Recital Otu Kojo

Funded through an Art Matters grant, Otu Kojo conducted ten drum circles at different locations across the City, engaging groups of all ages and experience levels with the art of African Drumming. Drumming at spaces such as the Melrose Library and the EnVision Center, Otu brought great joy to others through his music. In collaboration with Local Colors and CommUNITY Arts Reach, Otu and others performed at the Claude Moore Education Complex for an evening celebration of African cultures in November. Otu's drumming encourages spontaneity and it's almost impossible not to dance while listening to the rhythm and beats. He played at the YOTA winter celebration and fellow artists broke out into a spontaneous dance circle!



Otu Kojo (seated) conducting a drum circle

"Its always exciting to hear and see new drummers play the beats and find how they are part of the whole group working together. I have begun teaching dancers too. When they can be on site during a drum class, it will energize the new drummers."

-Otu Kojo



Projects Still in Progress

HOW DO WE HATCH
& NURTURE NEW
IDEAS?

Artwork by Artist in Residence Polly Branch.

Topical Online Art Gallery Rachel Austin

The artist will pilot, manage, and market an online gallery and engagement space featuring the work of local artists on environmental and humanitarian topics.

Like Moonlight on Water Film Kayla Saunders

The artist will produce and premier a short film exploring a hopeful dancer who loses her hearing yet remains determined to pursue her passions.

Mill Mountain Star Play Richie Cannaday

The artist will explore untold stories in the development of Roanoke's iconic star, culminating in the staged reading of a new short play that celebrates the community with a sense of possibility and belonging.

Culinary Arts Portrait Project Aaron Spicer

The artist will create a series of portraits that highlight underrepresented culinary artists in the Roanoke Valley.

What's next?

It's here! THE ARTS,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
+ PLACEMAKING IN
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

**A CALL FOR
PORTRAITS
APPLY BY JULY 12**

An all-discipline, paid call for original portraits of Roanoke's creative residents, business owners, and change makers who are making it all happen *right here, right now* in the Star City.

CELEBRATING
40 YEARS
OF PROGRESS
ART AND FUN

ROANOKE ARTS

ARTS
CONNECT

ROANOKE CULTURAL
ENDOWMENT

ROANOKE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2023 marks the 40th anniversary of the Roanoke Arts Commission. During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, we will be celebrating 40 years of progress, art, and fun! This year, the Roanoke Cultural Endowment and the Roanoke Arts Commission are leading a variety of partners in exploring the power of the arts in making Roanoke a stronger community. As part of that work, a six-part Buzz television series is investigating the arts in wellness, student engagement, collaboration, social impact, and more.

With the June 21 launch of the Arts + Economic Development episode, the Roanoke Arts Commission invites artists to watch the episode and listen to the song, *It's Here*, by Bryan "Harvest Blaque" Hancock, JP Powell, and collaborators. We think you'll be inspired to help us show that it's right here in Roanoke that something important is happening.

ROANOKE ARTS

CELEBRATING
40 YEARS
OF PROGRESS
ART AND FUN



[It's Here- Roanoke, Virginia](#)
[Buzz4Good](#)

What's next?

Hey, Neighbor!

WE'RE BRINGING
FREE ART RESOURCES
TO HELP YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD
ACHIEVE ITS GOALS

In early 2024, Roanoke neighborhoods will have access to a catalog offering arts activities that you can bring to your neighborhood...for free!



Artists will also be available to help neighborhoods prepare for the Daisy Art Parade -- April 15, 2024

WWW.ROANOKEARTS.ORG/NEIGHBORS

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

- **Sign up** as an interested neighbor at roanokearts.org/neighbors. We'll keep you updated.
- **Plan your 2024 goals and outcomes.** Consider neighborhood events such as a May neighborhood day, National Night Out, block parties, park picnics, and your annual meeting.
- January '24 - **Review the catalog**, *Arts Connect Neighbors*, online and in print, featuring 50 potential arts engagements.
- Winter '24 - alongside neighbors, **match your goals and events with arts offerings.**
- **Request the free programming** from the City.
- Spring - Fall '24 - hold events, trainings, and performances that **connect neighbors!**
- Fall '24 - **Share the success** of your work with us & **apply for a next-steps art project grant!**

WHAT KIND OF RESOURCES WILL BE AVAILABLE?

- Activity based workshops
- Performances
- Physical art projects, like sculpture or murals
- Interactive walking tours or activities on a relevant subject, like local architecture
- Facilitation of neighborhood art projects
- And more! We'll have a full list in December.



Get more information and submit a proposal at roanokearts.org/neighbors

