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FROM THE DIRECTOR

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Photo by Czelsi Kozak

Expression and engagement abundant in Montana

I had an inspiring visit with the founders of Mountain Time Arts, a new grantee of the Montana Arts Council. With a mission to “enliven our relationships to ... history, culture, and environment,” Mountain Time Arts (MTA) has produced a thoughtful array of site-specific performances that spotlight issues critical to Montanans. It was a lively conversation that jumped from aesthetics to the environment, to civic engagement. I left impressed with MTA's practice to empower scholars, scientists and artists to engage with their community and inspire deep thinking.



Northern Cree Drummers and Singers at “Cherry River, Where the Rivers Mix,” a performance piece produced by Mountain Time Arts Aug. 23 near Bozeman. (Photo by Elly Vadseth Stormer for *Hyperallergic*)

Americans for the Arts Convention. Addressing the topic of the urgency of art and culture, Mr. Morial drew comparisons to historical societies like the Egyptians, Romans and Aztecs, acknowledging their significant contributions to civilization. He noted that the demise of these cultures was not due to their over-investment in humanities or education, in fact, they are remembered for those elements. He postulated that their downfall was due

to the divisions and conflict they allowed to form in their communities. It was an obvious allusion to the current climate in America.

As a state agency, the Montana Arts Council (MAC) exists to meet the artistic and cultural needs of Montana's residents, to nurture those things that become our history. These investments of public dollars are made in a

way that is intended to strengthen communities, enhance learning, and develop creative potential. Art is the device that can counteract destructive divisions, a way to stay connected with our humanity.

Inspiring expression and connection in Montana

Montana's Shakespeare in the Parks was honored with a Governor's Arts Award in 1991 for their commitment to Montana. In Helena, where I live, their visits are so valued that the community fundraises to have two performances. Kindness and courtesy were everywhere as we negotiated close quarters, filling every possible space. The library lawn, blanketed with people, was near silent as the actors used unfamiliar words to tell the most recognizable stories. I tracked the people who happened upon the performance and lingered to take it in. It was a magical evening, and I left feeling grateful for the experience.

I had similar thoughts in the very different environment of Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild in Lincoln. In the handful of times that I have visited this season, I've been struck by how differently visitors interact with the park. Some have the reverence seen museums, carefully reading the markers and studying the art. Others, like my children, bound along the trail, as enamored by the setting as the sculptures. I've only seen evidence of the next type: those inspired to leave their mark in stacks of rocks, balanced sticks, and arranged leaves. Sculpture in the Wild bridges the environment, art, and history in a way that makes every visitor comfortable.

Each of these organizations engages outside of the usual art venues, with atypical audiences, who are authentically engaged. MAC is proud to nurture an environment that inspires expression and results in connections.

I'll end with this quote by Herbert Marcuse: “Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world.”

Art can counteract divisions

My conversation with MTA was still fresh when I heard Marc Morial, the president of the National Urban League, speak at the

What Montanans say about the arts (from page 1)

Montanans believe the arts provide meaning to their lives and make their communities better places to live.

- **76 percent of Montana adults attended an arts or cultural event during the previous year**, such as the theater, museum, zoo, or a musical performance.

- **People in Montana are more likely to be personally involved in artistic activities as arts makers** (62 percent) than American adults nationally (47 percent).

- **Montanans are especially likely to agree that the arts are a form of pure pleasure** when they experience or participate in them (73 percent), and 72 percent believe the arts help them understand other cultures better.

- **75 percent of Montanans believe the arts help students perform better academically**; 61 percent believe that the arts improve healing and the healthcare experience; and 47 percent agree that the arts are helpful to military personnel transitioning back to civilian life.

- **Six-in-ten Montanans agree that creativity enhances success in the workplace** (61 percent). Six-in-ten Montanans also say their job requires them to be creative – either individually or as part of a team – and come up with ideas that are new or unique (61 percent).

- **In Montana, there is consensus when it comes to how the arts impact tourism**, with about nine-in-ten adults in agreement that the arts attract travelers and are good for tourism (86 percent).

- **Three-quarters of Montana residents agree that the arts have a social impact and improve the quality and livability of their community** (74 percent vs. 71 percent nationally).



- **About four-in-ten adults in Montana think federal spending per person on nonprofit arts organizations is not enough** (42 percent).

- **Most adults in Montana disapprove of the government eliminating the**

National Endowment for the Arts, including 41 percent who strongly disapprove.

What Americans say about the arts in 2018

Americans are highly engaged in the arts and believe more strongly than ever that the arts promote personal well-being, help us understand other cultures in our community, are essential to a well-rounded K-12 education, and that government has an important role in funding the arts.

“The arts provide meaning to our lives.” 69 percent of Americans believe the arts “lift me up beyond everyday experiences,” 73 percent feel the arts give them “pure pleasure to experience and participate in,” and 81 percent say the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world.”

“The arts unify our communities.” The personal benefits of the arts extend beyond the individual to the community, with 72 percent believing “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity” and 73 percent agreeing that the arts “helps me understand other cultures better.”

“Most of us seek out arts experiences.” Nearly three-quarters of the adult population (72 percent) attended an arts or cultural event during the previous year, such as the theater, museum, zoo, or a musical performance.

“We experience the arts in unexpected places.” Americans also enjoy the arts in “non-traditional” venues, such as a symphony

in the park, a performance in an airport, or exhibitions in a hospital or shopping mall (70 percent).

“There is near universal support for arts education.” The vast majority agree that the arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education (91 percent). Over 90 percent say students should receive an education in the arts in elementary school, middle school, and high school; 89 percent say the arts should also be taught outside of the classroom in the community.

“We support government arts funding at all levels.” Most Americans approve of arts funding by local government (60 percent), state government (58 percent), federal government (54 percent), and by the National Endowment for the Arts (64 percent).

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STATE OF THE ARTS

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State of the Arts welcomes submissions of photographs, press releases and newsworthy information from individual artists and arts organizations.

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