

# MUSE

INSPIRED BY UTAH



# Connecting Through Creativity

In the middle of our pandemic summer, my 89-year-old mother said 2020 was more difficult than the Great Depression or World War II. Even during the depths of those dark periods of time, she had never felt more alone or helpless than she did this year.

Few people would dispute my mother's sentiment. On a local, national and global scale, this year has been exceptionally challenging, and not just because of COVID-19. Natural disasters have reminded us about the perpetual threat of climate changes, while police shootings and protests have forced a national reckoning about race relations.

When things have gotten difficult for me, I have learned to own those feelings instead of putting them in a box. I learned to acknowledge the new is not at all normal, but it's our reality.

That is why this issue of MUSE has me excited. During this time of crisis, many in our cultural community embraced this new reality, as these stories highlight. They recognized the need for connection, even virtual, during a time of isolation. They identified ways to use their skills to provide necessary equipment. They found an opportunity for change because of painful but important conversations.

As we enter the fall and winter, I am optimistic more organizations will find their own pivot. They will continue to reinforce the importance of the cultural sector for a healthy society. They will provide a respite from the daily stresses and a bridge between divided people. They will use their influence and creativity to build a more positive world.

Wherever possible, we will work to preserve, support and elevate our cultural community. This will come as grants to keep the doors open, but it will also come through forums for professional development and outlets for telling their stories.

Personally, I will continue to own my feelings of despair in the moment, but always look forward with an optimistic eye. I am confident that sooner, rather than later, community plays, professional shows and Broadway musicals will once again grace our stages. We will once again have open art galleries and packed concert halls. We will once again join together to celebrate the creativity and diversity of our great state, to serve others, to sing and to dance.



Jill Remington Love  
Executive Director



**good idea** Taking a pottery class.



Taking a piece of ancient pottery.

**bad idea**

UMG AD

## We're Losing Utah's History.

Every day, visitors to Utah's outdoor wonderland take home pieces of our past, such as arrowheads and pottery. Leaving artifacts in place and having respect for archaeological sites ensures that these sites stay with us for thousands of years to come.

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# INSIDE

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Artists create, pandemic or protests or not. And even before Utah's theaters and museums and concert halls reopened, the creative sector was already reinventing itself. While still in the middle of everything, creators revealed how they're refocusing while finding new ways to reach audiences. Of course, the work of pivoting isn't finished — perhaps it's barely begun — but these stories underscore the creativity of the state's cultural landscape.

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> [heritageandarts.utah.gov/MUSE](https://heritageandarts.utah.gov/MUSE)

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“Stop asking what you  
can do to be antiracist.  
Go do the work.”

# MUSE

Editor in Chief ELLEN FAGG WEIST | Publisher JOSH LOFTIN | Art Director SARINA V. EHRGOTT  
Designer KERRY SHAW | Designer & Staff Photographer TODD ANDERSON | Copy Editor CATHERINE REESE NEWTON



UTAH STATE LIBRARY • DIVISION OF STATE HISTORY • DIVISION OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS  
USERVEUTAH • DIVISION OF INDIAN AFFAIRS • DIVISION OF ARTS & MUSEUMS • STEM ACTION CENTER

Executive Director JILL REMINGTON LOVE | Deputy Director KATHERINE POTTER

> [heritageandarts.utah.gov](https://heritageandarts.utah.gov)

Publishing BRENT LOW  
Project Manager MEGAN DONIO

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# THE BOOKS MUST GO OUT

UTAH'S STATE LIBRARY SHIPPED BOOKS FOR THE BLIND  
ALL OVER THE COUNTRY DURING THE SHUTDOWN

by **ELLEN FAGG WEIST** / photography by **TODD ANDERSON**

**ON THE PHONE,** Ruth Levi, a 97-year-old reader from Chicago, admitted she was a little bit desperate.

In the middle of the pandemic, the Midwestern warehouse of the National Library Services for the Blind and Print Disabled had shut its doors. Yet Levi, who is visually impaired, was routed to the phone of Lisa Nelson, manager of Utah's Program for the Blind & Disabled, which remained open.

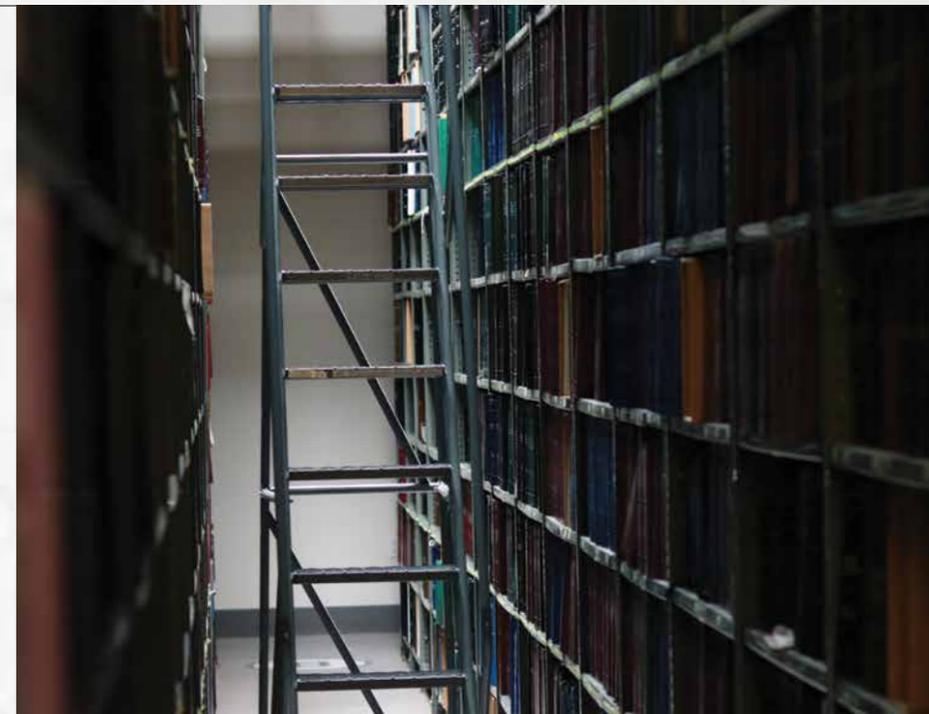
"She called one day out of the blue and said: 'I'm calling Utah because I've just got to have some books,'" Nelson recalls. She said: "I feel like I've been on a desert island for the past little while because I don't have a thing to read and I don't want to watch TV."

On March 11, as libraries across the country were considering closing due to the spread of the virus, Utah officials classified as "essential" the staff of the Multistate

Center West — located at the State Library headquarters on the west side of Salt Lake City. (The warehouse, which operates under a contract from the Library of Congress, was only closed for a one-day building safety check after Magna's 5.7 magnitude earthquake on March 18.)

Due to the pandemic, volunteers and public visitors haven't been allowed to enter the Library for the Blind facilities, but staff kept shipping out book requests. In contrast, the country's Multistate Center East, located in Cincinnati, announced its closure on March 23, and remained shuttered until June 1.

Utah library managers upgraded sanitation and safety routines while mandating masks for workers, and began quarantining materials for three days after they were returned. Nelson says her Canadian-reared husband lent her a hockey stick as a visual reminder of what the distance of 6 feet looks like.



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Library staff took orders via an online catalog or by telephone, then shipped Braille and digital books all over the country. From March to June, Utah staffers shipped three times as many volumes as usual through the state's interlibrary program, says Joe Ballard, director of the Multistate Center West. "I do think it came at some sacrifice on my staff's side," says Colleen Eggett, division director for the Utah State Library.

Some readers were so grateful they tucked thank-you notes in returned books. In

a May letter, Utah Gov. Gary R. Herbert commended state library workers for their service, underscoring how books can provide comfort and escape during times of crisis.

Back in March, readers — who were allowed to check out 30 books at a time — were hoarding books, worried the Utah warehouse would soon shut down. When the limit was increased to 60, readers were willing to return books before they had read them for the second or third time, Nelson says.

"At first, they wanted everything we had on pandemics or plagues or catastrophic events through history," says Nelson, adding that by June, readers were again requesting more entertaining books by favorite authors.

Listening to digital books has been invaluable during the pandemic, says Sharon Hinson of St. George, in the way the stories allowed her to go into her own "wonderland." She became friends with state librarians as she regularly placed her book orders by phone. "I appreciate them so much for keeping me going, because I would have gone stir crazy" without new books to listen to, says Hinson, who lost her sight gradually over the past 24 years.

Even after the Midwestern warehouse reopened in June, Ruth Levi continued to call Utah to request new reading materials, most recently inquiring about Wallace Stegner's time living in Utah. Nelson says she was always happy to talk with her new friend, and happy to contact her counterpart in Cincinnati to fulfill Levi's book orders. [bit.ly/MUSE20BlindLibrary](https://bit.ly/MUSE20BlindLibrary)

LEARN MORE about available services and resources: [blindlibrary.utah.gov](https://blindlibrary.utah.gov)



# Stories in the Bones

HOW A MYSTERY ON THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH CAMPUS LED TO SURPRISING FINDINGS ABOUT THE STATE'S EARLY MEDICAL TRAINING

by ELLEN FAGG WEIST



**THIS IS A HAND OF A LABORER:** That's visible from the bones. Two fingertips on this left hand are missing, and the palm bones are badly fused together.

Nearly 100 years after they were likely buried and then forgotten, these bones tell of a man who continued working even after suffering a crushing fracture to the metacarpals of his palm.

Stories found in bones are endlessly fascinating to Dr. Derinna Kopp, a forensic anthropologist for the Utah State Historic

Preservation Office. She examined this hand in her investigation of some 1,069 bones and fragments unearthed on the University of Utah campus in 2016.

The skeletal remains are believed to be cadavers from the early days of the U.'s medical school, found during renovations of the George Thomas Building. The building once housed the medical school, later the campus library, then the on-campus natural history museum, and now the remodeled Crocker Science Center.

As part of her investigation, Kopp found markings carved into the skeletal remains that matched procedures detailed in early medical textbooks. "Every skeleton I look at, I learn something new," Kopp says. "The bones, they just floored me. I could see these people through the life of their bones."

Information about Utah's earliest body donors was feared lost forever. Since then, based on a coincidental phone call that led to a "lucky and rare" historical connection, Kopp has been digging through decades of Salt Lake County vital records. As she searches death certificates, she's finding more evidence to layer on top of what she's observed in the bones.

Uncovering a 19th-century skeletal collection is extremely rare. This collection, the only one to have been unearthed in Utah, is especially significant because of its link to the state's early medical training, says Dr. Christopher Merritt, state historic preservation officer.

In the early months of 2017, Kopp analyzed those skeletal remains, most crushed through excavation or mixed together. She was able to match femurs — upper thigh bones — for some 11 bodies.

Out of respect, Kopp doesn't talk about most of the American Indian and Alaskan Native remains she investigates as the state government's lead forensic archaeologist, following tradition as well as legal protections.

"Prehistoric people buried their people everywhere and anywhere," Kopp says.

Whenever possible, those skeletal remains are returned to tribal leaders for reburial.

In her investigation of the U.'s anatomical skeletons, she can talk about evidence such as that mangled left hand. Details embedded in the bones helped Kopp determine that most had worked as laborers.



Dr. Derinna Kopp

In a law passed in 1907, the Utah Legislature decreed that unclaimed bodies could be sent to the U. to be embalmed and used as cadavers. Body donation was considered taboo, and in those early years names were either lost or not recorded. (By the mid-1930s, cadavers were cremated in a campus facility after they had been used for medical training, and now cremains are buried at the Salt Lake City cemetery. Records were maintained from about 1969 on, says Kerry Peterson, head of the U.'s body donor program.)

Later, after Kopp finished her investigation, a man called her colleague Amy Barry, the state's cemetery program manager, seeking the gravesite of his great-uncle. The death certificate listed the University of Utah as the place of deposition. That was a crucial missing link — how donated bodies were designated on death records.

To learn more, Kopp began researching Salt Lake County vital records from 1907 to 1930. "I had a good story that I was able to tell from the remains," she says. "They were probably all male, and age range [at death], I had that. But now — with the death

certificates — I could maybe find out who these people were. And exactly what time frame they died."

Over months of research, she's compiled a list of 300 people whose bodies were donated to the university. Each year, a handful of those bodies were likely used as cadavers.

**"Every skeleton I look at, I learn something new. The bones, they just floored me. I could see these people through the life of their bones."**

— Dr. Derinna Kopp, forensic anthropologist for the Utah State Historic Preservation Office

The vital records also recorded age, place of birth and occupation. A majority of the donated bodies were listed as laborers, including miners and railroad workers, which helps to explain the injuries recorded in their bones. "We know the what and the when," says Kopp, outlining questions about the cadaver collection. "We still don't know the why. And we still don't know the who."

Maybe research will eventually unearth more information. Maybe more questions about the lives of the state's earliest cadavers will be answered. Or maybe not. No matter what, Merritt says, these remains offer a snapshot of the people who helped train the state's first doctors. "This is a part of our history that is not often told in history books." [bit.ly/MUSE20Bones](https://bit.ly/MUSE20Bones) •

**LISTEN** to this podcast series to hear more about the excavation of the University of Utah's cadavers: [bit.ly/MUSE20Cadavers](https://bit.ly/MUSE20Cadavers)

**EXPLORE** the University of Utah's body donor program with donor stories and FAQs: [bit.ly/MUSE20BodyDonor](https://bit.ly/MUSE20BodyDonor)

# ART *for* EVERYONE

HOW ARTIST MICHAEL BINGHAM IS EXPANDING  
A LOGAN ART STUDIO IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

by ELLEN FAGG WEIST / photography by KEITH JOHNSON



## DURING THE PANDEMIC, ARTIST MICHAEL BINGHAM HAS BEEN DREAMING ABOUT BUILDING A SPACESHIP.

Bingham is a graphic artist-turned-fine-artist-turned-arts-educator, now building a Logan nonprofit. Three years ago, he launched Jump the Moon, a drop-in arts studio aimed at serving artists of diverse abilities.

Suzy, trained as a medical assistant, found him and then revived him.

He suffered a fractured skull, a brain bleed, and 12 fractures, seven in his neck bones. He spent three weeks in intensive care. “Bunch of miracles along the way,” he says. “I really should have died.”

As he speaks about his year of recovery, you can hear the voice of someone who calls himself “too optimistic.” He refers to the accident as a blessing, even after having to relearn how to walk, talk and swallow. His doctor told Bingham he didn’t understand why he wasn’t paralyzed — or dead. “I know what a 10 on the pain scale feels like now,” Bingham says. “Even that I’m grateful for. Gives me empathy.”

And just as he rips apart vacuums and repurposes rebar to use in his art, Bingham recycled the drop cloth that was under his ladder before the accident. He turned it into

a painting for his Utah State University MFA exhibition, which he titled “Second Chances.”

**WHATEVER BINGHAM UNDERSTANDS** about helping others make art, he says, grew out of his own learning disabilities (later diagnosed as ADHD and dyslexia), which made school difficult when he was growing up in rural Idaho towns.

At Ricks College (now Brigham Young University-Idaho), art professors encouraged him to apply to Pasadena’s prestigious Art Center College of Design. “I had found my element,” he says.

From art school, Bingham was recruited by the Hallmark Cards company in Kansas City. For a dozen years he was part of a thriving art department until the Internet wiped out the growth curve of the greeting-card industry.

Bingham transitioned into making a living as a fine art painter. In 2001, he, Suzy and their seven children moved to Cache County, which they picked to be closer to her parents in Pocatello and his parents in Ogden.

For a decade, he taught at Mountain Crest and Ridgeline high schools, where he focused on helping students see art assignments as creative problem-solving opportunities. He wanted to especially help students with disabilities, but it was difficult to find the space or the time. “You only have an hour with 40 kids,” he says of teaching high school. “If you move fast, you can get around to everybody and spend maybe a minute with them.”

**DURING THIS SPRING’S** coronavirus shutdown, Bingham launched Jump the Moon’s first extraordinary change: expansion. The 4,300-square-foot art studio, previously an auto glass shop, leased an adjoining 2,200-square-foot space, a former auto garage. Before remodeling it into a performance space, Bingham realized it could solve another of his pressing problems.

Recovery had slowed his ability to create art, and by the time he was ready to plan an

exhibit to complete his MFA requirements, gallery spaces were all booked up. Facing a looming deadline during a pandemic, Bingham found himself in problem-solving mode, which is his artistic superpower. “I get excited, I get happy when a big problem happens — my wife tells me that’s not normal — because it presents an opportunity to use creative problem solving,” he says.

That prompted an idea: The space behind his closed studio had industrial bay doors. So in May he held a drive-in art exhibit, maybe the first in Utah, and certainly the first in Logan. People could drive into the space and safely view his art from their cars. Other viewers, wearing masks, could walk around the garage and view paintings at a safe distance.

Now he’s partnering with another Logan nonprofit, the Unicorn Children’s Theatre, to transform that drive-in gallery into a performance space with a 75-seat house.

*“I used to think I was born to be an artist. I’m not,” Bingham says, with wisdom gained from a recent accident that once again refocused his life. “I was born to use art to bless the lives of other people.”*

For the past couple of years, Bingham has been thinking about what he didn’t understand about artists with physical challenges. He wanted to relate better.

On March 7, 2019, he started on that journey of understanding. As the artist was painting a ceiling at home, the ladder slipped out from under him. He fell 20 feet, breaking his neck. He wasn’t breathing when his wife,

*“I get excited, I get happy when a big problem happens... because it presents an opportunity to use creative problem solving.”*

That's where he hopes to land the spaceship, which he's designing with an artist friend who builds props. Bingham describes a steel structure covered by carved styrofoam, to be reached by a long, twisting ramp. Inside, there will be a captain's bridge — "with levers, knobs, cranks and twisty things that you push and pull with hands and feet to make different sorts of sounds or noises or music."

He envisions such a magical space that everyone, including wheelchair users, will be compelled to put forth the energy to reach it. "If I make fun enjoyable, I've discovered that people forget the work and effort part because they are playing," Bingham says.

*"If I make it fun and enjoyable, I've discovered that people forget the work and effort part because they are playing."*

In the perpetually cash-needy nonprofit world, the idea of building a spaceship might sound like a pipe dream in regular funding cycles. Pandemic or not, Bingham keeps focusing on the need. The spaceship will provide movement, physical therapy, learning and self-expression, all in one place. "I'm really of the mindset 'If you build it, they'll come,'" Bingham says, infusing that "Field of Dreams" Hollywood story tagline, circa 1989, with the power of post-COVID optimism.

Who does that? Who designs a spaceship to help people who can't move easily have fun while they're exercising? asks Rochelle Thompson, of South Jordan, mother of an art-loving special-needs son, who was appointed last year to the studio's board.

**WHEN YOU WALK INTO** Jump the Moon, there's art in front of you and above you — in the form of a massive astronaut sculpture Bingham created out of recycled steel rods, with a jetpack made from vacuum parts. In 2014, the sculpture was displayed in front of Abravanel Hall as part of Salt Lake Arts Council's "Flying Objects" public arts project.

On one side of the studio there's a bank of computers, and on the other side there's a gallery space where Bingham hopes to sell artists' works. At the center of everything, there's Bingham, welcoming visitors, but more importantly, observing.

"He makes a lot of impossible things into reality, and that's very incredible to watch firsthand," says Caleb Clark, a USU graduate who volunteered for more than a year at the studio.

Bingham engineers improvisational art tools, often out of thrift-store finds. His adaptations can be as simple as melting crayons into easier-to-grasp shapes, or as strategic as attaching implements to wheelchairs. "I just start making a list, and I count a lot of things as pluses," he says, explaining how a person's body weight can help a wheelchair serve as a printing press. "What do they have? What can we use?"

One regular visitor couldn't express himself with words, but liked to wrap yarn around things. Bingham affixed silicone to superhero



figures, which made the yarn adhere better. "I don't know how Michael figured that out," Clark says.

Bingham is a master at combining recycled materials and "making them say something they weren't necessarily meant to say," says Raymond Veon, assistant dean for arts education at Utah State University, a friend and colleague.

Supporters say Bingham's ideas are advanced on the artistic empowerment side, but he's still learning how to sustainably operate a

nonprofit. "We can do a lot with a little bit" is how he describes the funding chase.

"When I daydream, I dream of people like Michael winning a MacArthur genius award," says Jean Tokuda Irwin, arts education manager at Utah Arts & Museums.

In the months before everything shut down, Bingham learned that asking for donations, of money or time, helped visitors value the studio more. "That one pivot alone in our thinking and our approach is making a big difference," Bingham says. "If you always give, give, give, and people don't have the opportunity to give back, that can create a resentful situation."

During an interview about COVID-era pivots, he's considering the problem of installing electricity near the stage. In another interview, he's taking a break from jackhammering the sidewalk to make a smoother path for wheelchairs. "I'm kind of in my happy place right now because I have so many huge challenges to overcome," he says. "I'm kind of giddy." [bit.ly/MUSE20JumpTheMoon](https://bit.ly/MUSE20JumpTheMoon) ●



**+ VISIT** Jump the Moon online: [jumplemoon.org](https://jumplemoon.org)

**+ WATCH** Michael Bingham's TEDxUSU talk about art unlocking a student's creativity and diverse abilities: [bit.ly/MUSE20MichaelBingham](https://bit.ly/MUSE20MichaelBingham)

# MASKING UTAH

by ELLEN FAGG WEIST

## MAYBE WE'LL REFER TO 2020 AS THE YEAR OF THE MASK.

In Utah, the demand for personal protective equipment sparked remarkable partnerships, linking the technical expertise of maker spaces, like the Utah PPE Makers Group, with a fleet of available 3-D printers in maker spaces, schools, universities and libraries.

The goal? To print shields for healthcare workers, super-powered by a \$20,000 donation from Micron Technology. In March, UServeUtah set a goal seeking 10,000 face shields. By July, community partners had printed and donated more than 18,000; extra shields were offered to dental workers. "It was amazing to watch the community come together and solve problems," says Becca Robison, program manager at STEM Action Center, which connected schools and libraries to the mask-making effort. "It's been so amazing and humbling to see people jump into action."

Now the collaborators are working with the Utah Division of Indian Affairs and American Indian Services to donate six 3-D printers (and 120 rolls of filament) to the Navajo Nation.

Beyond masks and shields, the partners have ambitious plans to find other ways to use this informal, never-been-connected network of printers. "If the need arises, a lot of people are interested in printing again," Robison says. "We've got a lot of partners ready to step up to the plate." [bit.ly/MUSE20Masks](https://bit.ly/MUSE20Masks) ●

**+ DURING EMERGENCIES**, Utah receives credit toward Federal Emergency Management Agency matching funds by volunteering or donating resources through UServeUtah. To donate or volunteer, call 888-755-UTAH (8824), email [volunteers@utah.gov](mailto:volunteers@utah.gov) or visit [bit.ly/MUSE20Emergency](https://bit.ly/MUSE20Emergency).

**+ PRINT** face shields for medical workers on your own 3-D printer and donate them through UServeUtah: [bit.ly/MUSE20Print](https://bit.ly/MUSE20Print)

**+ VISIT** UServeUtah's resource page to find volunteer opportunities, donate supplies, access COVID-19 resources and recruit volunteers: [bit.ly/MUSE20Volunteer](https://bit.ly/MUSE20Volunteer)

# PANDEMIC Bread

TWO UTAH POTTERS FIND IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DOUGH DURING QUARANTINE

by ELLEN FAGG WEIST / title page photography by TODD ANDERSON

**TWO UTAH POTTERS** were particularly well-positioned to take advantage of the quarantine bread-baking trend.

During the pandemic, Joe Bennion, who owns Spring City's Horseshoe Mountain Pottery, has regularly sold out of his stock of sturdy bread baker pots. In July, one batch of 15 pots was sold within 21 minutes after the potter unloaded the kiln.

In Salt Lake City, potter Ben Behunin has been promoting the joy of bread on social media for three years through Bread Brothers Unlimited, a collaboration with friend Bert Compton, with the slogan: "Bake bread and be happy."

It's the potter's distinctive square sacrament plates, especially suited for Latter-day Saint families holding home church, that kept Behunin's studio thriving during the early months of the pandemic.



Joe Bennion working at his wheel.  
Photo by Ali Johnson.



Ben Behunin in studio.  
Photo by Todd K. Jacobsen.

Bennion didn't predict the fanatical interest in baking during the coronavirus shutdown, but operating a small-town studio over the past 40 years did help position him for the moment. "I'm very busy, and I sell everything

I make," says Bennion of his bread baker pots, which retail for \$100. "I've sold between two and three times the amount of pottery I would usually sell this time of year."

For Bennion, establishing a retail shop in his studio offered a chance to sell his pottery directly, rather than relying on galleries or exhibiting at craft fairs. Over the years, he has worked as a "one-man chamber of commerce" to draw visitors to the artsy Sanpete County



Bread baker pottery. Photo by Joe Bennion.

town, publishing a newsletter and heading the Spring City Arts collective. "I would call it lucky foresight, rather than being really clever," he says. "There was something in my gut that said: 'Bring your market closer to home.'"

Pandemic or not, Bennion doesn't ever close his shop. On Sundays, or when he's off working his other job as a river guide, he relies on the honor system, leaving out a money box for his customers. He chooses not to ship his bread baker pots, instead relying on the town's drive-through traffic.

His wife, Lee Bennion, a well-respected painter, has also experienced steady business in direct response to COVID-19. About five years ago, she developed a salve, Mom's Stuff, to ease her husband's hands roughened by handling clay and boat paddles. The cream, made with natural ingredients such as olive oil and piñon pine pitch, seems perfectly targeted for civilians now washing their hands with the attention and intensity of healthcare workers.

Behunin figured, at best, he might sell a couple hundred plates for home church. Instead, by mid-August he had sold some 3,500 sacrament plates for \$20 apiece. "For two months, I did nothing but sacrament plates," he says, adding that he needed help from his wife and daughter to keep up with the demand. For local customers, he offered

curbside pickup, complete with a free roll of toilet paper when it was in short supply at local stores.

Another of Behunin's social experiments, now on pause, is Sourdough Sundays, in which he invites people through social media posts to stop by his Salt Lake City home for a slice of bread. "All sorts of people showed up who we didn't know," he says, sometimes as many as 25, others as few as six.

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curbside pickup, complete with a free roll of toilet paper when it was in short supply at local stores. That began last October after a neighbor died of suicide, leaving behind a note expressing feelings of hopelessness. Behunin decided sharing bread was one way he could share hope. During the early days of the shutdown, he delivered bread in his neighborhood, social-distance-style, at the end of an 18-foot painter's rod.

During the pandemic, Behunin, who also writes novels and creativity guides, figures he has given away at least 30 sourdough starts. He hopes, when the time is right, others might want to start their own chapters of Sourdough Sundays.

[bit.ly/MUSE20Bread](https://bit.ly/MUSE20Bread)



Always Have His Spirit sacrament plate.  
Photo by Ben Behunin.

**CHECK OUT** Joe Bennion's pottery studio: [facebook.com/HorseshoeMountainPottery](https://facebook.com/HorseshoeMountainPottery)

**VISIT** Ben Behunin's website: [potterboy.com](https://potterboy.com)

# Discovering

THE BREADTH OF

# Utah's Stories

EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED WRITERS OFFER AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE STATE'S LITERARY STORY

by **ELLEN FAGG WEIST** / photography by **KERRY SHAW**

**ON JUST ABOUT EVERY SCHOOL VISIT,** Paisley Rekdal, Utah's poet laureate, meets a few students who have literary ambitions they haven't even acknowledged to themselves.

For young writers, it's easy to think you have to graduate from a prestigious college to become a published author. It's easy to consider your hometown a cultural backwater in a fly-over state. It's easy to not be aware of Utah's thriving and varied literary history.

As an invitation to understanding that rich history, Rekdal, the state's fifth poetry ambassador, launched Mapping

were barely any women, and no one was biracial," she recalls. "I didn't know there was a world of poetry out there."

As far as representation, the anthology didn't invite Rekdal to believe she could go on to publish eight books. (Her ninth book, "Appropriate: A Provocation," considering cultural appropriation, will be published by W. W. Norton in February.) Or to think that one day she'd be asked to guest edit the "Best American Poetry 2020" collection.

Launching Mapping Literary Utah required more than a year in the "planning and heckling and emailing and writing and

**"I didn't know there was a world of poetry out there," says Paisley Rekdal, Utah's poet laureate, of growing up outside literary centers.**

Literary Utah, a website that serves as a showcase and an archive. Rekdal says the site will help introduce Utah readers — or perhaps reintroduce them — to the breadth of writers launched in this place. Just as important, she hopes it will help younger writers see themselves represented in the state's story.

"My intent was very much about Utah kids growing up and wanting to know if they could be writers," Rekdal says. "A lot of schools can't afford to bring out a poet laureate. This is my way of visiting classrooms even though I can't be in those classrooms."

She recalls growing up in the Pacific Northwest at a time when Seattle wasn't cool. When her father gave her a popular anthology ("The Voice That Is Great Within Us: American Poetry of the Twentieth Century," edited by Hayden Carruth), she searched the index, seeking evidence that writers could come from Seattle. "There

researching" stages, Rekdal says. The website was funded through a \$100,000 grant Rekdal received as one of thirteen Academy of American Poets laureate fellows in 2019. (The grant also helped fund a virtual poetry festival planned for April after the event was postponed in 2020.)

She praises the skills of researcher Robert Kennedy, a University of Utah English literature graduate student, who spearheaded the site's video interviews.

**Mapping Literary Utah required more than a year in the "planning and heckling and emailing and writing and researching" stages.**

**+** **EXPLORE** Utah's literary story through the new website: [MappingLiteraryUtah.org](http://MappingLiteraryUtah.org)

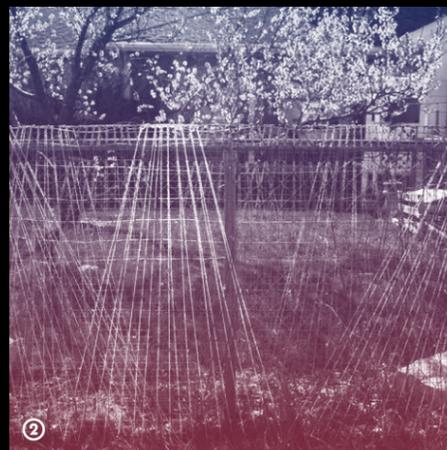
**+** **DISCOVER** the breadth of Utah's artists through The Utah Artists Project: [bit.ly/MUSE20ArtistsProject](http://bit.ly/MUSE20ArtistsProject)

He also wrote essays spotlighting cowboy poets, slam poets, nature writers, LGBTQ writers, and the state's burgeoning collection of young adult novelists. Rekdal credits Third Sun developers for the site's appealing design.

The website offers excerpts ranging from romance to mystery novels, from sci-fi and horror to children's lit and young adult novels. It features podcasters and bilingual authors, juxtaposing "the historically notable alongside the just-emerging." Among the notable there's Zitkála-Šá, who lived on the Uintah-Ouray Reservation in the early 20th century. She was the author of "Old Indian Legends" and "American Indian Stories," and the co-writer of the "Sun Dance Opera," thought to be the first opera to be co-written by a Native writer when it premiered in 1913 at Vernal's Orpheus Hall.

More than 180 authors are currently archived on Mapping Literary Utah, which includes a particularly robust selection of poets. Even as she was talking about the site during a phone interview, Rekdal received another submission from a writer. Throughout her remaining time as Utah's poetry ambassador, Rekdal plans to continue posting biographies and excerpts as they are submitted.

She hopes teachers will use the site as an educational tool, while readers might consider it a literary invitation. After all, new Utah storytellers are born here every day. [bit.ly/MUSE20Stories](http://bit.ly/MUSE20Stories) ●



THE CREATIVE COVID PIVOT



① ALEX BOYÉ | ② GRANARY ARTS | ③ HOLLADAY ARTS COUNCIL'S "UN"COMMON CONCERTS | ④ KZMU  
 ⑤ ALONE TOGETHER FILM FEST | ⑥ EXCELLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY | ⑦ UTAHPRESENTS  
 ⑧ DIXIE STATE UNIVERSITY'S SEARS ART MUSEUM

ARTISTS AND ARTS GROUPS REINVENT THEMSELVES AS THE WORLD SHIFTS

by ELLEN FAGG WEIST

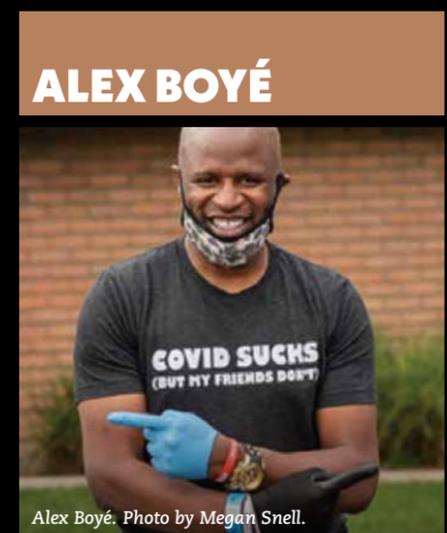
A musician performing on your sidewalk. Artists posting new works in their yards and radio DJs recording their shows at home, bird sounds included. Audiences and artists connected via computer screens.

THIS IS THE STATE OF UTAH ARTS IN 2020.

This season, musicians, artists and nonprofit leaders embraced reinvention — the creative COVID-19 Pivot — as they faced the massive economic rupture, caused by cancellations and closures that are expected to stretch into next year.

“We had to write a new playbook using the best information we had available at the time,” says Sheryl Gillilan, executive director of the Holladay Arts Council. She was talking about restructuring a summer concert series, but she could have been talking about what it means to present art in a pandemic.

Some arts leaders say they’ve been reinspired to shift programming that better serves their nonprofit mission. Others are recharging by reaching audiences beyond their physical walls. Yet even as we take the pulse of Utah’s creative community, the stories of local artists are still being written. Says Jeff Whiteley, founder of the Excellence in the Community concert series: “This is kind of a brave new world for all of us.”



Alex Boyé. Photo by Megan Snell.

In one day in mid-March, as the economy quickly closed down, singer Alex Boyé learned just as quickly his upcoming concerts had been canceled. The cancellations added up to more than \$100,000 in income.

His first thought: How can I support my family now? His second thought: How can I help my community?

The British-American singer’s answer: performing Curbside Quarantine concerts.

Boyé, who lives in Sandy, invites nominations of individuals, families or essential workers for intimate concerts. “It’s something people don’t even realize they need until they get it,” he says. He brings a portable sound system

“YOU’VE GOT TO TAKE A LOT OF DEEP BREATHS.”

and performs a short concert 6 feet away from a small audience, singing motivational, Africanized pop songs, including his popular YouTube hit “Lemonade.”

By early September, Boyé had performed 50 quarantine concerts in nontraditional Utah and Idaho venues, including more than a dozen hospitals and nursing homes, as well as fire and police stations.

“Some of the most fulfilling musical experiences I’ve ever had in my life,” says the former European boy band singer and former featured soloist of the LDS Church’s Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square. “It’s just been amazing, the financial side has been taken care of” through donations.

The singer performed one concert on a doorstep while a man and his family listened through an open window. The man died of the coronavirus the next day. “This was the best thing you gave our family,” his loved ones told the singer.

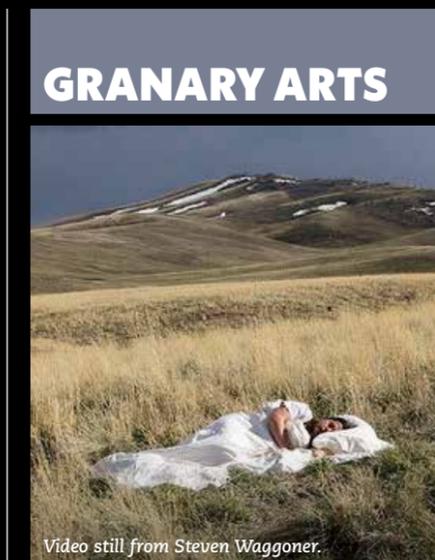
When performing a large show in a hospital parking lot, he was moved by seeing the deep red grooves in healthcare workers’ faces left behind by their masks and shields. He, too, has learned how to work in a mask. “You’ve got to take a lot of deep breaths,” Boyé says.

Quarantine concerts can be exhausting — in the best possible way, the singer says. “It feels like I’m ministering through music,” he says, using The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ term for community caretaking.

“I’m busier now than I was before COVID,” says Boyé, adding that his attitude toward music has changed. Now he thinks of performing as a service for first responders and neighbors, and that approach is boosting his own mental health.

WATCH a curbside quarantine concert: [bit.ly/MUSE20AlexBoye](https://bit.ly/MUSE20AlexBoye)

NOMINATE at [facebook.com/alexboyereal](https://facebook.com/alexboyereal)



Using front yards as an outdoor art gallery, like a progressive dinner, was the aim of “Lawn Gnomes 2020,” a partnership between Ephraim’s Granary Arts and Salt Lake City’s Utah Museum of Contemporary Arts.

While both arts galleries were closed, curators invited local artists to plant new works in their yards, and visitors were invited to follow a map to drive by the art. Some viewers went on to make their own yard art, says Amy Jorgensen, executive director of Granary Arts. (The project was a revival of a 2011 Salt Lake City installation organized by UMOCA guest curator Micol Hebron.)

Jorgensen says the drive-yourself-by exhibit drew different viewers than those who attend shows at the contemporary art center.

“It was a timely and perfect application of how to experience art out in the world in this moment when all of us have to think about safety and health and breathing,” she says.

Granary Arts reopened in June, and as expected, walk-in traffic has been down.

“We’re finding we can still be a productive and engaging art space without having to be a physical space,” Jorgensen says. One example is the center’s recent “Incubation Period” digital exhibit created by PARC Collective, fellows of the art center. They curated a show by 40 artists from around the world, inviting artworks sparked by the idea of quarantine as a “creative incubation period.”

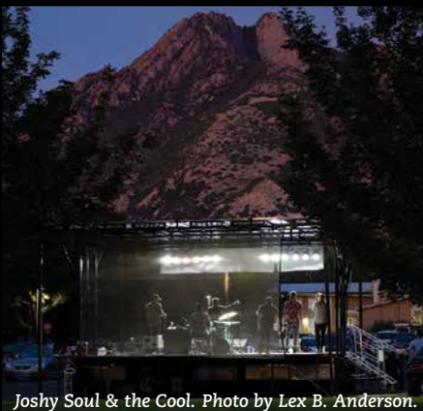
Some pieces invoked nature as a dream world, while others explored the emotional landscape of the body, amplified by the shutdown of regular work and school routines, as well as the Black Lives Matter protests across the country. “It’s fascinating how we’re all going through similar experiences,” Jorgensen says. “When else has this happened?”

**VISIT** “Lawn Gnomes 2020” in person and online. Artworks will remain posted in Ephraim, Spring City, Fairview and Mt. Pleasant yards as long as weather allows. [granaryarts.org/umoca-lawn-gnomes-2020](http://granaryarts.org/umoca-lawn-gnomes-2020)

**GET YOUR MAP** of Salt Lake City artists’ “Lawn Gnomes 2020” by emailing [lawngnomes@utahmoca.org](mailto:lawngnomes@utahmoca.org)

**VIEW** the virtual exhibition, “Incubation Period.” [granaryarts.org/incubation-period-parc-collective](http://granaryarts.org/incubation-period-parc-collective)

## HOLLADAY ARTS COUNCIL'S "UN"COMMON CONCERTS



Joshy Soul & the Cool. Photo by Lex B. Anderson.

By the third reiteration — or was it the fourth? or fifth? — of a summer concert series in the COVID-19 era, the Holladay Arts Council decided to keep plans as simple, and as safe, as possible.

The group planned four “Un”Common drive-in-style concerts. Cars served as portable social distancing bubbles, so plans didn’t have to change based on Salt Lake County’s fluctuating risk status, says Sheryl Gillilan, executive director.

Since Holladay City Hall isn’t equipped with a theater sound system, the arts council sought a suitably sized parking lot, which was harder to find than it sounded. Eventually, a local Latter-day Saint church lot was secured, where they could build a portable stage.

Concertgoers reserved staggered parking spaces online, with the crowd capped at 100. Demand was high in a season when most summer events were canceled. In addition, the concerts were live-streamed so more

people could enjoy the music in their air-conditioned living rooms.

All of the plans and the revising of plans have caused the arts council to refocus on its mission of bringing together the community through art. And like its colleagues across the state, Gillilan says the council is embracing the challenge of creative problem-solving.

**CHECK OUT** Holladay Arts Council’s upcoming events: [holladayarts.org](http://holladayarts.org)

## KZMU



KZMU DJ Josie Kovash

When Moab’s community radio station closed its building in mid-March, the station first turned to an automated system, which it usually relies on for overnight programming.

After a week, KZMU volunteer DJs began taping their shows from home, complete with ambient sounds. Listeners heard familiar voices, and “you could hear the birds in the background, and you could hear the music, and it was a really, really awesome thing,” says Serah Mead, general manager.

“We want to make sure you’re OK. Call us up,” was the tone of the public service

announcements DJs recorded and aired, while the news director launched a list of COVID resources on the station’s website.

During the earliest days of the lockdown, online listeners doubled with every show, Mead says, which translated to an even larger physical audience. Listeners told her the station was their lifeline. “Listening to you is my connection to the outside world,” they said.

Eventually, in June as the town opened up, the station’s building also reopened. Staff members set up microphones 6 feet apart and were able to have two people in the recording booth at the same time.

The station’s financial support remained strong during the lockdown, but Mead is concerned about ongoing fundraising as people everywhere experience “COVID fatigue.”

“So much of the value we bring is intangible,” says Mead of the indie station that was launched in 1992. “There’s only so many times I can try to convince listeners we’re a lifeline, essentially a free subscription to ever-changing music and daily news.”

When the virus struck, Mead says she tried to drop every task that wasn’t focused on meeting the needs of listeners. “We tried to put on the best programming we could,” she says, including special dance parties and collecting and airing tips for surviving quarantine. “Some of the best radio shows I had heard all year were the shows people had recorded at home, like long-form art.”

Even better was when announcers were able to return to the console. “You could hear in their voices how happy they were,” she says. The general manager adds: “How special KZMU is in a place like this. It is a unique gem.”

**LISTEN** at [kzmu.org/program-schedule](http://kzmu.org/program-schedule)



KZMU DJ MaryAnne Russel

## ALONE TOGETHER FILM FEST



Actor Dat Nguyen with filmmaker Eduardo Ayres Soares

Film students graduating into a pandemic will face the most difficult job market in years, while many screenings of their works were canceled due to COVID-19, says Miriam Albert-Sobrino, an assistant professor in film and media arts at the University of Utah.

That’s why she and Sonia Albert-Sobrino, her filmmaking and U. teaching colleague — and twin sister — launched an online festival to showcase student work. The Albert-Sobrinos, who were raised in Spain, left careers as nurses in 2007 to earn film production degrees. They make films under their Also Sisters label.

In July, they transitioned a 4-year-old university-based festival, canceled due to the pandemic, into a digital event, Alone Together Fest. They have ambitious plans to build the site into an international platform and resource for student filmmakers.

They received 100 submissions for the first edition of Alone Together. An international panel selected 22 short films, of which more than half were directed by women. “Our goal, in many ways, is to showcase that student work is good work,” Miriam Albert-Sobrino says. Which is why they tapped filmmakers for the jury who would be committed to boosting student work.

The website attracted more than 9,000 pageviews during the festival weekend, July 1-5. Instagram posts promoting the films averaged a 38 percent engagement rate, Albert-Sobrino says.

With support from the university and the Utah Film Commission, the sisters donated their resources to build the festival’s website. It’s part of their effort to boost the reputation of the U.’s film program.

They hope the initiative will help students find their first film jobs. Rather than cash awards, Alone Together prizes were designed as a chance for student filmmakers to receive feedback and be mentored by professionals.

Next year the sisters plan to expand the online festival to include Q&As and video panels to connect filmmakers, professionals and the audience. “It was born out of the pandemic as a reaction to that, but we want it to continue for years to come,” Albert-Sobrino says.

**LEARN MORE** at [alonetgether.site](http://alonetgether.site)



Film still from Nathan Rice’s animated short, “Merl’s Magical Sandwiches”

“YOU COULD HEAR THE BIRDS IN THE BACKGROUND, AND YOU COULD HEAR THE MUSIC, AND IT WAS A REALLY, REALLY AWESOME THING.”

**EXCELLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY**



Ellen Hayashi. Photo by Lex B. Anderson.

Jeff Whiteley says he started to grieve when the Excellence in the Community concert series was forced to pause in late March — until the nonprofit's founder hit upon a new plan.

On April 16, even as Salt Lake County health restrictions tightened, the music series relaunched with weekly Wednesday and Saturday performances. The only thing missing was the in-person audience.

Instead, Utah musicians found themselves performing for huge virtual audiences, averaging 10,000 pageviews per show on the series' Facebook page. "Just what we needed," one commenter wrote. "I'm dancing in my living room."

Fundraising has been disappointing during the pandemic, but operating costs have been covered by the small nonprofit's rainy-day fund. "I work on the budgets very carefully to see how long we can keep going," Whiteley says.

In addition to Salt Lake City shows, the Excellence team has been helping other musicians and partners, such as the Holladay Arts Council, and streaming regular fundraising concerts by Utah Symphony musicians.

Last year, in the Before Times, the nonprofit raised \$600,000 and presented 128 concerts

with partners throughout the state, including 70 at its homebase at downtown Salt Lake City's Gallivan Center.

"We really believe in the healing power, the uplifting power, of high-quality music," Whiteley says. "All of us are aware of the emotional needs of the people whose lives have been interrupted. We're grateful for this chance to keep going."

**STREAM** concerts at [excellenceconcerts.org](http://excellenceconcerts.org)

**UTAHPRESENTS**



Black Benatar by Beatrice L. Thomas

When UtahPresents shows were canceled in the spring, Executive Director Brooke Horejsi seized the opportunity. If an audience couldn't be invited to Kingsbury Hall, she asked, could the space be used to help artists create new work?

She invited arts companies to consider campus residencies. First up was Kinetic Light, a disability arts company "with physically fearless performers," as Horejsi describes their work. The group is creating "Barbed Wire," a dramatic piece of spectacle theater, featuring innovative rigging to fly wheelchair-based performers.

Kingsbury seemed like a safe place for the company to isolate and work together for six weeks. UtahPresents hoped to eventually present the piece virtually in order to remove the barriers for disabled arts patrons to see the work. Yet in late June, when virus cases in Salt

Lake City spiked, there weren't enough tests available locally to maintain the company's safety, so the residency was postponed.

In August, Beatrice Thomas, a Bay Area artist who performs in drag as Black Benatar, returned to Utah to develop her "funny and subversive" Black Magic Cabaret. The show is scheduled to be performed at Kingsbury next April, and it will feature local queer performers.

"We'll create a safety pod for them," is how Horejsi described the residency, adding that they would work with local artists virtually.

"The queer community has been existing in a virtual space, as their own safe space, for a long time," she says. "For [Thomas], and her queer community, the internet and virtual space was the original safe space."

Investing in new models that support artists developing work is one of the opportunities presented by this cultural pause, Horejsi says. Free virtual content might have served as an artistic balm during the early days of the pandemic, but it isn't sustainable. "The average person doesn't understand how precarious the field has always been — it's the original gig economy." Artists have been living that way for a very long time, and they are suffering dramatically."

UtahPresents changed its season announcement event, featuring the LajaMartin dance company, into a virtual fundraiser. Originally, they hoped to host 200 people in the theater, but the online event attracted almost 900 pageviews over several months, while hitting fundraising goals.

"It costs money to make work, particularly work that's worth watching," Horejsi says. "Even if audiences are watching in their PJs in the living room, we want them to have an experience that makes them feel as if it's worth their time."

**VISIT** [utahpresents.org](http://utahpresents.org)

**DIXIE STATE UNIVERSITY'S SEARS ART MUSEUM**



Photo by Kathy Cieslewicz

Most exhibitions at St. George's Sears Art Museum are months in the planning, with artworks that are meticulously hung and arranged.

But instead immediacy was the inspiration for "COVID-19 Pops-Up in Art," an exhibition in the museum's foyer, says Kathy Cieslewicz, museum curator. Anchoring the show were artist Stewart Seidman's series of eight large acrylic paintings about the death of his sister from the virus. "Very poignant," she says. "It is an immediate, first-person artist response to right now, not looking back on it."

To accompany those searing paintings, she invited local artists to create 12-by-12-inch works about the coronavirus. Artists became part of the exhibit as they were invited to come to the museum separately to hang their own work. Poems by local writers accompany the artworks. The curator also created an installation from vintage chairs arranged in taped-off squares, with signs like "Wash

your hands," and "Closed economy: We're in it together."

"I had to shift gears immediately and make all of this work really fast," Cieslewicz says.

"I wanted artists' reactions to what was going in their lives during COVID-19. That's what we got." [bit.ly/MUSE20CreativePivot](http://bit.ly/MUSE20CreativePivot)

**VIEW** [searsart.com/in-the-grand-foyer](http://searsart.com/in-the-grand-foyer)

- COVER PHOTOS:**  
 Alex Boyé in concert by Rachael Gibson (@fxsrachael)  
 Granary Arts "Lawn Gnomes 2020" Artwork by Kamilla Earlywine  
 Joshy Soul & the Cool at "Un"Common Concerts by Lex B. Anderson  
 KZMU volunteer DJ Nancy Kurtz  
 Film still of Nora Lang from "Metamorphoses, Book One" by Eduardo Ayres Soares  
 Deann Huang by Lex B. Anderson  
 Black Benatar's Black Magic Cabaret show by Kyle DeVries  
 "Tearful Memories" by Stewart Seidman

# Salt Lake West Side Stories

A History of the Pioneer Park Neighborhood

Presenting a new blog series that tells the little known history of SLC's oldest industrial and international district.

Stories include recommended readings and some short field trips where you can step into the history of the Pioneer Park neighborhood.

Uncover forgotten stories about ancient and native inhabitants, and the Mormon, Chinese, Italian, Greek, Japanese, Latino, and who all once inhabited SLC's west side.

This geographically-based collection covers SLC's original west side that spans from West Temple Street to the I-15 corridor and from North Temple to 6th South Street.

Journey through time with us at: [heritageandarts.utah.gov/salt-lake-west-side-stories](http://heritageandarts.utah.gov/salt-lake-west-side-stories)



> [heritageandarts.utah.gov](http://heritageandarts.utah.gov)

"FOR [BEATRICE THOMAS], AND HER QUEER COMMUNITY, THE INTERNET AND VIRTUAL SPACE WAS THE ORIGINAL SAFE SPACE."

# “WE ARE NOT A TREND”

TALKING ABOUT SYSTEMIC RACISM  
AND THE ARTS IN UTAH

by **ELLEN FAGG WEIST** / illustrations by **SARINA VILLAREAL EHRGOTT**

Masked protesters, proclaiming Black Lives Matter, became one of the dramatic images of summer of 2020 across the country and also in Utah streets.

After the COVID-19 shutdown paused the state's art performances and closed museums, MUSE magazine sponsored a cultural conversation with artists discussing systemic racism. The panel, hosted by Utah Poet Laureate Paisley Rekdal, featured actor and singer Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin, actor Latoya Cameron, arts educator Gabriella Huggins, and poet and activist Willy Palomo.

In a far-ranging conversation on Aug. 10, the artists talked about barriers for participation and the need for white people to listen, while calling for institutions to forge genuine partnerships to elevate the voices of Black and brown artists.

This transcript has been edited for length and readability.

## PAISLEY REKDAL Biggest question to ask right now: What do you want the arts sector and arts audiences, in particular, to understand about barriers to participation for artists of color?

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**DEE-DEE DARBY-DUFFIN** The same barriers that were around before COVID-19. Being seen not just as artists of color, doing work that is all-encompassing and doesn't just talk about our traumas. Writing some of our own stories, getting our own stories up and out there.

**LATOYA CAMERON** I feel like in Utah, in general, we isolate or separate ourselves from what is happening across the country in regards to how we handle racism. [But] those microaggressions are definitely in the artistic world. Just because I'm part of the BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of Color] community doesn't mean my work is less than or I have not done the same work.

**GABRIELLA HUGGINS** Part of the dynamic is that it's so homogenous [here] and we keep recycling the same narratives. The art becomes more and more sanitized to be palatable to a specific population. It assumes a lot about the kind of white people who have access to consuming art.

**WILLY PALOMO** One thing I wanted to point to was the lack of mentorship. If you are a young artist, it's transformative when you finally find somebody who actually is able to speak to the experience you are sharing. It was important for me when I finally had my first Latino professor.

I also wanted to come at this question from the perspective of an attendee. The cost to attend things is always something that should be mentioned. In high school I got a free ticket to see "The Color Purple" in Salt Lake City. I thought, "Cool," I went on a date, took somebody there, and the minute I got there, I said, "I'm not supposed to be here," just because of how old and white the audience was. Even with the cost taken care of for me, I was still put in a situation as a youngster where I felt deeply uncomfortable.

## REKDAL I want to talk about how this moment might be influencing your artistic work. By this moment, I mean the racial equity protests and conversations we are having around antiracist practices.

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**DARBY-DUFFIN** I perform jazz, and at every concert, I always sing "Strange Fruit," which has made me consider my own personal safety. With the protests and my participation in Black Lives Matter, honestly knowing that the songs I sing or even the simple statement of Black Lives Matter, saying that in a public forum could upset someone so much that they will want to cause harm to my body. What it has caused me to do is add a security rider in my contracts. I've never had to think about that before. Also, thinking about where I live — Salt Lake City is in a concealed-carry state. That is the biggest thing that's occurred for me in terms of changing how I operate as an artist.

**HUGGINS** It feels hard to not feel offended by [watching people who don't have to think about these things]: You never thought about this and never knew it was real? [The kids I teach and mentor at Spy Hop] don't have computers, they can't do my programs because they don't have internet access. On one hand, it's exciting and there's possibility in these conversations being at the forefront.

**CAMERON** Once the world basically stopped, I remember thinking to myself: "This is an opportunity for me to create." Then the world started to really reveal itself. I feel like it's the destruction of the society we thought we were in. When I started reassessing — trying

to create energy and that space — I couldn't. I felt defeated. Until it became a very intense rage with the murder of George Floyd. I can't believe we are still in this repetition, this repeating of history. If I'm not going to be going on the stage, which I don't feel so drawn to right now, how can I assist in uplifting the voices of my people and my BIPOC community? And holding those people accountable who have come and said: "We stand with you"? When everything prior to those moments [has] shown us that they have not. We are not a trend. I've been [working] behind-the-scenes in regards to having those difficult conversations with local theater companies to see how I can continue the conversation to hold them accountable.

**PALOMO** There's always that question if I should be writing or organizing right now. It comes down to keeping your head above water and floating in surviving. Art becomes the space where we go to heal and try to create a sense of being OK. This has been a challenge for all the artists I know. We know this is the opportunity for change; the window to get social change will close up again.

## REKDAL We are attending many of these talks, right? That is another potential barrier I think artists of color feel right now, the multiple hats that we are all being asked to wear. I want to go back to Utah culture: Talk about how you think that the context of being in Utah, Utah's history, Utah's predominant culture — how that influences the reception of your work.

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**HUGGINS** I think Salt Lake has a big problem with trying to distance itself from the rest of the state. I think the performance is the specific countercultural backlash to the LDS Church. I think white institutions and institutional power here want to think of themselves as progressive and open-minded but we do a lot of really racist things in trying to distance [our]selves from that. Inclusion is a tricky word, as well. I think there is a plausible deniability that exists in Salt Lake because we are liberal — but also so white. It's very clear that the city is not for our art and our stories.

**PALOMO** For me, personally, leaving Salt Lake City is what allowed my work to be able to finally blossom because I did not have to worry about what this audience would understand. For me, it's always been about trying to create the spaces where we can exist as our full selves. Sometimes that means choosing our audience rather than letting everybody in. That's always been something we wrestle with, with diversity and inclusion: How do you create safe spaces for folks to be able to show their work and clearly be whole in it while allowing as diverse of a group as possible?

**DARBY-DUFFIN** The state itself was formed so that people could stop being persecuted and do their own thing. I think it is an interesting kind of dichotomy when other groups are like: "Hey, we would like to do our own thing, too," [and] everybody all of a sudden has amnesia. I call it the "Technicolor Dreamcoat" version of Utah. People go, "Wait, but I did something. I did this. Isn't that enough?" You just have to stop saying that because I did this one thing, because I was an ally that one time, that that was enough. That is like putting a Band-Aid over the Hoover Dam and saying you're plugging up holes.

There is work for you to do as an observer and as a listener — as much as there is for us as actors and performers — to get ready to enter this world. You have to do some of your own work. You can't just continue to utilize the resources of your BIPOC friends and continue asking them.

**CAMERON** Growing up in Utah, especially in Kaysville, identity comes up a lot for me right now. I remember having conversations with a fellow artist who said: "You're not really Black." I looked at him and I was like — "OK, then you tell me what it is to be Black, because you obviously know something I must be missing." He could not answer the question.

Especially in Utah, it really becomes confusing when you come into a space of creativity. When I go into space where it becomes a show that traditionally was not a POC playing this role, instead of me just bringing myself and my identity to the table, it becomes “No, it’s not that. You need to be more like this, or more like that and need to do this,” or “That sounds a little too much, like too urban. You need to bring that back.” What does that mean? I have to even code switch my own identity in Utah, not just outside to survive in the Utah culture, but in the Salt Lake culture. When I go into an all-Black cast, I feel like I have to catch up because I have not had the mentors that I wish I could’ve had on how to interpret certain texts without having the influences of what happened when I’m doing Shakespeare or stuff like that.

This culture doesn’t allow you to just *be* because it’s always trying to judge you and to depict you instead of just letting people be who they are innately. That does a huge disservice for everybody, especially if you are a part of a marginalized culture that’s always being put under a microscope.

**REKDAL** Here’s another enormous bomb of a question: What does progress look like, the question on everyone’s lips. What are some antiracist steps that can be taken?

**DARBY-DUFFIN** Stop asking what you can do to be antiracist. Go do the work. The same work I had to learn about myself and my history. I did that. I put that work in so I could speak eloquently about the things that are affecting me.

**HUGGINS** I feel like these conversations are rehashing and rehashing. How about you guys all talk to each other? Do you have ideas? Do you have thoughts? Are you not listening? Are you not reading? This is not new.

**PALOMO** One tension I always have to wrestle with, is the idea that we’ve been talking about, not expecting POC people to educate, along with this other idea, the catch phrase for it is: Nothing about us without us. There’s a lot of organizations that would try to hold Mexican-themed events, and not be in consultation or conversation with any Latino people. It’s this tension where ideally we’d be working alongside each other, but until the cultural competency fluency is gained, doing that work becomes a burden on the POC organizers who were putting it together.

Thinking of antiracist steps, for me, [is about] finding POC organizations that you can partner with and actually bring something to the table and support them with, while following their lead in the work that is going on. There’s a few places: Plan-B [Theatre] has what I think is a really good project supporting the POC community there. There is a Woman of Color writers collective that has been doing a lot of good work. Supporting these spaces like this should be part of this conversation of how you move forward.

There’s so much work to be done in shifting the narrative. We talk about money and power and funders, funders become the driving force for all of the work. It’s completely secondary — we go to them so we can have our numbers for diversity in our organization; we have no respect for these communities at all, for their stories. We want to try to amplify their stories in a specific way and get them to make specific types of work that make our funders happy so the community can be happy. It’s so paternalistic. And white supremacist.

**CAMERON** I would also say: Take the time. It’s not a rushed process, truly take the time to do it. Slow down and reassess and really digest the information.

**REKDAL** What’s giving you hope? What’s pushing you forward in a way you feel is quite positive?

**DARBY-DUFFIN** Having a group of people in my community that I can go back to. Knowing that there are people who have your back, who get you, who you can be authentically yourself with.

**CAMERON** I have an older sister who is a performer as well; she has two little ones, my niece and nephew, and I love them dearly. That’s one of the major driving forces for me, the hope that the kind of work that [is] happening now will provide a little bit easier of a path for them.

**PALOMO** I don’t expect to see a lot of change in my lifetime, frankly. For me, it’s been a matter of building the capacity to still have joy alongside all the other feelings. Just being in the moment, even while we are collectively grieving horrific things that are happening to our communities. Having hope shouldn’t mean disregarding the collective difficulties and challenges that we are also facing.

**HUGGINS** I would be remiss if I were to deny, disrespect and forget [that the] struggles that happened in the past have got me to this place. There is so much that has happened leading up to this. If I am going to be here, I better be doing something.

**REKDAL** Thank you all so much for your time, your brilliance and your great comments in your work and your art. [bit.ly/MUSE20NotATrend](https://bit.ly/MUSE20NotATrend)

## HOST



**PAISLEY REKDAL**, a University of Utah English professor, is the guest editor of “Best American Poetry 2020,” and created the Mapping Literary Utah website. Her ninth book, “Appropriate: A Provocation,” which considers cultural appropriation and the literary imagination, will be published in February 2021.

## PANELISTS



**WILLY PALOMO** earned a master’s degree in Latin American and Caribbean studies from Indiana University. He is a poet, educator, organizer and translator, and program manager for Utah Humanities’ Center for the Book.



**DEE-DEE DARBY-DUFFIN** is a singer and actor and a 2020 Utah Arts & Museum Performing Arts fellow. She has acted regularly at Utah theater companies and regularly performs at Utah concert series. Her first play, “DoLs,” will be streamed by Plan-B Theatre in June 2021.



**LATOYA CAMERON**, a Utah native, graduated from Southern Utah University. She performs at the Salt Lake Acting Company, Plan-B and Pioneer theater companies, as well as the Denver Center for Performing Arts and Utah Shakespeare Festival.



**GABRIELLA HUGGINS** is a Salt Lake City native and multimedia producer who is the community programs mentor of Spy Hop Productions. She leads the “Sending Messages” podcast, which produces stories by youth in custody.

**WATCH** the complete conversation: [bit.ly/MUSE20RacialPanel](https://bit.ly/MUSE20RacialPanel)

Additional panel sponsors: the Utah Department of Heritage & Arts, Utah Division of Arts & Museums, Utah Cultural Alliance, Utah Humanities, Utah Museums Association, and local arts agencies throughout Utah.

# Racial Equity & Inclusion Fund

**BROUGHT TO YOU BY:**

THE MULTICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE STATE OF UTAH'S COVID-19 RESPONSE AND THE UTAH DIVISION OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS



The Racial Equity and Inclusion Fund of Utah will assist community-based organizations who are providing emergency support and financial assistance to disproportionately impacted communities during the pandemic. Through this fund, we aim to increase the ability for organizations working on behalf of marginalized and systematically isolated communities to sustain a more equitable outcome for themselves and their communities in light of the social and economic implications brought about by COVID-19.

**THE NEED**

The broader economic crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has left individuals and families without resources for food, housing, utilities, and other essentials. Many workers and families in underrepresented communities have been left out of federal stimulus support.

Stakeholders of this initiative believe addressing racial disparities is an essential

step toward building a more fair and just community, especially as we survive and overcome the impacts of the pandemic.

**IN THE FACE OF AN EMERGENCY AND BEYOND**

This fund is committed to prioritize and work toward racial equity so that one's racial identity no longer predicts how one fares in their health, wealth, education, and sociocultural outcomes.

## WAYS TO HELP



**DONATE**

Join us in addressing racial disparities by donating to support community-based organizations that are serving underrepresented communities. Donate at [multicultural.utah.gov](http://multicultural.utah.gov).



**BECOME A FUNDING PARTNER**

If you are a company or philanthropist committed to racial equity and would like to support the fund financially, contact Nubia Peña at [npena@utah.gov](mailto:npena@utah.gov).

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