

# State of the ARTS

Summer 2021

July • August  
September

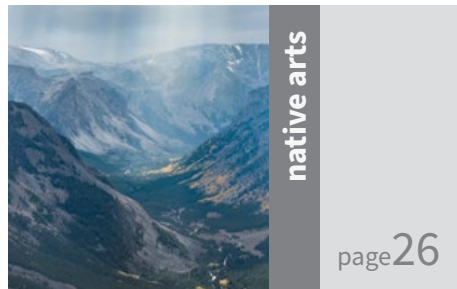
MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL

Providing information to all Montanans through funding by the National Endowment for the Arts and the State of Montana



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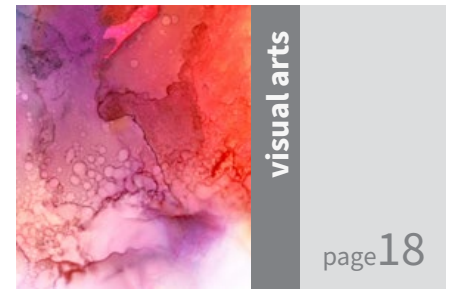
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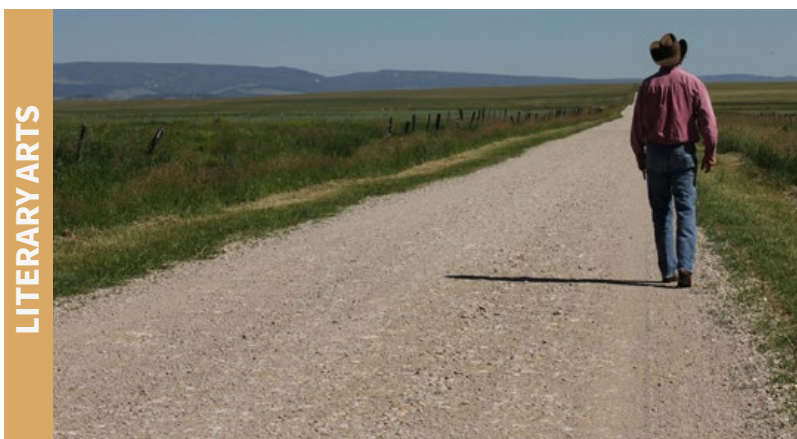
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LITERARY ARTS

Photo by Wendy Thompson Elwood

## A Closer Look

Russell Rowland's objective for his book *Fifty-Six Counties* was to get a spontaneous view of what is happening in Montana today. Find out the backstory about his approach, what worked and the gracious Montanans who showed him what didn't.

Read more, page 10



VISUAL ARTS

Art courtesy of Gordon McConnell

## Imaginary America

With one eye on the past and an immediate sense of the present, artist Gordon McConnell's latest Western-themed exhibition was crafted in response to the isolation of the pandemic.

Read more, page 22



PERFORMING ARTS

Photo courtesy of Haeli Allen

## Haeli Allen

Lewistown singer-songwriter Haeli Allen recently released her debut recording, *The Gilt Edge Collection*, a snug, enjoyable selection of original country-bluesy numbers you must hear. Brian D'Ambrosio sat down with her to learn more about her music, family and Montana life.

Read more, page 9



NATIVE ARTS

Photo courtesy of Shelby Means Photography

## Birdie Real Bird

Real Bird is an artist and scholar of traditional Crow beadwork who has been perfecting her craft since age 12. She used the time at home during the pandemic to create a set of award-winning parade regalia.

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Statewide Art News



2021 MONTANA SUMMER FESTIVALS





**Tatiana Gant**  
Executive Director  
tatiana.gant@mt.gov

Montana’s ancient pathways and current county lines help knit us together.

For the first time in more than a year, we’re finally able to gather once more. As with nearly everything, the pandemic brought participation in the arts to a standstill. Performance venues were shuttered, libraries and museums closed, writers conferences postponed or pushed online, festivals and fairs suspended. Montanans working in the arts, often as a second job pursued with passion or maintained by slender margins even in good times, could be forgiven for simply throwing their hands up in despair.

Instead, it feels like the dam’s about to burst. Concert schedules are brimming with top-notch acts. New venues are opening across the state. People are hitting the road. Writers are reading in front of bookstore crowds rather than webcams. There’s a buzz in the air for powwows, art fairs, music festivals. A buzz for just being together. For being a community.

**In the spring issue, we talked about Montanans’ urge to get out of the house,** onto the road, headed anywhere but where we’ve been stuck for months. Now, as summer arrives, it’s clear we all have places we’re eagerly headed to. Along with our national and state parks, cherished camping and fishing spots, rodeos and county fairs, we’re ready to see old friends at the places where community happens: art gatherings, Red Ants Pants, summer symphonies, Shakespeare in the Park.

**There’s a sense of common ground we’re hungry for in these and other places.** Russell Rowland went looking for what made each corner of the Big Sky a part of Montana in his book *Fifty-Six Counties*. In this issue, he gives us a closer look at how he chose who to talk to in Montana’s far-flung communities, and how he learned that sometimes one visit isn’t enough to get the full measure of a place.

**Community sometimes spans not just geography, but time.** Apsáalooke artist Birdie Real Bird’s stunning beadwork created for ceremonial regalia and horse trappings helped see her through the pandemic—emotionally and financially. Birdie speaks of selling a set of trappings to finance the removal of a bat infestation at her home near the Little Bighorn battlefield, then creating a new set as 2020 wore on. The threads of her craft tie her back to her ancestors and other Crow women, as well as the warriors who fought so close to her home. And she notes that trappings are meant to be shared, passed from one set of hands to the next in a spirit of communal pride.

**Montana’s ancient pathways and current county lines help knit us together, of course, and we’ve mapped them for a century and more.** Montana’s own highway still describes who and where we are, and an extraordinary museum in Polson has collected some of its finest editions, illustrated with nostalgic flair by cowboy artist Shorty Shope. And perhaps more that most, in the summer of 2021 all roads lead to lively music festivals, to workshops, to historic movie palaces in Anaconda, Deer Lodge and Billings. A few roads, in fact, shape communities all their own, as seen in Helena’s Rodney Street Project.

**As a subset of life itself, the arts help remind us who we are and where we belong.** They knit us together across Montana’s high, wide and handsome expanse. And like the small luxuries of hugging loved ones, shaking hands across a fence or bellying up to a crowded bar, this summer we’ll finally get to realize just how badly they’ve been missed.

Montana’s Percent for Art program once again offers an opportunity for artists to contribute to a new public space. Established by the Legislature in 1983, Percent for Art provides that a portion of the funds for the construction or renovation of appropriate state buildings be allocated for the acquisition of works of art for inclusion in the space.



The Life Sciences Building is designed by Architect Mike Dowling of Dowling Architects.

The Life Sciences Building is a complex of three buildings merged onto one large, functioning edifice for the MSU-Billings life and health science programs. Classrooms, laboratories, an auditorium and offices combine to create an environment for learning and progressing through a rewarding college experience. Art for the facility is sought to highlight and complement building elements or to tell a story with the sciences as a theme.

Learn more [Percent for Art \(mt.gov\)](https://art.mt.gov/percent-for-art)

State of the Arts Welcomes Submissions

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

**Next deadline:**  
The deadline for submissions is August 25 for the fall issue (Oct/Nov/Dec).  
*Please check with the Montana Arts Council for reprint permission.*

**Send items to:**  
Montana Arts Council  
PO Box 202201  
Helena, MT 59620-2201  
**phone** 406-444-6430  
**fax** 406-444-6548  
**email** mac@mt.gov

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# Artist’s Innovation Award Applications Opening in July

Artist’s Innovation Awards have been presented in alternating years since 2009. The deadline for submission is September 21, 2021

In 2019, six Montana artists were honored: Jane Waggoner Deschner of Billings, Robert Harrison of Helena, Nan Parsons of Basin, and Jennifer Reifsneider, Naomi Siegel and Melissa Stephenson of Missoula.

“Montana has an incredibly rich creative environment,” says Tatiana Gant, executive director of the Montana Arts Council. “The council understands the necessity for artists to take chances. This award encourages artists to invest in research and continued exploration. The caliber of the artists selected highlights Montana’s bright future.”

The Artist’s Innovation Award includes a \$5,000 honorarium. Artists who receive this award must also convey their artistry to other Montanans during the course of the upcoming year.

Guidelines will be available online in July.  
**Learn more at [www.art.mt.gov](http://www.art.mt.gov).**



**Naomi Siegel**  
*Photo courtesy of Tom Bauer, Missoulian*



**Nan Parsons**  
*Photo courtesy of Thom Bridge, Independent Record*



**Melissa Stephenson**  
*Photo courtesy of Tom Bauer, Missoulian*



**Robert Harrison**  
*Photo courtesy of Robert Harrison*



**Jennifer Reifsneider**  
*Photo courtesy of Tom Bauer, Missoulian*



**Jane Waggoner Deschner**  
*Photo courtesy of Jane Waggoner Deschner*

## We Welcome Four New Members to the Council

**The strength of the Montana Arts Council’s work has always been the result of the extraordinary talent, vision and dedication of our council members.** Each brings unique experiences and capabilities to our work, drawing from diverse cultural, geographic, artistic and economic perspectives. The Council’s mix of working artists, entrepreneurs, educators, business and government professionals, and others making a difference in the creative world drives the engine for all our efforts. In 2021, we welcome four new members, and we’d like to introduce them to you here. We’re looking forward to the insights and accomplishments each will bring to promoting and supporting the arts in Montana in the coming years.



**Sarah Calhoun**

### Sarah Calhoun

Sarah Calhoun is the owner of Red Ants Pants, the executive director of the Red Ants Pants Foundation and the producer of the Red Ants Pants Music Festival. The festival is in its 10th year and draws tens of thousands to a cow pasture in Meagher County. It was named the Montana Event of the Year by the Montana Office of Tourism. From her home in the small town of White Sulphur Springs, she has become an inspiration to entrepreneurs nationwide and is known for her dedication to supporting rural communities, the arts and women’s leadership. In

2018, she was named to the Montana Business Hall of Fame and in 2012, named the National Women in Business Champion for the SBA. She has been invited to the White House twice and honored when Governor Schweitzer named her the 2011 Entrepreneur of the Year for the State of Montana. She has given two TEDx talks, dozens of keynote addresses and has gained national press such as CNBC, CNN, Bloomberg, Sunset, Entrepreneur, National Geographic, The New York Times and The Huffington Post.



**Wylie Gustafson**

### Wylie Galt Gustafson

Wylie Gustafson is an American original. The singer, songwriter, rancher, horseman and world-famous Yahoo! yodeler leads the musical outfit known as Wylie and the Wild West. The group is internationally known for their vibrant presentation of the music—both original and traditional—of America and its colorful West. They delight audiences around the world with their one-of-a-kind brand of music, including elements of cowboy, traditional country, western swing, folk

and of course yodeling. Wylie is a real-life cowboy born into a 4th generation ranching family on the empty sprawl of Northern Montana. He is a member of the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame and the Montana Pro Rodeo Wall and Hall of Fame. He’s the real deal and, as one music writer quipped, “all old school without being a tired period piece.”

### Linda Netschert

Linda Netschert is the owner and publisher of Farcountry Press and Sweetgrass Books. Linda bought Farcountry Press, an award-winning regional book publishing company, in 2011 after a career spent selling their books throughout the West and managing book sales and marketing for Lee Enterprises’ national publishing program. A Montana native with a degree from Western Montana College, Linda was a manager in retail, theatre and the hospitality industry before joining Farcountry Press as a sales rep more than 25 years ago. Throughout her book publishing career, she has nurtured book professionals from across the country, especially Montana authors, photographers and illustrators. Through Sweetgrass Books, the same staff helps others custom publish their own books. When she is not working, Linda can be found on the lake, in the mountains riding and driving her horses, and enjoying her ever-growing menagerie of farm animals.

### Steve Zabel

Founder of Montana Trails Gallery in Bozeman, Steve Zabel grew up on a ranch in the Madison Valley and began his art career by publishing prints of work by his father Larry Zabel, the respected Western wildlife painter. Montana Trails Gallery has operated from several locations on Bozeman’s Main Street and has long been a mainstay of Montana’s Western art scene, earning a reputation for its strong historic collections which include work by Charles M. Russell, Frederic Remington, Joseph Henry Sharp and others.



# Congratulations to...

## MHS Bestows Prestigious Heritage Keeper Awards

Bev and Gene Allen, Birdie Real Bird and Bud Cheff Jr. are the 2021 Heritage Keeper Award honorees, with A&E Design earning special recognition as the 2021 Heritage Guardian.



The Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees chose the Heritage Keepers and Heritage Guardian from a large field of nominees, noting that they were all high-caliber but these five rose to the top based on their contributions to Montana history.

“This was a phenomenal batch of nominees, and any would be worthy,” said longtime board member Thomas Nygard. “To have to try to pick somebody out of this bunch wasn’t an easy task, but these five are truly the keepers of Montana’s heritage.”

The annual awards honor exemplary commitment, effort and impact in identifying, preserving and presenting Montana’s historical and cultural heritage for current and future generations. Up to three Heritage Keeper awards are given out each year. Additionally, the Montana Heritage Guardian Award recognizes the record of accomplishment of one of the nominees, but the board reserves the right to not award it each year unless warranted by the record of outstanding achievements.

A&E Design includes a team of specialists who have dedicated their careers to historic preservation. On projects including the Bluebird Building in Missoula, the Daly Mansion in Hamilton, the State Capitol Building in Helena and the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone National Park, the 50-year-old company always shows its passion for ensuring that future generations view our history through the unique lens of our historic structures.

A&E Designs has offices in Billings, Bozeman, Missoula, Kalispell and Seattle.

“Thanks to the vision of Jim McDonald, Jim Bos and the other founding partners, A&E has made it their mission and their avocation to champion the preservation of our state’s significant historic places,” Chere Jiusto, executive director

of Preserve Montana, wrote in a letter of support. “They have also committed their personal time and energies to strengthen and support the educational and nonprofit cultural sector in our state.”



Heritage Keeper Bud Cheff, Jr. is a storyteller of the highest caliber and one of the founders of the nonprofit Ninepipes Museum of Early Montana. As a young boy in the Mission Valley, Cheff spent many evenings listening to elders’ tales of adventure and legends, which kindled his lifelong passion for preserving the past and his cultural heritage.

“With great personal expense and labor, he and his wife Laurel have created the best collection of cultural and historical items displayed in Northwest Montana,” wrote Ronald Merwin in a letter of support. “The success of Bud’s passion can be realized when one reads the reviews of the visitors who pass through the museum.”



Birdie Real Bird of Garryowen taught Crow tradition and culture at Crow Agency for many years. She is nationally renowned for her beadwork and traditional Crow dolls, which help provide a glimpse into the lives of Indigenous people of Montana. But perhaps most importantly, she was director of the Montana Indian Language Preservation Program and helped create the Crow Apsáalooke language app to help teach traditional language.

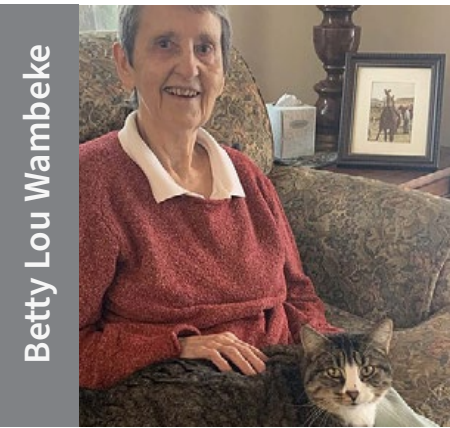
“She joined other fluent Crow speakers to transcribe and translate Crow words, recording traditional Crow songs, and gathering pictures, which were used to create the Crow language app, released in 2015,”

Martha Kohn and Deb Mitchell wrote in the nominating form. “Birdie has spent her life preserving, creating and sharing her culture.”

Bev and Gene Allen of Helena are history devotees who amassed an expansive collection of Western and Montana-based books, art and photographs that is respected by researchers, authors, other collectors and museums across the West. They also have the best collection of L.A. Huffman’s eastern Montana photographic prints and ephemera.

“The large number of Huffman photographs in the Allens’ collection encourages us to ponder the transitions chronicled—old ways to new ways and their ramifications to the land and to the people of this area,” wrote Ann Ripley in the nominating form. “By creating this collection, the Allens have provided to all a cohesive body of visual history.”

## In Memory of...



By Deidre Corson

So many have left a musical legacy: Mozart, Beethoven, Lennon, Presley, Hendrix... the list goes on and on. These artists have touched millions of lives through their music, creativity and ingenuity, and they will continue to influence and inspire many more into the future. Similarly, many have left a legacy through their teachings: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, King, Mandela... again, an endless list. The lessons get shared and passed on from generation to generation.

We recently lost a music educator that touched so many lives and has certainly left a legacy. Betty Lou Wambeke placed thousands of little fingers on the ivory keys. She shared the gift of music throughout her life with her family and to her students. Betty Lou co-founded North Valley Music School and created a space for any age, any ability, any student that desires it, the gift of music education. Her legacy lives on through the children that have grown into adults and continue to play, through her daughter, Jenny Wickland, and her granddaughter, Rachel Wambeke, both teachers at NVMS, who continue to pass on the gift of music to future generations.

Thank you Betty Lou, you will be greatly missed and fondly remembered. We will honor your legacy.

Deidre Corson is the executive director of North Valley Music School.

To watch a visual tribute: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-GITo3\\_QyQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-GITo3_QyQ)

<https://whitefishpilot.com/news/2021/jun/09/educator-leaves-behind-musical-legacy/i>

Photo of Betty Lou Wambeke at home with her cat. (Courtesy photo)



Pat Sponheim was born in Havre, Montana and raised on the Hi-Line in Rudyard, Montana. When Pat was in grade school, her mother drove her over 80 miles round-trip to take classical piano lessons in Havre from Ruth Locke who was a well-known classical pianist. Pat continued to take classical piano lessons until she was a teenager. At the age of 14, she started playing in a dance band on weekends in dance halls up and down the Hi-Line from Shelby to Havre. She liked playing both classical and pop music. She could read any music and would listen to records and the radio to learn both classical and pop music of the day.

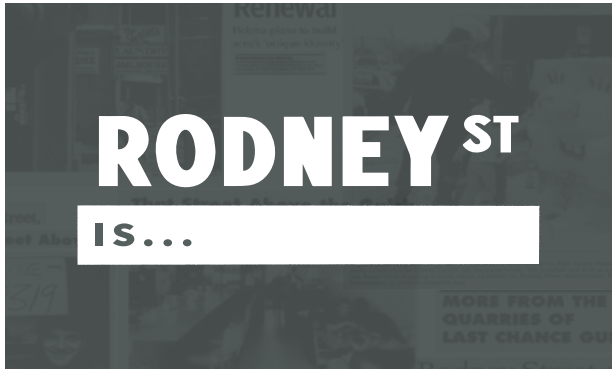
As a single mom, Pat raised her children while working two jobs. She worked as a medical transcriptionist for 38 years at the Great Falls Clinic, and simultaneously worked at the Sip N Dip Lounge for over 50 years as the widely recognized piano player known as “Piano Pat.” Her fans were worldwide. Piano Pat became an icon in the Great Falls community, but if asked, she would shrug off any claim to fame.

She touched the lives of many through her musical talent and loving kindness. She will be greatly missed, though we know she is surely in Heaven singing with the angels.

Check out this video of Piano Pat: <https://vimeo.com/23165992>

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/greatfallsbureau/name/patricia-sponheim-obituary?pid=198577102e>





At Rodney Street's Jesters, bartender Shaun oversees fresh drinks and vintage street signs.



Artists in residence Ashley Moon, Elena Johnson and Amanda Reese discuss the Rodney Street project at the Myrna Loy.



Vacant lots become gallery space along Helena's Rodney Street.

## Rodney Street IS...

By Brian Moody

Photos courtesy of Eric Heidle/Montana Arts Council

**Gentrification is a tricky topic of conversation. It brings up thorny questions—especially in the West—about who belongs and who does not, who calls the shots and who gets to define a place.**

**As Montana grows and changes at a breakneck pace,** the need to work on these questions with honesty and vision is becoming more urgent. It should come as no surprise that artists and arts organizations are already at the forefront of leading this difficult community-based work. One example is the “Rodney Street Is...” project in Helena, which is part of an arts-driven community development process called creative placemaking.

**Running right through the core of historic Helena, Rodney Street hosts a pert-near self-sufficient community** complete with schools, banks, a bodega, a bakery, a bar, a laundromat, churches, social and medical services, and even a trailhead. Imposing 20th-century mansions abut apartment complexes, and the street itself turns to dirt as it climbs steeply into the South Hills above town. While there are social and economic issues that residents are concerned about—potholes on streets, addiction and mental illness, traffic—there is a strong sense of pride and loyalty to the neighborhood. But as Helena feels the crunch of skyrocketing housing prices, residents are increasingly concerned about losing the neighborhood altogether.

**Creative placemaking was born out of this same dynamic happening across the country.** According to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA): “Creative placemaking integrates arts, culture and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities.” In other words, creative placemaking puts art and culture at the center of community organizing work. The Myrna Loy, a performing arts and cultural center in the Rodney Street neighborhood, is leading this process locally in collaboration with the City of Helena through a grant from the NEA with the “Rodney Street Is” project.

**The NEA grant is funding year-long residencies for a design team—**Amanda Reese, Ashley Moon and Elena Johnson—and videographer Jeannie Warden to help capture the neighborhood’s character and envision its future. The team is digging into research and reports, passing out surveys, interviewing residents, collecting oral histories, leading workshops, installing temporary art and even throwing block parties, all with a bigger purpose in mind. As Ashley Moon explains, “We’re trying to ignite a sense of civic ownership and gain momentum.” For Krys Holmes, director of The Myrna Loy: “The downtown area has ‘Downtown Helena,’ the businesses have the Chamber of Commerce; how can we help build some kind of infrastructure of community-fired support for Rodney Street?”

Some of that support infrastructure already exists informally and is central to the identity of the neighborhood. Amanda Reese says, “What I love about Rodney is its DIY attitude. It’s a very resilient place.” Business owners and residents have already started using art to enliven the area, pasting up historic photos on blank walls and painting whimsical scenes

on phone booths. While this can-do spirit is certainly an asset, among the challenges of creative placemaking is turning isolated acts into sustained collective action. For Elena Johnson, relationships are key to addressing that challenge: “One of the biggest things we’re learning is to ask for help. I think the support [for the project] is there, we just have to figure out how to tap into it.”

**Rodney Street is a complex and diverse neighborhood.** For example, it’s home to some of the most prestigious law firms in Montana but also defined as an “area of blight” by the city. While this diversity is an asset, it also leaves the community somewhat fractured, lacking a cohesive sense of identity. As a long-term community institution, The Myrna Loy is uniquely positioned to bring residents to the table to decide what their shared values and identity can be. Krys Holmes says about the placemaking work of the Myrna, “We’re trying to be a better neighbor, to be in dialogue with our neighbors, and to erase the invisible boundaries that exist between us and the residents of the neighborhood.”

Now more than six months into their residency and as the COVID-19 pandemic starts to ease, the design team at the heart of the “Rodney Street Is” project will finally get the opportunities it needs to convene gatherings of people face to face. The summer and fall months ahead will be filled with meetings, more block parties and lots of art. After months of research and virtual interactions, the team now gets to fully lean into their art and design abilities, helping to bring out the hopes, dreams, motivations and skills of community members through imagination-fueled co-creation workshops. As Ashley Moon describes the philosophy behind the workshops and creative placemaking in general: “Everyone is inherently creative, but sometimes it takes artists and designers to help people imagine new ways to look at these issues and to reassure people that their ideas are important.”

The artists and designers leading the “Rodney Street Is” project are careful to emphasize the importance of the process of creative placemaking, rather than focusing on specific outcomes. They are continually being asked: “What’s going to come of all this?” When their residency concludes in December of 2021, there will certainly be physical changes to point to—maybe public art, benches, planters—as well as the work of final reports and long-term implementation plans. But far more important than that will be relationship building in the neighborhood and helping residents realize their own power to create change.

**Creative placemaking offers an alternative to gentrification.** Gentrification is top-down change, where monied interests decide who belongs and how to define a community. Creative placemaking is a grassroots process, where residents tell their own stories and step into the role of changemakers. Projects like “Rodney Street Is” can hopefully serve as a model for all Montana communities facing big changes, showing how people and community institutions can partner to build a future around shared values and mutual benefit. Furthermore, Montana artists are uniquely positioned to lead this charge, for, as Krys Holmes explains, “Artists are in the business of imagining what can be.”

**To Learn More, Visit:**

[www.facebook.com/rodneystreetis](http://www.facebook.com/rodneystreetis) • [www.themyrnaloy.com/rodney-street/](http://www.themyrnaloy.com/rodney-street/) • [www.helenamt.gov](http://www.helenamt.gov)



# Performing Arts

THE MARQUEE LIGHTS ARE ON!

COME TO THE MOVIES

By Allison Whitmer, Film Commissioner, Montana Film Office

This summer, the movie theaters are turning on the marquee lights and inviting us back into those dark boxes of hopes, dreams, horror, love and sadness. Crunching popcorn, holding hands (remember that?) and gasping at monsters feels better together, with your fellow patrons equally mesmerized by the big screen.

Try it: Pick a very quiet movie and then, in the tense space between characters, eat one piece of popcorn. "Crunch." All ears will be on you. That space, the communal agreement in the dark between strangers—that is community. The concentration of attention, absent the hum of our living room and phones ringing, lets us bask, revel, celebrate the art of all the crafts that made the film possible.

**Those craftspeople here in Montana** have been working through snow, rain and heat to make films and other programs. You may have seen them in your communities, taking comprehensive health precautions to not only protect themselves, but also everyone around them. Constant testing three times a week, daily rapid testing and in-depth sanitation processes have helped them keep films in production.

**Over 600 people in the state work in this field**, as makeup artists, costume designers, grips, lighting designers and camera crew; in props, special effects, locations and set decoration; and as drivers, wranglers, directors, actors and so many more—all contributing to the look and feel of projects.

**They live in every part of this great state, including Essex, Glasgow, Lima, Shelby, Darby, Elkhorn and Eureka.** Two film schools in Bozeman and Missoula train students in hands-on process, and the MAPS program in Hamilton works with high school students in many urban and rural communities. Recently, filmmakers have been in Fort Benton, Billings, Livingston and Ennis.

Now, I'd like to you pick a theatre to visit this summer. There are so many choices including drive-ins, multiplexes and historic cinemas.



Here are some of my favorites:

## The Babcock

Billings, Montana

[www.babcockbillings.com](http://www.babcockbillings.com)

The swooping marquee in front of the theatre says it all: Expect plenty of gilt when you look at the pillowed side stage, and take 750 friends with you to experience first-run and classic films. This theatre hosts the MINT film festival, with plenty of red carpet to go around.

If you want a truly personal experience, rent the theatre for your wedding!

Around the corner, take in the Art House Cinema for the best in international and independent cinema, also hosting for the MINT film festival.



## The Washoe

Anaconda, Montana

[www.washoetheatre.com](http://www.washoetheatre.com)

There are no words to adequately gush about the Washoe. It must be experienced.

The grand, Art Deco style from 1936 is a plethora of lavish ornamentation, curtains and balconies. This theatre is a national treasure, as it was the last one built in the country in this style. The main curtain is silk, with deer stags forming the design. Carved rams' heads line the walls and the theatre boasts near-perfect acoustics.



## Rialto

Deer Lodge, Montana

[www.deerlodgerialto.com](http://www.deerlodgerialto.com)

This theatre has been ravaged by fire multiple times, and the citizens have rallied to rebuild, each time working with experts and historians to keep the classic Beaux Arts "Movie Palace" style intact.

On Wednesdays, go buy a popcorn with real butter from the concessions and settle into a theatre that has been showing films to its 485 seats since 1921.

The oval windows and poster space along the front of the building bring you right to the four-door marquee façade, with pillars and a balcony under a red-tile roof. You'll feel like a star entering the brass and marble ticket area and arched doorways.

The arts community in Montana looks forward to your participation in all events, and we can't wait to see you at the movies this summer.

**Learn more about the Montana Film Office at [www.montanafilm.com](http://www.montanafilm.com) and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.**

*Photos courtesy of the Montana Film Office*



# Theatre

## Shakespeare in the Parks is Back!

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks opened its first season in the summer of 1973.

The amateur acting company was comprised of a mixture of students and community members and was founded by Dr. Bruce Jacobsen. The company performed Shakespearean scenes only, and the season consisted of 13 performances in seven cities in Montana. The goal was to bring Shakespeare directly to the people of Montana. The following summer, two full productions (*The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*) were mounted by a paid professional company and staff. The season doubled to include 26 performances in 18 cities, and the Montana Shakespeare in the Parks company as we have come to know it was born. Now with three separate tours that encompass the entire state from border to border and beyond, Shakespeare in the Parks serves literally the entire state of Montana with programs for citizens from ages 5 to 95. This year's season will feature productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Cymbeline*.

"After enduring a year of uncertainty, we are so thrilled to be looking towards our 2021 season where we'll be able to once again engage our amazing communities with live, free, professional theatre. Our greatest passion at MSIP is the opportunity that we've had for 49 years to bring families and neighbors together to share a picnic and enjoy the splendor of Shakespeare's world, a world that is so relevant to our own." – Kevin Asselin, Executive Artistic Director




Touring for its 49th year, the Montana Shakespeare in the Parks company will travel nearly 7,000 miles putting on productions throughout Montana and neighboring states.

All performances are offered free to audiences in local parks and public spaces. Montana Shakespeare in the Parks relies on grants, corporate sponsorships and thousands of individual donors to support the free performances.

"Without question, absence makes the heart grow fonder, and MSU's College of Arts & Architecture is proud that our very own Montana Shakespeare in the Parks will be back on the road this summer. We'll be working closely with the communities around our region to deliver free Shakespeare performances with an eye to all our audiences' health and well-being. We look forward to warmly welcoming audiences to another spectacular season in the coming months!" – Dr. Royce W. Smith, Dean, College of Arts & Architecture.

To learn more about the upcoming Montana Shakespeare in the Parks season, please visit: [shakespeareintheparks.org](http://shakespeareintheparks.org).

Calendar: [www.shakespeareintheparks.org/calendar\\_demo/calendars/shakespeareInTheParks](http://www.shakespeareintheparks.org/calendar_demo/calendars/shakespeareInTheParks) 

# Music

## Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs Through the Smoke

By Eric Heidle



Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs have things to say about 2020. The live-music world's implosion—just as the Bozeman-based group's momentum was building around a strong following throughout the Mountain West—dealt the band a bad hand. But the Dogs persevered, with side gigs, day jobs, releasing a live album—all ways to keep things going when things aren't going well.

The pandemic also provided creative fuel for the fire, as referenced in the title of the band's new record, *Through the Smoke*. Banjo player Matt Demarais' lyric on album-closer "Alive" hits it on the head: "Headlines and horoscopes, fathers, sons, and holy ghosts / Dumpster fire coast to coast, it's hard to see the light through all that smoke."

Much of the Bird Dogs' new album deals with disaster, in fact—natural and otherwise. Guitarist Lena Schiffer turns heartache and resilience over like a snow globe in her hands on

"Up For Air" and "Count On You," quiet tracks brought forcefully to life through her compelling vocals. Even the titles of songs, like "Reeling" and "Burn It Down," hint at the emotional see-saw of the recent past. Josh Moore brings his Appalachian roots to bear on "Bootleg" and "Black Crow," sketching dark landscapes filled with metaphorical omens and literal addictions. "Paradise" seems set in nearby country, and it'll be another foot-stomping crowd-pleaser for what the band describes as its "viciously loyal" fans.

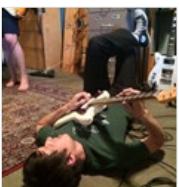
So will "Ball and Chain," an exuberant kiss-off to constraints and limitations that speaks for everyone who's missed the freedom to dance and holler in a big, sweaty crowd. Its triumphant sing-along fairly explodes out of the record, so it should be twice as great live. It's a statement that Laney Lou and crew are back in business, a sentiment they kick off immediately as Lena Schiffer sings the album's opening lines:

"I'm on the Hi-Line; it's a slow ride, chasin' time to make it back to you." It's a sound bathed in something like pure joy, and as with all the other great bands we've been missing, it's great to see the Bird Dogs have found their way through the lonesome blue.

Photos courtesy of Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs



Add These  
to your Playlist +



**Alter Mitty**  
explores new territory with touches of indie and country music in *Range Brown Range*.  
**Available on most platforms.**



**We are Like Warriors**  
Mike Murray addresses issues relevant to our times in his honest, direct, folk storytelling style.  
**Available on most platforms.**





Photos courtesy of Bach Roads of Montana

## Bach Roads of Montana

By Dana Waganer

Baroque Music Montana Founder, Carrie Krause, had a big birthday this year. “My partner, Paul, wanted to take me on a trip, and I said I think I’d like to play these amazing pieces by Bach, and I want to include others in this journey.”

These pieces by Bach, a solo collection of works for violinists, take three hours to play. The stamina required “is hugely difficult but our basic text,” Krause said. “Music is such a multifaceted challenge in that there is a physical element to it. You have to be strong and efficient with your body. The consideration of history and all that one can gather about who the composer was and the place they lived in and what their motivations were. And that when we hear classical music it’s a chance to learn something about another place and a past group of people. It’s about what happens through the violin.”

Undeterred by the challenges this posed, she presented her idea to the board of Baroque Music Montana, who embraced it and gave their wholehearted support. “We kicked it off with Bach on Main and Bach at Trails with 40 musicians playing across the valley. It was amazing to see the pictures and the crowds gathered. We started out with a parade of my younger students playing Bach from memory with their siblings racing alongside us on bikes. As part of Biking for Bach, we

connected the six towns of Gallatin Valley with these six pieces through a community bike ride. I also played lighter works at coffee shops and parks along the way.”

Sometime later (this was actually over a year prior), she went on a bike ride along the Ruby River when the idea for Bach Roads of Montana struck. “I happened upon Laurin and the church there, and it made me wonder how many beautiful, tiny churches there are that we could showcase with a performance. I wondered how it sounded inside.”

She had a recording session coming and wanted a unique setting. “Any church in Bozeman, it’s too noisy because of traffic.” So, she and a recording engineering team ended up at eight churches—Basin, Townsend, Lennep, Laurin, Virginia City, Jeffers, Emigrant and Manhattan. Krause worked with local lay people at each church who provided introductions and local church history at each performance. Krause said,

“We were the first concert at one of these churches and these are churches that are 100 years old!”

A Juilliard School graduate, Krause specializes in historical performance and says she uses different instruments to get closer to the music from three centuries ago. For Bach Roads of Montana, she played her recently acquired violin that was built in 1740 by Andreas Ferdinand Mayr, known as the maker of Mozart’s childhood violin. “It’s set up with gut strings, from sheep gut that’s sourced from a shop in NY that gets them from Italy.” Violin hardware has evolved since then for instruments to be louder and projecting. The violin Krause plays for the Bozeman Symphony has a louder and brighter sound with metal strings.

She loved the intimacy of playing in smaller churches. “Small spaces are very well suited to my historical instrument which is all about nuance and variety. It wasn’t about projecting in large spaces. It was fascinating to hear the different sound in each of them and to hear them on the recordings. And how I perceive the sound in the moment versus the sound in the back of the space. The acoustic makes a big difference with how good it sounds. It’s not me, it’s the space that really does influence the perception of the music making. On another level, it was fun because I got to go to different places and meet different people and engage with them. I talked with elementary school kids who enjoyed the concert and letting music live in these vibrant places that have meaning to their community through time.”

Krause said, “There can be a perception of Bach that can be dry and machine-like, but there is so much in his music. I think he was always seeking, always asking unanswerable questions that we all grapple with. His music takes you on a journey; you go places.” Like Bach, she believes music moves the soul. “It’s been my source of therapy. Music is mental, spiritual, physical. It pulls you to a different place. ... Bach believed music was the refreshment of the spirit. The musician is a conduit of emotional expression, healing and beauty. I feel so lucky that I can sit with this great music and uncover its secrets—the highs, the lows and the darks that it takes you to every day.”

**Excerpts from Bach Roads of Montana are available as an archived resource on [www.baroquemusicmontana.org](http://www.baroquemusicmontana.org)**

## Glacier Symphony Summer 2021

Summer in NW Montana—the beautiful scenery and warm weather just make you want to get outside and enjoy the days, soaking up all the area has to offer. Familiar traditions abound in these months when Mother Nature comes alive, and two of the most beloved (musically speaking) will be returning this summer thanks to the Glacier Symphony: *Symphony Night at Rebecca Farm* and *Festival Amadeus*.

*Symphony Night at Rebecca Farm*, the Glacier Symphony’s popular outdoor pops concert, returns July 9th and 10th. The music starts at 7:30 p.m., but the gates open at 5:30 p.m. for the “picnic experience” to begin. *Festival Amadeus* runs from August 3rd through August 8th.

**Further information and tickets** are available at 406-407-7000 or on the website [www.glaciersymphony.org](http://www.glaciersymphony.org)



Photo courtesy of Glacier Symphony



Up-and-coming performing artists may talk about how committed they are to treating the rigors of the musician’s life: to endless days of driving, to playing to empty rooms, to working even when discouraged and tired.

Lewistown singer-songwriter Haeli Allen isn’t such a musician. While, yes, she is committed to the craft, that commitment needs to be steadied with a similar allegiance to her husband, their four children and the family cattle ranch.

“The kids come to band practice and to the local stuff,” says Allen. “My 10-year-old plays harmonica in the band and is learning the guitar. For me to feel healthy and whole, I need my family life. And I’m lucky, because I get to play to my heart’s content, usually close to home. And I’m not missing anything. I don’t have the emptiness or the void of the road that others seem to have.” Her husband, Jaxon, (who often serves as her bassist or front man in a band setting) is usually along, and the kids, ages 10, 8, 5, and 2 can come along, too.

Allen was born and raised in Stevensville, in the Bitterroot Valley, and she trained in vocal performance at college as part of her minor in music. A couple of years ago, she released her debut recording, *The Gilt Edge Collection*, a snug, enjoyable selection of original country-bluesy numbers which takes its title from a nearby gold-mining encampment that reached the peak of its prosperity in the early 1910s. Her debut recording certainly clips along crisply with smart, well-enunciated lyrics and enough energy to keep it intriguing.

Busy on the Ranch

Despite the unpleasant state of angst, Allen has learned that lockdown frustrations can offer a unique chance to practice patience.

“I’ve been busy on the ranch and I haven’t hopped on the streaming,” says Allen. “I’m saving myself for live music again. Not having an audience was very humbling to me and it really took a lot of the joy out of performing. I didn’t realize how important and intimate that relationship had felt for me—having real people to look at and draw energy from in a really personal exchange. Things were booked and then bookings



starting dropping like flies, and that took the wind out of my sail on the performing end. So, I’ve been really writing a lot.”

The Allens run approximately 300 pairs of cattle and operate a livestock feedlot; and Jaxon is a livestock trucker who hauls the cattle to transport locations countrywide.

“I’ve been milking a cow every day since the lockdown. So, I’m plenty busy. The pandemic is not apparent to us until we try to go out. I’m really blessed that it hasn’t changed a lot on my home front. The blessing is that ranch life is a huge distraction from everything else that’s out there.”

While Allen’s debut album could be considered a solo offering, she has since grown increasingly comfortable cushioned by a family of musicians, literally; Allen, her husband and two of his siblings form The Sightliners.

“I love the relationship, the dynamic and the chemistry with different musicians. I feel very complete when I am performing with my husband. At one point my

sister-in-law (Kenzie) and I had a little girl band, and we’d sing with a sweet girl country vibe. The band is so varied: originals, outlaw country, rock covers. My sister-in-law has a folky, country sound, and we’ve got all different backgrounds and styles, but something makes it cohesive and fresh.”

“All About Here”: *The Gilt Edge Collection*

In *The Gilt Edge Collection*, Allen channeled her world experience into song. At the core of everything is her voice: Like a dagger swathed in silk, it pokes and slices at the most unexpected of moments. Songs are packaged in a way that capture the complexity of human emotion, with plenty of appreciation for the infectious nature of a swaggering bluesy-country refrain.

“The road we live on is called Gilt Edge and it leads to a ghost town. Gilt Edge is where they mined gold. It was short-lived because there was some money skimming going on. It was the first place they used cyanide in the mining process. It had a huge allure and a lot of people moved there. I took Gilt Edge to be a part of my home, my roots and my family, and my cattle ranch. It’s all about here. What we are building here as a family. I wanted it to be clear, pure and true to who I was when I created it.”

Photo courtesy of Haeli Allen

## Dance



Photo courtesy of Bare Bait Dance

## Contemporary Dance in Montana for Montanans

Bare Bait Dance offers fresh, original, professional dance works in Montana for Montanans. Under the continuing direction of Joy French, Bare Bait Dance company aims to increase the availability of contemporary dance to both the Missoula community as well as rural Montana communities. Producing concerts that speak directly to contemporary Western audiences and collaborating directly with local artists (filmmakers, musicians, visual artists, directors, actors), Bare Bait has been making dance more accessible to Montanans since 2011.

Learn more at [www.barebaitdance.org](http://www.barebaitdance.org) or follow them on Instagram @barebaitdance.





Photo by Wendy Thompson Elwood

## A Closer Look

By Russell Rowland

About seven years ago, when I began my journey for what would become the book *Fifty-Six Counties*, I made a couple of conscious decisions about how I was going to approach this project. My objective for this book was to get a spontaneous view of what is happening in Montana today, so except for a handful of discussions I scheduled in advance, most of the interviews I did were on the spot. I didn't want a whitewashed, Chamber of Commerce version of what's happening in each county.

The second decision I made was to limit the time I spent doing research and writing this book because I knew it was the kind of project that could last for years, and that the more time I spent getting bogged down in research, the further I would take myself from that spontaneous reaction to each place I visited. I wanted my own take on this journey to be as fresh as possible.

There were a couple of natural disadvantages to this approach, the first being that my experience with each county depended in large part on who I happened to encounter. And the second was that the limited time on research meant that I missed some important details. I knew this would be an issue with some readers, so when the book came out, I braced myself for the inevitable criticism.

And it came. But the most pleasant surprise, especially in this age of unadulterated vitriol in comments sections all over the internet, is that every single email I received that was critical of *Fifty-Six Counties* was thoughtful, respectful and often filled with excellent information to back up their arguments. Just last week, I got an email from a reader in Ravalli County who was very unhappy with the way I portrayed Marcus Daly, who built a huge mansion in the Bitterroot Valley not long before he died. I was admittedly hard on Mr. Daly in my book, mostly pointing out that after paying several experts to dispute the idea that the toxic smoke emitted from the smelter Daly built in Anaconda was harmful to the area, he moved his own family across the Rockies to a safer place.

My reader friend did not dispute the criticism I offered toward Mr. Daly's business practices, but what he found upsetting was the fact that I overlooked so much good that Mr. Daly did. He gave me a long list of evidence, including the fact that Daly plotted the layout of Hamilton to

give the homeowners bigger lots than they have in Butte or Anaconda, or even Missoula. He also pointed out that the Daly family donated much of their land to the city, for churches in particular.

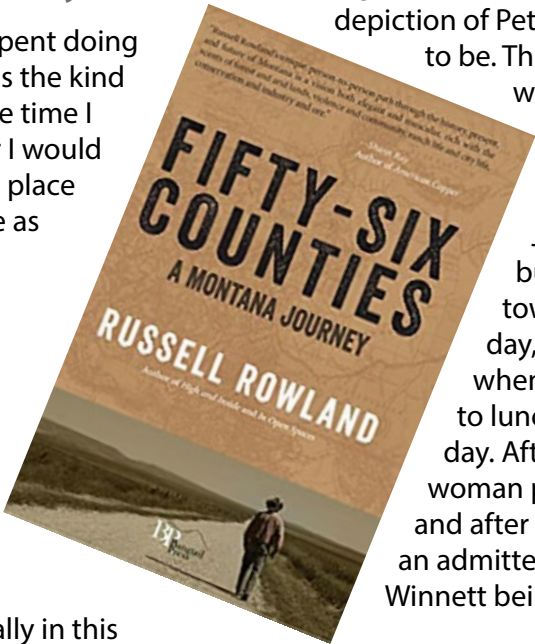
So one could argue that the fact that he had so much land to begin with was largely due to his questionable business practices, especially when it came to paying his workers a living wage. But the point is pretty simple. This man thought it was important that I tell a more complete story, and I couldn't argue with that. So I wrote and thanked him for his input, admitting that I should have taken a wider view of the situation.

My favorite email by far came to me about a year ago from a young woman in Lewistown. Emily Standley is an extension agent for both Fergus and Petroleum Counties, and she was very disappointed in my depiction of Petroleum County in particular. And she had every right to be. Things had not gone well on the day I visited Winnett, which is the smallest county seat in Montana. I started that day's journey by stopping in at the county courthouse, where someone told me that my best bet for an interview was a man named Jack Barisich. Jack was the man who carried the mail in Winnett, but he was also considered by anyone I asked to be the town historian, so I made a valiant effort to find him that day, going first to the post office and then to his home when the guy behind the counter told me that he had gone to lunch and would probably go home from there for the day. After going to the wrong house, and having a very nice woman point out the correct address, I found nobody home and after waiting for about an hour, I decided to move on. I took an admittedly rushed view of this tiny town, and wrote about Winnett being one more dying community.

Emily Standley explained in her email that Winnett has an organization called ACES (Agricultural Cultural Enhancement and Sustainability) that was doing incredible work to make the community more viable and attractive to young people who want to return to the county. She made several other valid points (and also, as with most of the people who contacted me, pointed out the parts she liked about the book), so I wrote her back and thanked her.

About two years later, when I started doing the radio show based on *Fifty-Six Counties*, I thought of Emily, and contacted her to ask whether she would be willing to do an interview, and also whether she would hook me up with a couple of people from Winnett for an episode about Petroleum County.

So in the second week of June 2020, just before the state shut down, I walked into the County Courthouse of Petroleum County six years





They also talked about discussing preliminary plans to build a community center, in a town where the only building that would hold more than 100 people was the school gymnasium. Once the word got out, a native of Winnett named Larry Carroll, who had done very well for himself as a petroleum engineer, donated five million dollars, not only enough to plan and build the center, but also to set aside an endowment to finance the maintenance of the building for years to come once it's built.

This episode of *Fifty-Six Counties* remains one of my favorites, because it was such a surprise, and because this conversation turned out to provide a stark contrast to my first visit to Winnett. That hour reminded me of something I wrote about in the book, a piece of advice I threw out to the

world but apparently didn't always apply myself. I mention several times in *Fifty-Six Counties* that most of Montana requires "a closer look" to appreciate what you're looking at. If you jump to conclusions about any of these small, dusty towns, you're bound to miss something interesting, something surprising, and sometimes even something remarkable.

But there's still a tendency, even for a native Montanan like me, to make assumptions about the small towns in Montana from a first impression, shaded by lingering stereotypes. When I was doing my tour of the state, I pulled into Plentywood, which is in the far northeast corner of the state. My usual routine when I pulled into every town was to drive around and look for interesting places, businesses or organizations that might lead to an interesting interview or story. So I started driving around Plentywood on a sunny summer afternoon, and I soon noticed a big black pickup behind me. At first I thought I might be paranoid, but each time I turned, he took the same turn, and eventually I had to admit that he was following me.

I wasn't scared, but I did wonder what transgression I had committed, so I eventually decided I better just pull over and give him a chance to explain. So I pulled into a parking lot and rolled down my window. Sure enough, he pulled in next to me, facing the other direction, and rolled down his own window. "Just wanted to let you know that your right rear tire is low," he explained.

**2021 Montana Poetry Out Loud Champ** Brady Drummond

**Montana's 2021 Poetry Out Loud champion Brady Drummond** won top nationwide honors as the 2021 Poetry Ourselves written poetry winner for the poem "Wheatgrass." A companion to Poetry Out Loud, the Poetry Ourselves competition gives students the opportunity to submit original poetry. The 2021 competition was open to state and jurisdictional champions. Since the program began in 2005, more than 4.1 million students and 68,000 teachers from 17,000 schools across the country have participated in Poetry Out Loud.

## “Wheatgrass”

Against the breeze drops a lone feather,  
against the azure backdrop angle liquid rays,  
against rolling knolls and velvet fields, dotting acres,  
stallion and his mares graze.

Against the still surface, ripples break, water striders darting  
blue-green,  
against moss and stone, minnows flashing and flipping,  
a soft, young muzzle dripping, whiskers spraying  
teardrops against a smooth roan coat, inky ears hearing.

On the hillside, wheatgrass swaying mute buckling knees,  
milk bubbles bursting, warning  
whinnies.

On the day when the sun never sets, energetic foals collapse  
into exhaustive warmth.

A mother grazes.

Mares, swishing tails against flies, rest in the shade of  
elderly oaks;  
On their young, a watchful eye.

Against the platinum leader hovers another mare, inky as  
the ears of the colt.

Her son, against the skyline, stands proud over his herd, his  
offspring, his mares.

Colts and fillies play,  
rubbing, shaking manes, curling lips;  
fighting against unstable legs, they dance with one another.

A nicker across the reservoir, a colt in a happy frolick  
to his dam,  
dark ears blending against dark.

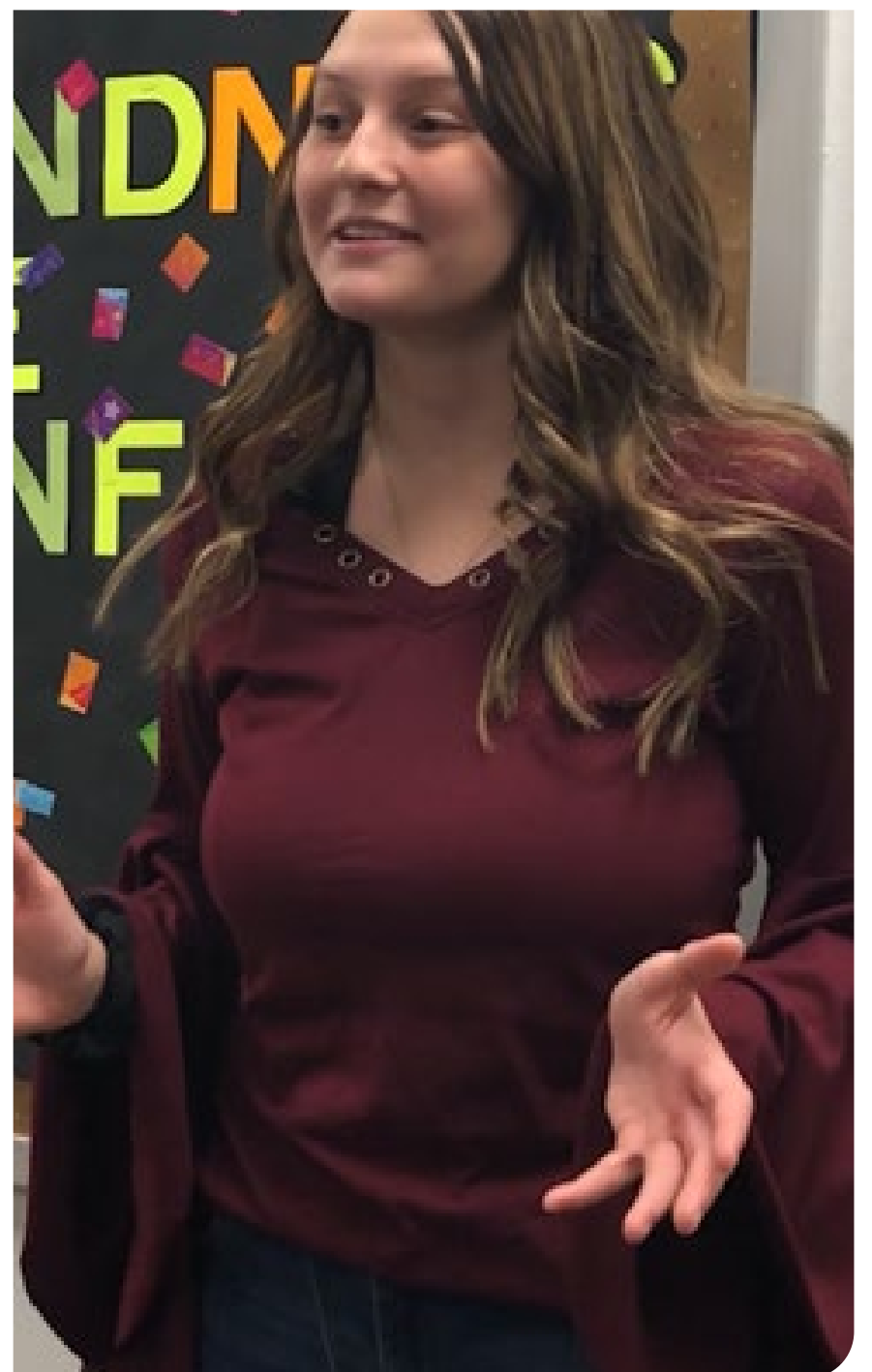
Sweet drops fall, muzzle against udder.

As shadows begin to cover,  
against the grass whispering, the stallion moves for  
his family.

Against the horizon, the moon brushes a white gloss  
over the herd;  
sleepy foals fall under silver blanket,  
wrapping a warming hand against the mares,  
assuring the Stallion against any fears.

Stars dance against a black stage.

The herd lies in the deep cushion of their home.



*Photo courtesy of Montana Arts Council*



# Farewell from Montana’s Poets Laureate

By Melissa Kwasney



Montana Poets Laureate M.L. Smoker and Melissa Kwasny at the Missoula Art Museum with “Raven In Competition” by artist Jeneese Hilton.

“Put down that bag of potato chips, that white bread, that bottle of pop. Turn off that cellphone, computer, and remote control,” begins a poem by current U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo. She continues, “Welcome your spirit back from its wandering. It may return in pieces, in tatters. Gather them together. They will be happy to be found after being lost for so long.”

**As the state and the nation are emerging from a dark time**, a time when our spirits were tested by fear, exhaustion and grief, M.L. Smoker and I are ending our tenure as Montana Poets Laureate. It was, of course, an unprecedented tenure. Charged with bringing poetry to rural and urban communities throughout our wide state, we were six months in when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, canceling our events in schools, libraries and other public venues for the next year and a half.

Mandy and I had asked to be nominated together for this position because we both believe in collaboration—in art, in education, in civic life, in friendship. As members of marginalized communities, we also hoped that our voices might serve as inspiration, especially for



Beaded map by Lakota artist Molly Murphy Adams depicting abduction/assault/murder sites of Indigenous women

American Indian and LGBTQ+ people, especially for the young. We believe in poetry’s power to remind us of our shared humanity and creativity. In the face of the pandemic, we were challenged to find ways to convey that message in new and unanticipated ways.

**Like many of you, we became experts on Zoom.** We were able to visit many classes and audiences because of it. We gave the keynote for the Montana Library Association. (Our heroes!) We interviewed each other for NPR’s Story Corps. For the virtual Montana Book Festival, we sent videos of each of us reading our poems outdoors in sites across Montana: Flathead Lake, the pictographs at Hellgate Canyon. We were invited by the Missoula Art Museum to contribute to their *Love Letters to the Collection*, a project that entailed choosing an artwork from their Contemporary American Indian Art Collection and writing a poem in response. We chose a beaded vintage map by Lakota artist Molly Murphy Adams that depicts where Indigenous women have gone missing or been murdered or assaulted in the Missoula and Flathead reservation area. The poems were mounted at the museum and recorded in a video available at the museum and its website. I created a *Letters to a Young Poet* project. The Billings Library supplies stamps and paper for young people to write back in real letters!

In the meantime, Mandy’s poems appeared in two national anthologies, *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* and *Living Nations, Living Words*, both edited by Joy Harjo. The poems in the latter book are accessible at the same time within an interactive map of First Peoples, sponsored by the Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov>.

And we’re not done yet! Even though we will no longer be laureates, we will be continuing our collaboration. We are currently writing a poem for a video by Big Sky Film Institute on Montana waterways. And we are very excited that we have just received an Academy of American Poets Poets Laureate Fellowship. For it, we will visit art and history museums across Montana, writing poems and conducting workshops.

We want to thank Humanities Montana for their incredible support without which most poets could not afford to be named laureates, who provide funding and technical support to connect us with the people who host us. We are grateful to Free Verse for sending us into classrooms in Billings. Natalie Peeterse helped us with recording, including a video made outside on her deck in January 2020 for an art center in Mississippi. We must have looked odd to them, dressed in our heavy down coats and boots! We want to also thank all the people who reached out to us, who wrote with us, who welcomed us. For Mandy and me, it has been a gift and a treasure—teaching, learning and serving during difficult times—to share our love and appreciation of poetry with all of you.



Melissa and Mandy in the Yellowstone Public Radio studio

Photos courtesy of the Melissa Kwasny and M.L. Smoker





We all know Montana is a great place to live...

the scenery, the wildlife, the people, the space. But what makes it even more special is when our communities bring it all together with festivals to inspire our creative spirits and connect us to each other.

For more information about the festivals below, check out [www.livelytimes.com](http://www.livelytimes.com)

Art Festivals

- Livingston Art Walk**  
Now-Sept. 27, Livingston
- Plein Air Glacier Exhibition and Online Auction** – July 7-28, Kalispell
- Hockaday Museum’s Arts in the Park**  
July 16-18, Kalispell
- 45th Annual Virginia City Art Show**  
July 23-25, Virginia City
- Flathead Lake Festival of the Arts**  
July 24-25, Polson
- Madison Valley Arts Festival 2021**  
July 31, Ennis
- Bigfork Festival of the Arts**  
Aug. 7-8, Bigfork
- The 3rd ArtsFest MONTANA**  
Aug. 12-20, Great Falls  
*(see page 15 for more information)*
- Special Edition Western Art Week**  
Aug. 18-22, Great Falls  
*(see page 15 for more information)*
- 24th Annual Art Auction and Juried Exhibition at Paris Gibson Museum**  
Aug. 20, Great Falls *(see pages 15-16 for more information)*
- Equine Art Extravaganza**  
Aug. 21, Lolo
- Open AIR Artist Talks and Special Events**  
*(see page 14 for more information)*

Art & Music Festivals

- Under the Big Sky Music and Arts Festival** – July 17-18, Whitefish
- Sweet Pea Festival**  
Aug. 6-8, Bozeman
- MontanaFair**  
Aug. 13-21, Billings
- Lincoln Art and Music Festival**  
Aug. 14-15, Lincoln
- Paris Gibson Square Art Auction and Concert** – Aug. 20, Great Falls
- SpringFest!**  
Aug. 21, Billings
- Montana Renaissance Faire**  
July 24-Aug1, Kalispell
- Montana Shakespeare in the Parks: Cymbeline** – varies
- Montana Shakespeare in the Parks: A Midsummer Night’s Dream** – varies

Theatre Festivals

Cultural Festivals

- 12th Annual Bitterroot Celtic Games and Gatherings** – Aug. 21-22, Hamilton
- Flathead Celtic Festival**  
Sept. 10-11, Kalispell
- Arts Missoula Germanfest 2021**  
Sept. (dates not confirmed), Missoula

Music Festivals

- Red Ants Pants Music Festival**  
July 22-25, White Sulphur Springs
- The Montana Music Event: Locals of the Lake** – Aug. 1, Whitefish *(see page 14 for more information)*
- Magic City Blues – Montana’s Urban Music Festival** – Aug. 5-7, Billings
- The Bob Marshall Music Festival**  
Aug. 6-7, Seeley Lake
- Rockin’ The Rivers**  
Aug. 12-14, Cardwell
- Headwaters Country Jam**  
Aug. 19-21, Cardwell
- Tippet Rise on Tour: August Festival**  
Aug. 19-22, Fishtail *(see page 16 for more information)*
- River City Roots**  
Aug. 27, Missoula
- Whitefish Songwriter Festival**  
Sept. 16-18, Whitefish
- Tinworks Art 2021**– varies  
*(see page 15 for more information)*

Literary Festivals

- Montana Book Festival**  
Sept. 16-18, Missoula

Misc Festivals

- Broadwater County and Three Forks Area County-Wide Yard Sale** – July 17, Townsend
- Montana Clean Energy Fair**  
Aug. 14, Billings
- Pet Fest**  
Aug. 21, Missoula
- Food & Beer Festivals**
- Montana Brews and BBQ**  
July 17, Billings
- Annual Bitterroot Brewfest**  
July 31, Hamilton
- Flathead Cherry Festival**  
July 31-Aug1, Polson
- Huckleberry Days 2021**  
Aug. 13-15, Whitefish





“Thresholds” by Erica Selby



Emily Stark



“What’s for Dinner” series, Maria Ylvisaker

# Open AIR Artist-in-Residence Artist Talk Series

The community is invited to learn more about these unique places and the artists connected to them during the Artist Talks and special events.

## 2021 marks the third year of Open AIR’s place-based Artist-in-Residence program.

Artist-in-Residence programs provide artists with time and space to research and create new works. Open AIR’s place-based program takes this a step further and connects artists with unique sites and the stewards of those sites to ground their research and production of new works.

## Events from July and August

### Special Events with Open AIR:

July 13 and 20, Aug. 3 and 13 – Plein AIR Excursions at Flathead Lake Biological Station (32125 Bio Station Ln, Polson, MT 59860), 10 a.m.-2 p.m. with Open AIR artist Sandra Marker, MT. Free, registration required, art supplies not provided.

July 21, 4-6 at the Fairgrounds (1101 South Ave W, Missoula, MT 59801) – raising the flags from *My Story is My Flag* project with introduction by visiting artist Cristina Victor, FL and Raphael Chacón, MT with the Montana Museum of Art and Culture.

Aug. 15 – Philipsburg Arts Fest and Philipsburg Open AIR Artist (downtown Philipsburg, exact location TBD); presentation with visual artist Taylor Clough, MT. Free and open to the public.

### Artist Talk Series:

July 24, 11-1 at Historic Clark Chateau, Butte (321 W Broadway St, Butte, MT 59701) with visual artist Erica Selby (MT).

July 28, 4-6 at Missoula Public Library (455 E Main St, Missoula, MT 59802) with textile artist Aaron Cobbett (NY).

July 31, 11-1 at Historical Museum at Fort Missoula (3400 Captain Rawn Way, Missoula, MT 59804) with visual artist Maria Ylvisaker (NY) and art historian Meave Sheehan (NJ).

Aug. 4, 4-6 at Home ReSource (1515 Wyoming St, Missoula, MT 59801) with visual artist Emily Stark (MT).

Aug. 6, 2:15 at Flathead Lake Biological Station (32125 Bio Station Ln, Polson, MT 59860) with cartoonist Christopher Baldwin (WA).

Aug. 7, Bitterroot Wilderness Artist at Travelers’ Rest (6717 US-12, Lolo, MT 59847), in partnership with the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, with writer Eric Segel (CO).

Cost: All of the above events are Free!

Discover more at [www.openairmt.org](http://www.openairmt.org)

# North Valley Music School Hosts Fifth Annual Montana Music Event

**On Sunday, Aug. 1, North Valley Music School will host the Montana Music Event**, a fundraiser for the nonprofit music school. Currently in its fifth year, the gathering provides essential support for the school’s scholarship fund and is an opportunity to bring musical performance to the community.

In the past, the MME was hosted at the O’Shaughnessy Center. This year, NVMS themed the event *Locals on the Lake* and will take the music outside to Stillwater Landing. “We put a new twist on an old classic after reflecting on how nice it would be to spend some time outdoors listening to music on the lake,” said NVMS Director of Opportunity Jessica Shaw. “We presented the idea and were grateful to find that many musicians and community partners felt the same way. We see this musical collaboration as a gift to our community and hope everyone will treat themselves to what we hope will be the perfect summer night in Montana.”

**The MME showcases over 20 talented local musicians and NVMS student alumni. The evening is family-friendly, with free face painting and Junior Tix for \$5 (ages 0-5). Food trucks, shaved ice, craft beer from Sacred Waters, sangria from Waters Edge Winery and a complimentary hourly shuttle service from Whitefish are also available. Main Gates open at 5:30 p.m. and the MME will start at 6:00 p.m. Blankets, chairs and cash are encouraged. Service animals are welcome; personal pets are asked to remain at home.**

**A VIP Social is from 5-6:00 pm. Tickets are \$75 with a limit of 75 guests.** The Social will include a seasonal three-course menu prepared fresh at Stillwater’s new outdoor kitchen (appetizer, main + side, dessert), beer/wine, chamber music, a custom thank you gift and the chance to mix and mingle with the event’s performers. VIP Ticket must be purchased in advance and sales close on July 14.

“After 2020 kept so many of us inside, understandably, we are looking forward to hosting a memorable moment in a beautiful open space where the sound of music can be heard wafting through the air,” said Shaw. “Plus, it raises money for music education and we just can’t think of a better reason to reunite than that.”

The Montana Music Event is made possible by Presenting Sponsor Charles Schwab. Interested parties are invited to follow NVMS’s Facebook page for volunteer opportunities and up-to-the-minute event updates including performer highlights and a surprise raffle opportunity.



**The Montana Music Event, Sunday, Aug. 1, 2021**  
**Stillwater Landing, Whitefish MT**  
**VIP Social \$75, 5-6:00 p.m.**  
**Main Event \$25, 6-9:00 p.m.**

To buy tickets,  
**call 406-862-8074 or order online at [www.northvalleymusicschool.org](http://www.northvalleymusicschool.org).**



# Great Falls Celebrates Arts—Together

By Nicole Maria Evans

Summer 2021 in Great Falls, MT showcases art, culture and community through a combination of new and established summer art exhibitions, auctions and celebrations that are bringing freshness and vibrancy to the Electric City. Unique in their diverse appeal, Great Falls’ cultural institutions and programs highlight art that ranges from contemporary to traditional. In so doing, the city demonstrates a growing understanding that through the arts a common good is achieved—the opportunity to work collectively and continue to grow a lively, cultured and healthy community that is also a destination location for the arts in Montana.

**August 2021** proves to be an example of the diverse opportunities to celebrate the arts in Great Falls. From Aug. 12 through Aug. 22, a plethora of art-related events and happenings are occurring concurrently in what has transformed into a city-wide celebration of the arts—a coming together of the arts in Great Falls!

**Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art**, the city’s premier institution for the contemporary arts, is hosting their 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Art Auction and Juried Exhibition on Friday, Aug. 20, 2021; it is the museum’s primary fundraiser. The auction has been re-imagined in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic to include a virtual component and a limited live VIP in-person event. Paris Gibson Square activity supports the community through important artist-, exhibition- and studio-arts-driven programming and education. In conjunction with the major auction event, the museum is introducing an evening summer concert celebration, inviting the community to have fun and support the arts. Additionally, the museum is hosting important summer solo exhibitions within the historic building which include: *Distilled*, featuring the work of Jennifer Combe; *Between Earth and Heaven*, featuring the work of E.L. Stewart; and *Body of Land*, featuring the work of Julia Becker, in participation with *Extraction: Art on the Edge of the Abyss* a project of the CODEX Foundation.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> ArtsFest MONTANA** will occur in Great Falls Aug. 12-20, 2021. New and returning artists are invited to create murals in the city’s central business district. The Great Falls Business Improvement District (BID), in partnership with Visit Great Falls Montana and NeighborWorks Great Falls, officially launched **ArtsFest MONTANA** in Aug. 2019. It consists of an artist workshop; walking art tours and



Photo courtesy of Daniel Photo

the installation of new large-scale murals on buildings downtown. Internationally known artist Cameron Moberg will collaborate with local artists on the installation of murals.

**This year, a new addition to Great Falls summer art events will be *Special Edition Western Art Week, August 18-22, 2021*.** *Western Art Week* has a long-standing position in Great Falls and is traditionally held in March during Charlie Marion Russell’s birthday but is now finding a new position within the summer calendar of events. *Western Art Week* celebrates the art of the West and has transformed Great Falls into a hot spot for Western art collectors. This new edition is an opportunity for Western artists, vendors and museums to recuperate after the effects of Covid-19 and the resulting cancellations and postponements. Participants include: *The Russell: An Exhibition and Sale to Benefit the C.M. Russell Museum*; *Out West Art Show and Sale*; *Great Western Living and Design Show*; *Legends West*; *Missouri Falls Fine Arts Show and Sale*; *Jay Contway Art Show*; *Wild Bunch Show*; *Studio 706 Show*; *Celebration of Native Plains Artists Show*; *First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park Exhibit and Sale*; *Western Heritage Artists—Footprints on the Trail*, **and much more!**

## Tinworks Art 2021

Tinworks Art has announced its lineup for its much-anticipated third season. The annual summer exhibition is entitled, *The Pursuit of Happiness* and will open in two phases July 9-Sept. 5, 2021.



A special performance by Arlen Hlusko

Photo courtesy of Tinworks Art 2021

This year’s summer exhibition will feature 13 exhibiting artists, performances and dynamic programming installed in the historic Rialto Theater and the Story Mill, and a public mural on the corner of Cottonwood and Wallace.

The exhibition will explore topics such as unity in democracy, individual and collective well-being, lateral power structures and more. Community programming—from workshops to interactive experiences—will activate the static works of art and transform them into catalysts for conversation about what it means to be happy in a democratic society.

Showcasing the immense pool of talent in our region, the summer exhibition series encourages artists to work ambitiously at new scales and in new mediums with support from the curatorial team. The 2021 roster of artists has been carefully selected from the Montana arts community set in conversation with artists working nationally and internationally.

### Exhibiting artists in alphabetical order:

Jesse Albrecht	Movement4Movements
Rollin Beamish	Tucker Nichols
Jon Boogz and Quentin Robinson	Wendy Red Star
Gregory Crewdson	Macon Reed
Karolina Halatek	Rigo23
Raven Halfmoon	Jay Schmidt

Jim Zimpel with special performances by The Crossing, Nervous Theatre, and Raison D’ tre Dance Project.

**Exhibitions will begin July 9 at the Rialto Theater on Main Street in Bozeman, and the official opening reception will take place in the historic Story Mill on Thursday, July 29.**

**Visiting hours are Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, noon-6:00 p.m., and admission is free.**

**Group tours can be arranged at other times by contacting: [info@tinworksart.org](mailto:info@tinworksart.org).**

**For more information about special events or to volunteer, visit [www.tinworksart.org](http://www.tinworksart.org)**



# The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Juried Art Auction and Exhibition at The Square

The 24th Annual Art Auction at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art is the premier social event in North Central Montana, connecting art collectors with contemporary art and artists.



It is always a summer evening event filled with lively music, dynamic people and amazing art!

The auction will be comprised of a sustained online bidding component open to all **starting July 30, 2021, which proved to be successful last year.**

This year, there will also be a ticketed in-person *VIP Auction Event at The Square*, Aug. 20, 2021. We are excited to bring back a live summer event, limited in numbers and Covid-19 safe. The in-person component of the auction will be followed by a Summer Concert on the museum grounds starting at 8:00 p.m.

The Square is proud to announce our Special Guest Auction Juror, Robert Harrison.

### Silent Auction Online and Exhibition at The Square

July 30, 2021 through Aug. 20, 2021  
(No Ticket to participate online. Register at: <https://givergy.us/thesquare>)

### In-Person VIP Auction Event *Under the Tent*

Friday, Aug. 20, 2021 – Ticket, registration and RSVP required

6-7:00 p.m. – Viewing in the gallery and cocktail Hour

7-7:45 p.m. – Livestream art auction outdoors in VIP tent

Wine, appetizers, music, dessert, special live/silent auction items

Auction tickets: \$125\* Seating is **Limited** (must be purchased in advance) or Table for six: \$900\*

\*includes admission to Live Summer Concert with Ten Years Gone Band

### Live Summer Concert at The Square

8-10:00 p.m. – Featuring: Ten Years Gone Band from Helena

Admission: \$15

7:00 p.m. – Opening food trucks and beer garden on-site

For more information about tickets and events, visit us at: [www.the-square.org](http://www.the-square.org) or call us at (406)727-8255

## Four-Day Virtual Classical Music Festival AUGUST 19-22

### Tippet Rise on Tour: August Festival

Featuring cellist Arlen Hlusko, flutist Brandon Patrick George, pianists Michael Brown, Jenny Chen and Anne-Marie McDermott, violinist Geneva Lewis, and the vocal ensemble The New Consort.



Performing violinist Geneva Lewis Photo courtesy of Tippet Rise Art Center

On **Thursday, Aug. 19**, violinist and rising star **Geneva Lewis** will perform an eclectic mix of works including Biber's "Passacaglia," Ysaÿe's "Sonata No. 5 in G Major" for solo violin, and Kaija Saariaho's "Nocturne." The program was filmed at the [Cyclopean House](#), designed and owned by Ensamble Studio, in Brookline, Massachusetts. The second recording of the evening highlights returning artist **Brandon Patrick George**, who is the flutist of the Grammy®-nominated Imani Winds, playing Bach's "Partita in A Minor" for solo flute, David Lang's "Thorn," and "Air" by acclaimed Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu, whose legacy includes scores to close to 100 films. This performance was filmed in the Jerome Robbins Theater at the Baryshnikov Arts Center.

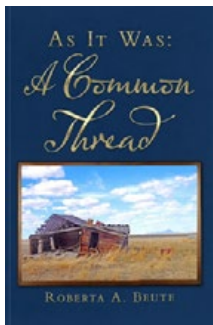
On **Friday, Aug. 20**, two Tippet Rise favorites, cellist **Arlen Hlusko** and pianist **Jenny Chen**, return. Hlusko will showcase new works captured at the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum in Queens, New York. The pieces were commissioned during the pandemic via Instagram and composed by Seth Cole, John Conahan, David Jaeger, Michelle Ross and Nicholas Yandell. Jenny Chen offers a performance showcasing Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 10 in E Major" and his Concert Study No. 3 in D-flat Major, "Un Sospiro," as well as Chopin's "Barcarolle in F-sharp Major," recorded at the Blue Gallery in Midtown Manhattan in New York City.

On **Saturday, Aug. 21**, the program is devoted to one of Schubert's masterpieces, his "Piano Sonata in B-flat Major" played by pianist Anne-Marie McDermott in the most unexpected of places—a tractor barn nestled in Colorado's Vail Valley.

The festival culminates on **Sunday, Aug. 22** with two programs. The first is performed by The New Consort, a project-based, solo-voice ensemble directed by baritone Brian Mummert. The ensemble embraces stylistic contrasts, which is evidenced by their performance. The evening includes vocal works by the exiled Syrian composer, poet and multi-instrumentalist Samih Choukeir arranged by Jordanian composer and vocalist Shireen Abu-Khader, madrigals by Gesualdo and Monteverdi, a piece by American composer Ted Hearne featuring a text from one of the hundreds of thousands of military cables referred to as the Iraq War Logs, sung a cappella by **Madeline Apple Healey, Rhianna Cockrell, Clifton Massey, Brian Mummert and Nathan Hodgson**. Pianist and composer **Michael Brown** closes the festival with a program featuring Chopin's "Impromptu in F-sharp Major," Mendelssohn's "Rondo Capriccioso," Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," Scriabin's "Poème in F-sharp Major," as well as a work of his own composition, "Breakup Etude for Right Hand Alone."

The streaming series, made possible by the art center's cutting-edge in-house audio-video recording capabilities, is available on the Tippet Rise website at [tippetrise.org/virtual-events](http://tippetrise.org/virtual-events).





## As it Was: a Common Thread

by Roberta A. Beute

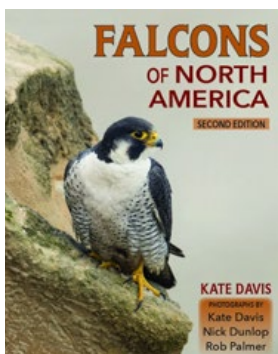
North American exploration has evolved, revealing vast resources and unexplored geography. The path to Montana descended simultaneously from four directions, culminating at the 49th parallel on the international boundary between the United States and Canada. A trio of mountains known as the Sweet Grass Hills lies along this path. These islands on the prairie were witness to several events, leaving untold stories. This brief collection contains memoirs, short stories and facts about the pioneers who persevered and left us reminders of their journey.



## Bitterroot Lake

by Alicia Beckman

When four women separated by tragedy reunite at a lakeside Montana lodge, murder forces them to confront everything they thought they knew about the terrifying accident that tore them apart, in Agatha Award-winning author Alicia Beckman's suspense debut.

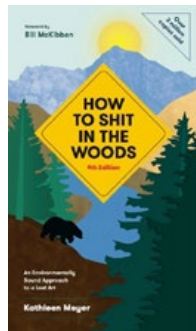


## Falcons of North America

by Kate Davis

"Doing justice to the falcons in a book is a tall order, but this one surpasses expectations. Filled with fascinating information and absolutely breathtaking images, I find myself going back again and again to browse or just to stare at a photo. Wow!" —David Sibley, author and illustrator of *The Sibley Guide to Birds*

"It should be no surprise if many people buy this book for the photos alone, because they are superb—both stunning and unique. But a glance at the text, which is eminently worth reading, draws a reader further into a raptor's world. ..." —Hans Peeters, author, artist, naturalist



## How to Shit in the Woods: An Environmentally Sound Approach to a Lost Art

by Kathleen Meyer

*How to Shit in the Woods* is widely known as the "backpacker's bible." In this fully revised fourth edition, Kathleen Meyer continues pioneering the paths to graceful backcountry elimination and responsible human waste disposal. Featured are the latest innovations—from classy, high-tech to inexpensive DIY.

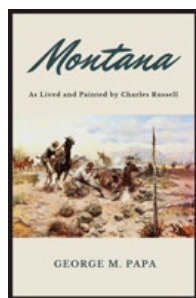


## Love in the Midst of COVID

by Mary Sheehy Moe

"I'm afraid. You are too, right?" Mary Sheehy Moe mused when COVID-19 hit Montana. "I'm afraid the test I've always wondered about, the test for my generation like the ones my parents' generation faced, and their parents' before them, has come at last. Our Depression. Our World War II. Our polio."

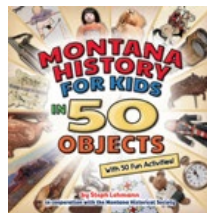
This compilation of Moe's writings is at once a portrait of a fearful, politically turbulent time and a montage of the reflections of a grandchild of Irish immigrants, a child of the '60s, and a fiercely doting grandmother. In between the lines is a crib sheet for the tests of any turbulent time.



## Montana: As Lived and Painted by Charles Russell

by George M. Papa

Charlie Russell was a true legend in the vast Judith River Valley where cattle roamed without fences and hustlers, gamblers, gold diggers and other characters abounded. Indeed, fast guns and faster horses were an everyday necessity to survive among all the surprises of that bygone era. Included is Helena's Cosmopolitan Hotel, where Madam Chicago Jo Hensley "ran a real tight ship upstairs." Ride with Charlie on a most eventful cattle drive to the railhead at Miles City, where everyday saloon life made WWI look like a church choir practice.

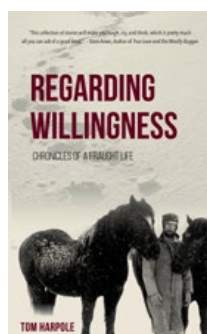


## Montana History for Kids in 50 Objects

by Steph Lehmann

Who says history has to be boring? Learn about Montana history with 50 objects from the Montana Historical Society and have a ton of fun while doing so!

Some historical objects may at first seem plain or unimportant, while others are famous works of fine art, but what they all have in common is that they are key pieces of Montana's past. Like memories, they offer glimpses into the lives of the people who lived here before us. While you are learning, have fun with 50 activities, from arts and crafts to baking, plus an exciting experiment and games!



## Regarding Willingness

by Tom Harpole

A natural storyteller and award-winning writer, Harpole tells stories that may cause you to cringe, cry, laugh and reflect. He has a quirky sense of humor and lives each day with optimism, kindness and compassion for man and beast. He has a talent for finding adventure or a good story ... often in the most unusual places.



## The Tender Care

by Larry Stanfel

An odd pair of model citizens conclude that their only protection, and that of their friends, against a powerful and dangerous adversary is murder. Needing additional brain- and muscle-power, their first task is recruiting a gang but keeping the other members innocent of the crime.

Suspense, twists and more than a few laughs lie around every corner of the titillating story.



## Walking the Fences

by Pete Critelli

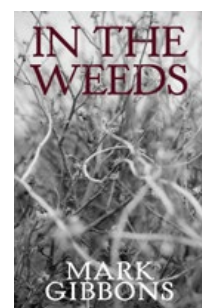
"To live in the high-country is visceral, palpable, emotional, and embracing. We're surrounded by a vastness that is humbling, challenging, yet comforting. I can rest my forearms on the hood of my thirty-year old truck and see our neighbor's woodstove puffing a half of a mile away, then turn my head to see the white scarfs encircling the snowy peaks of the Crazy Mountains seventy-five miles on the western horizon. But what is even louder than the gravel crunching beneath my boots is the people. Quietly proud, ethical, directed, and self-sufficient. Friends, family, and even strangers who quickly become not. The living hologram of ranchers, skiers, and everyone in between, tightly wires the synapses of life here in the high-country of south central Montana."



## Blue Man

by John L. Moore

The fifth novel in the Ezra Riley series, *Blue Man*, tells the story of a hardened Montana cowboy who prefers the hills, cattle and horses to cities, but his unique gift for dream interpretation has him secretly taken to the White House where the president is suffering from recurring nightmares. Riley's encounter launches a series of attacks by the man behind the nightmares, an elderly master spy and a pioneer in the CIA's experiments with psychic powers and hallucinogens, who has invested 30 years and millions of dollars in creating the ultimate psychic warrior.



## In The Weeds

by Mark Gibbons

Richard Fifield calls Mark Gibbons' new poetry collection "a flamethrower." Poetry that can inflame as well as inform is much needed right now, and *In the Weeds* delivers. Gibbons, the author of 10 books of poetry and editor for FootHills Publishing's *Montana Poets Series*, is a Montana Arts Council Artist's Innovation Award winner and longtime Poetry Out Loud panelist. With *In the Weeds*, he confirms his status as one of Montana's foremost poets.





Photos courtesy of Miracle of America Museum

## In the Fold: Shorty Shope’s Montana Highway Map Collection at the Miracle of America Museum

By Eric Heidle

In 2021, paper highway maps are impossibly quaint. Why fumble with a poster-sized printout of lines and dots, comically resistant to re-folding, when one can simply mutter a destination into the phone and have it describe a detailed route in nearly human speech?

But our waning reliance on printed maps means something’s been lost. Visitors never fail to boggle at Montana’s sheer size, but an app can’t really express it. Literally unfolding the breadth of Big Sky Country in your lap, one can perhaps comprehend crazy facts about the state’s immensity: It’s bigger than Japan; it has counties bigger than Rhode Island; its southeast corner near Broadus is closer to Texas than to its own opposite corner by Libby. And seen in full, the massive network of interstates, US highways, state roads and sketchy dirt two-tracks resemble an asphalt lung, inhaling travel between far-flung communities, exhaling a seasonal tide of tourists, across vast open spaces.

Something else you won’t find on Google Maps is gorgeous, hand-painted artwork. For that, head to a remarkable storehouse of likewise “obsolete” cultural artifacts, up in the little town of Polson. Dig out your Montana Highway Map; you’ll find the town tucked right under the blue blob of Flathead Lake. There, the Miracle of America Museum’s sprawling campus houses an enormous collection of historical memorabilia from Montana and beyond. And tucked into a tiny corner of this huge archive is a singularly artistic display—a complete collection of Montana highway maps featuring the cowboy art of Irwin “Shorty” Shope.



Gil Mangels, owner of the Miracle of America Museum, describes the museum’s collection of Shorty Shope artwork and Montana state highway maps.



**Shorty Shope was born in Boulder in 1900 and went on to be one of Charlie Russell’s artistic descendants.** Raised on a ranch, Shope knew the cowboy life firsthand and translated it faithfully into a body of fine paintings during his long career. But the covers he painted for the Montana State Highway Commission’s highway maps delve wonderfully into a fanciful realm of evocative travel illustration. One wouldn’t think it necessary to exaggerate Montana’s scenery, but Shope nevertheless depicted crenelated, snowclad peaks vaulting skyward above gushing waterfalls, often with a smart-looking Packard or Studebaker rolling briskly through the scene. Shope’s compositions and color palette are instantly iconic, drawing the viewer into landscapes of pure majesty; if you see one of his covers and don’t want to be there *right now*, it’s clear you were born without a soul.

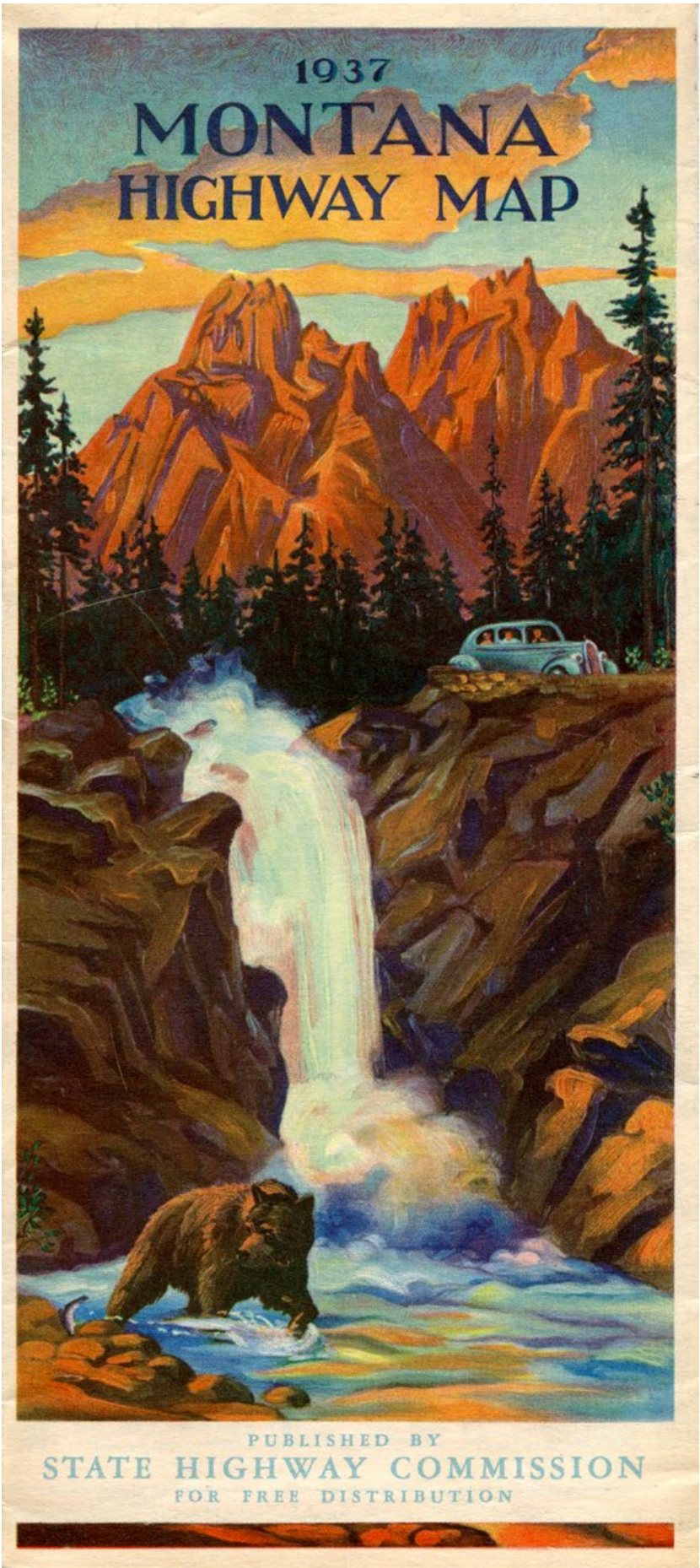
**Printing technology in the 1930s and 1940s sometimes failed to keep pace with Shorty’s vibrant hues, and that’s part of what makes the Miracle of America Museum’s collection irreplaceable.** Owner Gil Mangels explains that the museum has five Shope originals, which can be seen alongside the maps made from them. 1939’s “Land of the Shining Mountains” cover, for example, is rendered in pleasant earth tones on the map, but Shope’s original artwork just inches away portrays a sky of robin’s egg blue above a rich, colorful foreground of mountains and highway. A few of the covers draw clear parallels between modes of transportation from the past and (then) present; 1940’s “Roads to Romance” design presents a swirling timeline of covered wagons, Native horsemen, Cavalry soldiers and bucking cowgirls above two lanes of fat-fendered coupes leaning into the wind. And Shope’s work was topical when need be: rather than fedora-hatted anglers slaying big rainbows, the 1942 cover features an armored Lady Liberty drawing her sword, presiding over the miners, surveyors and cattlemen contributing to America’s war effort—seen in a gathering cloud of battleships, guns and tanks just beyond.



**The invigorating promise of the Big Sky, whether in its roads to romance, its shining mountains, or its wartime patriotism, couldn’t be better expressed than it was in Shorty Shope’s hands.**

His paintings, like the state highway map, tie the corners of Montana together, suggesting common ground across an uncommonly large stretch of land. The value of Shope’s work and its legacy to Montana’s self-image is irreplaceable, and to think that it’s just a tiny bit of the Miracle of America’s vast collection means a road trip is long overdue. So unfold the map, trace along with a finger till interstate green turns to highway red, and hit the brakes just short of that cyan blob of lake. Montana’s attic awaits.

**Learn more about the Miracle of America Museum online at <https://miracleofamericamuseum.org/> and visit in person at 36094 Memory Lane, Polson MT 59860**



Artwork courtesy of Miracle of America Museum





Yellowstone River, acrylic on polycarbonate 72 x 120 inches



Ben Miller



Ben's journal

## Fly Cast Paintings

Ben Miller celebrates, and intimately paints, rivers—the lifeblood of our land. His paintings present the natural world as a place of pilgrimage, discovery, inspiration, beauty and worship.

Without witnessing Ben paint a painting, it is almost impossible to understand how they are made. He starts by setting up a homemade easel on the banks of a river, upon which he places a sheet of transparent plexiglass. Using traditional fly fishing rods, Ben substitutes handmade “fly-brushes” for conventional hooked flies, saturates them in acrylic paint and casts from over 20 feet onto the plexiglass. Over the course of a day, he casts over a thousand times, the mark of each cast eventually making up a finished painting of a chosen river.

As if the process wasn’t amazing enough, one comes to realize that Ben, in a sense, paints backwards—the actual finished painting is the reverse of the paint-covered transparent polycarbonate. Turned around, the first strikes of the day are “on top” of the painting and the last form the backdrop.

### Scene and Unseen: *An interwoven tale of art and science at the Flathead Watershed*

From the macro to the micro, pen to brushstroke, discover new insights into our world through the eyes of artists and scientists inspired by the internationally renowned Flathead Lake Biological Station. Open AIR, the Flathead Lake Biological Station, and Bigfork Art and Cultural Center have come together to provide a unique exhibit featuring a wide variety of works created by artists from throughout the nation who have resided and created at the Biological Station’s 84-acre reserve on Yellow Bay.

The exhibition features Open AIR Artists-in-Residence at FLBS, local professional and novice artists who participated in Plein-air workshops last summer, and historical works from artists who have created at the Biological Station since its original founding. The exhibit includes works in watercolor, oil, fabric, graphite drawings and pastels as well as moving-image, sound and written works. Enjoy a unique exhibit revealing diverse perspectives on Flathead Lake and its watershed.

Ben Miller brings together two disparate cultures—fly fishing and high art—each with much to learn from the other. They breathe new life into an art world struggling to balance art and nature on our rapidly changing and endangered planet.

Gary Snyder Fine Art is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings by Ben Miller at the Story Mill Pop-Up Gallery in Bozeman. The Story Mill Pop-Up Gallery is in a raw, 10,000-square-foot industrial space that is part of the larger Historic Story Mill, just outside the city of Bozeman.

The gallery will be open to the public Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 1-7:00 p.m., through July 18, and also by appointment.

A percentage of all sales will go to river causes around the world.

**For further information please contact Gary Snyder at [gary@flycastpainting.com](mailto:gary@flycastpainting.com)**



Photo courtesy of Bigfork Art and Cultural Center

#### Dates and Time:

Start: Friday, Aug. 13, 2021, 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Opening Reception: Friday, Aug. 13, 5:30 a.m.-7:00 p.m.

End: Saturday, Sept. 25, 5:00 p.m.

Exhibit Hours: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

#### Cost: Free

Bigfork Art and Cultural Center, 525 Electric Ave. Bigfork MT 59911

Additional Events Connected to this Exhibit: *Plein AIR Excursions* at Flathead Lake Biological Station, by Sandra Marker, July 13 and 20, Aug. 3 and 13, 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Learn more and register at [openairmt.org](http://openairmt.org).



# Hidden Treasure in Montana

Photos and Story by Jeffrey Conger

## Sax & Fryer Co.

Looking for the real West? Simply visit Sax & Fryer Co. in historic downtown Livingston. This delightful retail shop known for featuring local and regional authors has the feel of a classic office supply and bookstore. It was originally founded in 1883 in nearby Springdale as a general mercantile. Now in its fourth location in Livingston, it is filled to the brim with more treasures than amazing new books. One will find a wide range of art supplies, note cards and gifts. Still in use today are the two National registers to ring up cash purchases. Beautiful vintage black-and-white photographs taken by founder Frank Fryer and now-owner John Fryer are displayed along the mezzanine. Store patrons are greeted by long-time employees Kathleen McGuire, who has worked at the store for 51 years, and Marge Brandon, who has been in the store for 43 years.

So, if you are in search of the latest travel guidebook or the best recommendation on a local Montana author, be sure to visit Sax & Fryer Co. between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The store is located at 109 West Callender Street in Livingston.



Kathleen and Marge



You can also find them on Facebook or call them on their rotary-dial telephone at (406) 222-1421.







Artwork by Gordon McConnell

# Imaginary America

By Anna Paige

**Billings-based artist Gordon McConnell grew up in a time when John Wayne’s rough-and-tumble attitude was idolized and mirrored by many—including his own father, who wanted his son to grow up and be something like Wayne.**

Glued to the TV, McConnell recalls his family watching Westerns, from the violent and gritty to the absurd and comedic. This genre of film and television shows exploded following WWII, where Hollywood churned out more Westerns than anything else. The violence of war was ritualized as lawmen, gunslingers, cowboys and Indians battled it out, imbuing ideals of good and bad onto many children growing up in the TV-centric households of the ‘50s and ‘60s.

**Westerns provided vivid fodder for McConnell to develop as an artist,** though he did not turn to the subject until the 1980s. At that time, he began working from photographs he took of movies as they were broadcast on television. When the VCR came around, his ability to stop frames sharpened his technique and his own obsession with the Western genre.

McConnell’s deep consideration for Western ideals and the central theme of heroes and villains plays out in *Imaginary America: New Paintings by Gordon McConnell*, on display June 2-July 16 at Kirks’ Grocery on Minnesota Avenue in downtown Billings. The show features new works crafted during the pandemic and informed by Western films made in the United States and Europe, and their portrayals of the American West.

Though 2020 was an isolating and difficult year, McConnell had reason to celebrate, as he not only dove into a new chapter of work; he was one of a handful of Montanans to receive the Governor’s Arts Award. McConnell was honored for his statewide contributions to the arts, including his role as a museum curator, helping shape the Yellowstone Art Museum from a former county jail into one of Montana’s largest cultural institutions and home for contemporary arts.

**“No one has done more for art in Montana—as an artist, curator, and all-around spark plug—than Gordon McConnell,”** wrote Pulitzer Prize-winning author Mark Stevens in his nomination of McConnell for the award, which recognizes Montanans for artistic excellence, dedication to Montana and ongoing contributions to the cultural community.

McConnell’s new works feature a cast of characters he became intimately familiar with during the pandemic. His paintings are informed by romanticized heroes such as Judah Ben-Hur and Sam Peckinpah’s brutally realistic anti-heroes in *The Wild Bunch*. The pieces—some upwards of 2.5 feet across—have been assembled with collaged advertisements from Artforum magazine, which McConnell then paints upon.

**“I like painting on this surface in part because the critics of Artforum have been fond of asking if painting is dead, or questioning its purpose and future,”** says McConnell.

With one eye on the past and an immediate sense of the present, such works McConnell describes as being crafted in response to the seclusion and isolation of the pandemic. For McConnell, the pandemic provided a point of reflection and an opportunity to review his works and find new conversations in an old medium.

As the pandemic carved more time for study and reflection, McConnell dove into provocative literature, such as Emmanuel Carrère’s *The Kingdom*, which fictionalized accounts of men who wrote the Gospels, and Lew Wallace’s iconic *Ben-Hur*, which he wrote in part while serving as Territorial Governor of New Mexico. During that time, he met with Billy the Kid and intervened in the Lincoln County War.

**“I ploughed through that antiquated novel last summer and started adapting some scenes from the book as they were depicted in comic-book versions of Ben-Hur I have owned since the 1950s,”** says McConnell.

McConnell first encountered Ben-Hur in the 1959 epic film made at Cinecitta Studios in Rome. A few years later, an assistant director on the chariot race scene, Sergio Leone, directed *A Fistful of Dollars*, the first Italian Western (often called “spaghetti” Westerns) to gain widespread attention. The earnest hero Ben-Hur, who took on the Roman Empire with righteous courage, was succeeded by *The Man With No Name*, a wise-cracking, cynically efficient killer. The establishment 1950s context of McConnell’s childhood years were likewise followed by the counterculture currents of the 1960s, his teen years.

McConnell ties all this material together under the title *Imaginary America*.

“Our empire is inspired by Rome and Christ,” explains McConnell. “An Italian navigator, Amerigo Vespucci gave his name to the continents of the Western Hemisphere; Italian filmmakers re-imagined an American frontier and gave us a new Western. These analogies keep me engaged with my themes.”

Kirks’ is an all-ages art gallery and performance space dedicated to showing contemporary art by local, regional, national and international artists who fall outside the typical Western art genre, associated with Montana galleries.

**Kirks’ is open Tuesday through Saturday from 1:00-9:00 p.m. or by appointment. For more information, call (406) 969-1398 or visit [www.kirksgrocery.com](http://www.kirksgrocery.com).**



Art courtesy of Gordon McConnell



## Artists in Schools and Communities Grants Awarded



Photo courtesy of Montana Arts Council

For more than 50 years, MAC has awarded grants to organizations in support of arts learning across a wide age range and ability spectrum. The Artists in Schools and Communities (AISC) grant cycle for the 2022 fiscal year opened in early February, with a subsequent deadline of March 24 for the AISC Residencies opportunity. Connecting guest or teaching artists with learners through short-term or long-term experiences is a hallmark of the program, providing a tri-fold benefit to organizations, learners and professional artists. Following a panel review in late April and approval by members of the Council on June 5, the 27 organizations identified here have been awarded project funding for the upcoming year. For other upcoming AISC grant opportunities, applicants should keep an eye on MAC’s social media, e-Newsletters and website.

### FY22 AISC Residencies Grant Awards:

- A VOICE, Pablo, Our Community Record, \$10,000
- Anaconda Local Development Corporation, Anaconda Artway, \$10,000
- Art Mobile of Montana, Art Mobile of Montana Artist in Residence, \$10,000
- Belgrade School District #44, Belgrade Rocks, \$10,000
- Bozeman Art Museum, Learning the Language of Drawing, \$5,000
- Choteau Community Art Studio, Choteau, Choteau Arts, \$5,615
- City of Glasgow, Glasgow High School Mural Residency, \$10,000
- Montana State University Billings, MSUB Creative Writing Center Residency, \$4,500
- Free Verse, I am Montana, \$10,000
- Holter Museum of Art, Art Feeds the Artist Within, \$7,795
- KALICO Art Center, KALICO Ceramics Program, \$10,000
- Kalispell Public Schools, Russell Elementary School, \$3,595
- Liberty Place, INC., Learning Weaving with Teaching Artist Diane Gerot, \$2,775
- MAPS, Maps Media Institute, \$10,000
- Missoula Art Museum, Teen Artist Project, \$10,000
- Missoula Community Radio, Blacksmith Encounters, \$3,500
- Missoula County Public Schools, Bare Bait Dance Model Dance Education Program, \$2,900
- Missoula Writing Collaborative, River City Young Poets: Creative Writing Residencies, \$10,000
- Montana Actors’ Theatre, MAT Youth, \$10,000
- Montana Repertory Theatre, Montana Rep’s 2021 Educational Outreach Tour, \$10,000
- Montana Shakespeare in the Parks, Montana Shakespeare in the Schools, \$10,000
- Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, Curative Art Collective, \$5,000
- SPARK! Arts Ignite Learning, Arts Integration Residency Project, \$10,000
- The Root & The Bloom Collective, Clark Chateau Youth Vaudeville Residency, \$2,500
- The Shane Lalani Center for the Arts, Shane Center Education Programs, \$10,000
- WaterWorks Art Museum, WaterWorks Educational Outreach, \$10,000
- White Sulphur Springs School District, White Sulphur Springs Theatre Camps, \$4,300

## Summer 2021 Studio Art Classes at The Square

Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art is offering many youth and adult summer classes, camps and workshops! For a full list with further details please call The Square or visit us online at [www.the-square.org](http://www.the-square.org).

**Youth Classes:** Painting and Drawing, Pottery, Parent and Child Pottery, Hand Building with Clay

**Youth Camps:** Clay All Day in June, Dream Art, Make Art, Be Art in July, Mask and Puppet Making Performance in August



**Adult Classes:** Beginning Ceramics, Plein Air Painting, Portrait Painting and Drawing, The Art of Healing: Connect with Your Creative Power, Hand Building and Design: Experiments in Clay, Senior Drawing

**Online Classes:** Beginning Watercolor, Montana Botanicals

**Workshops:** Character Design, Kite Making, Felted Garlands, Chine Colle, Raku Workshop, Ceramic Surface Design, Ceramic Wall Pockets





Behind the scenes with a sound man for the CHANTÉ Project



Thompson Falls students film a scene in their high school's dark library

# Thompson Falls High School Students Create Film in One-Week Intensive Workshop

By MAPS Media Institute

When MAPS Media Institute film instructor Dan Molloy worked with Thompson Falls High School students to create their film “Dragonfly” in a one-week intensive workshop, he knew the students were creating something uniquely powerful. The student filmmakers communicated a Stephen King-like internal drama which resonated on different levels—a teenager’s perspective on the global pandemic; the isolation caused by bullying; commentary on teen suicide. After viewing the film, some might wonder, what is the MAPS secret ingredient for helping students create “something uniquely powerful?” The secret has little to do with technology and more to do with creating a supportive and collaborative environment that encourages students to organically explore their ideas and, with professional guidance, bring them to life.

“MAPS is about helping students learn to communicate ideas, whether through a film, a song or photo essay,” said Clare Ann Harff, executive director of MAPS. “We often witness a creative evolution with students.”

This evolution was one MAPS Director of Programming Dru Carr witnessed firsthand working with students in the Fort Peck Community College CHANTÉ Project. Throughout the school year, **MAPS taught online media classes in podcasts, photojournalism and film.** “The work and the stories are completely student driven. The opportunities we create support their willingness to be vulnerable which powers creativity,” said Carr.

**MAPS provides free-of-charge media arts opportunities for youth across Montana,** including those in rural and reservation communities. This effort has seen stories shared through local and state media and on regional and national levels through film festivals culminating in celebrated awards.

**Quin Vulk is a MAPS teaching assistant, filmmaker and creator of the stop-motion animation film “Behind the Scenes,”** which was nominated for a regional High School Student Production Award (equivalent to a student Emmy). This piece was one of several MAPS films showcased in the Montana PBS series, *Stories from Montana’s Future*. Although Vulk didn’t take home the award, she points out, “When I made my film, I wasn’t thinking about awards. I was just doing what I love most—creating. When MAPS submitted my film and it was nominated, I realized anything is possible if you have a chance to tell your story.”

**The third episode of *Stories from Montana’s Future* begins airing on July 15, 2021, at 7:00 p.m.** This episode features two MAPS films created with students from Fort Belknap and Fort Peck—“Looking Forward From Yesterday” and “In This Together, We Are One.”

To watch “Dragonfly,” go to <https://mapsmediainstitute.com/programs/maps-media-lab>.

For more information about the CHANTÉ Project, visit <https://mapsmediainstitute.com/programs/fpcc-chante-project>.



Teaching Assistant Quin Vulk teaches stop-motion animation

The July 2021 viewer’s guide for Montana PBS with more information on the broadcast can be found at <https://www.montanapbs.org>. A livestream of this program will also be available at <https://www.montanapbs.org/watch>. In addition, episode four of the series will air later this year on Montana PBS.

**For more information about MAPS or to pre-register for their fall classes, please visit <https://mapsmediainstitute.com>.**

Photos courtesy of MAPS Media Institute



# Creative Aging Planning and Partnership Development for Montana

By Monica Grable

In collaboration with Aroha Philanthropies, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) has proudly announced the award of \$1,457,000 in grant funding to 36 state and jurisdictional arts agencies. Included in that awardee list is the Montana Arts Council, recipient of support for a yearlong planning project. Part of NASAA’s Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging initiative, these grants will expand opportunities for creative aging across the nation, facilitating lifelong learning, joy, social engagement and improved well-being for older adults.

State and jurisdictional arts agencies share a public mandate to make the social, educational and health benefits of the arts accessible to everyone, especially underserved populations. Older adults—who often must contend with ageism and isolation and have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19—are an essential part of this commitment.

“This timely investment lifts up the creative capacity of older adults,” says NASAA President and CEO Pam Breau. “By working through state arts agencies, this initiative marks a major national expansion in programs and services designed to improve quality of life and nurture meaningful community connections for older adults.”

“Aroha Philanthropies is proud to partner with NASAA to support creative aging through our state and jurisdictional arts agencies,” said Ellen Michelson, founder and president. “This initiative marks an

important step toward broadened awareness, adoption and funding of creative aging programs across the country.”

The cohort of 36 state arts agencies receiving funds includes every region of the country and five U.S. jurisdictions. With this funding, each state will conduct creative aging activities or planning for future activities tailored to the unique needs of its constituents. Activities will include bolstering existing creative aging programs, supporting artist residencies, providing professional development for teaching artists, developing creative aging communities of practice, providing direct programming to older adult audiences, cultivating creative aging partnerships and more.

For information about activities taking place in each state, see NASAA’s summary of grant awards or contact the appropriate state arts agency. For more information about NASAA’s Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging initiative, contact NASAA Arts Learning Projects Director Susan Oetgen at [susan.oetgen@nasaa-arts.org](mailto:susan.oetgen@nasaa-arts.org).

Montana Arts Council’s grant-funding planning year has just begun and will continue through early June of 2022, inviting engagement from statewide partners toward the development of a framework for providing creative aging programs in our state. To begin this work, MAC is hosting a three-part learning series led by Lifetime Arts, a national leader in creative aging instruction. The sessions will be held Aug. 9-11, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. each day, and a limited number of 25 participants are invited to join free of charge.

**To learn more or express interest in participating, contact Monica Grable, Arts Education Director, at [Monica.Grable@mt.gov](mailto:Monica.Grable@mt.gov) or (406) 444-6522.**

## Application Now Open: Montana Artrepreneur Program 2021-22

The Montana Artrepreneur Program (MAP) has been providing a robust program of professional development to Montana’s artists for 15 years. Taught by working artists, MAP demystifies the world of business and affirms the title of “Artist” as a credible profession.

**At the heart of the program is the guiding philosophy that a sustainable career in the arts** is attainable through advancement of proficiency in a chosen medium, a confident articulation of one’s story and purpose as an artist, strategic development of a patron base and proactive engagement in the broader arts community.

**Centered on the development of each artist’s business, MAP provides 40 hours of college-level instruction** that includes first-hand experience with 35 practical business tools, personalized coaching, and field trips to wholesale and retail markets and galleries. Though schedules and methods of delivery vary per cohort, MAC anticipates that at least 50% of the program instruction will occur in person this year. MAP is open to Montana artists of all disciplines.

**Applications are now open through July 29, 2021**

**For more information and to apply, visit <https://art.mt.gov/map> or contact Monica Grable at (406) 444-6522 or [Monica.Grable@mt.gov](mailto:Monica.Grable@mt.gov).**



Rickie van Berkum, fiber artist and Montana Artrepreneur Program coach



## BIRDIE REAL BIRD



By Anna Paige for the Montana Arts Council

“Pandemic beading,” as Birdie Real Bird calls it, helped keep her sane during 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic. “It keeps you thinking and going and being creative. Staying home, people got really depressed, but I didn’t.”

Real Bird, a beadwork artist and member of the Apsáalooke tribe who was raised on the Crow Reservation, isn’t one to stay still. During the pandemic, she started working on a set of parade regalia with intention to enter the finished pieces into the Heard Museum’s annual Indian Fair and Market in Phoenix.

The Heard Museum’s mission is to present stories of American Indian people from a first-person perspective. The 2021 competition, held in March, was the



museum’s 63rd annual event and showcased more than 300 artists from 75 tribal affiliations. Real Bird’s entry, *Horse Medicine*, was awarded second place in the Division E category for culturally based work inspired by tradition, both functional and/or decorative, and she was also honored with the Indian Arts and Crafts Association Commemorative Award.

This was the first competition and art show Real Bird had entered, though she’s been beading since age 12. She had recently sold her personal horse regalia—11 pieces in total—and it was eating at her.

“I felt really bad that I didn’t have anything like that,” said Real Bird. “I decided when the pandemic started, I was going to concentrate on that.”



Real Bird was in a tough situation when she sold her hand-beaded items. Her log home in Garryowen was overtaken with bats. They were hanging from its top beams, making her residence uninhabitable. To mitigate the situation, Real Bird needed a substantial sum, and she knew her hand-beaded horse trappings would fetch it.

**“To live in my house without fear and live there peacefully, I was desperate. So that’s what I did. That was the only thing that I could fall back on. Beading has been very good to me.”**

This wasn’t the first time that particular set of trappings left Real Bird’s possession. It was crafted in the 1980s for the wife of her brother’s friend. The items came back to the family after she passed away, but Real Bird said her brother subsequently sold the collection. “I found all those pieces at a pawn shop, picked them all back up and started adding here and there.”

Other members of the family, including Real Bird’s granddaughters and grandson, and her niece’s daughter, have used the trappings. “Regalia is something that gets shared,” explained Real Bird. “This one that I have right now, I will parade in it before I let anyone else parade in it.”

The new trappings took her a year to complete, but were made in record time. “Well...If you stay home and you don’t go anywhere, you get a lot done,” said Real Bird.

During 2020, Real Bird also walked daily.

“When I’m beading, I do a lot of walking. I bead and I sit for hours, but I get up and I walk several miles a day.”

Real Bird resides in Garryowen, near Medicine Tail Cooley, and adjacent to the Little Bighorn battlefield. “Where I live is where the Cheyenne camped during the battle,” she described.

Real Bird is descended from beadworkers and warriors. Her father, Jim Real Bird, was the grandson of Annie Medicine Crow-Real Bird and Frank Bethune. Annie, known as a skilled beadworker and kind woman who helped raise many of her grandchildren, was the only daughter of Chief Medicine Crow.

Real Bird beads in a style that she learned from observing Apsáalooke artifacts in museum collections. She first began by replicating a martingale she saw in the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, copying the design of the piece that rests on the breastbone of the horse. She then adapted the floral design on the sides of the martingale, which hang from the horse’s neck, into a creation inspired by the late 1800s design.

The original design is characteristic of Crow style, with light blue beads surrounding geometric shapes appearing as an hourglass. The plate is framed with pink beads and has a bold, red-beaded background. Such colors were some of the first beads that Europeans began trading to the Crow in the 1800s.

“Beads saved me,”

described Real Bird, who started beading when she was a teenager.

“If it wasn’t for beads, I would be an alcoholic. In my younger days, it was hard for me. Pretty soon, I let my friends go, and I’d say, ‘I’m going to sit with my beads tonight,’ and that kept happening. Now, through the pandemic, I sat with my beads and created.”

Real Bird said her grandmother taught her how to bead, and instructed her to bead in small circles, around and around to create points. “She

said, ‘If you get these points, you’re going to be a good beader,’ and just kept telling me that...I must have been a good beader, because she trusted me with making medallions.” The two would sell their creations, which were worn as necklaces.

It wasn’t until much later that Real Bird would be interested in replicating traditional Crow designs. “We were just creating our own designs,” she recalled.

Decades later, traditional designs called to her. “I just love the simple, delicate look of their work. They seem so easy, but they weren’t. And, they only had a few colors of beads...navy blue, light blues, turquoise...several colors that Crows used for background color; and then there was red. There was always red.”

As beading became ingrained into the Crow tribe’s fabric and beads became more and more plentiful, the Apsáalooke began to bead elaborately.

“Back in the day, everyone was a beader,” said Real Bird. “Decorating your horse, decorating your kids, decorating your husband and decorating yourself was all part of living. We had to look good, I guess.”

Carrying forward such a tradition, Real Bird admits she has even beaded in her sleep. She’s a scholar of traditional Crow beadwork and frequents museums to study the archives.

“Every time you look, you’ll find something new,” said Real Bird, who most recently spent time in the archives of Chicago’s Field Museum, where she was one of several members of the Crow tribe brought together to present *Apsáalooke Women and Warriors*. The exhibition opened in March 2020, during the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., but it was quickly closed with the rest of the country’s museums. Earlier this year, the Field Museum reopened the exhibit to the public.

*Apsáalooke Women and Warriors*, curated by Nina Sanders, a scholar and member of the Real Bird family, pairs historic and contemporary items from the Crow tribe’s history, held by the Field Museum. It was the first major exhibit curated by a Native American, in collaboration with her community, in the museum’s 126-year history.

Of the archives at the Field Museum, Real Bird said, “It’s a mysterious place, and I’ve been in a lot of archives.” She began a fascination with museum collections in the mid 1990s, when she visited the Peabody Museum in Boston and was able to view their collection of Crow Indian artifacts.

“Ever since then, I’ve been checking into archives and museums,” Real Bird said.

Real Bird is enthusiastic about having a full set of parade regalia again. “I love it. I feel good about it, because I have it, and I’m going to keep it unless someone wants to buy it for \$50,000,” she said with a grin. At the Heard show, every piece was also for sale, and that was the price tag she assigned to her work.

“Those things, you don’t just come by them anytime. It’s a lot of work. That piece of mind in my house, that was more important at the time, but I’m glad I have my other pieces now.”

Images courtesy of Shelby Means Photography





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**Mailing Address:**  
PO Box 202201, Helena, MT 59620-2201

**Street Address:**  
830 N. Warren St., Helena, MT 59620

T: 711 V: 406-444-6430  
Fax 406-444-6548  
website: art.mt.gov  
email: mac@mt.gov  
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JP Gabriel	

All Montana Arts Council members can be reached by email at mac@mt.gov or by mail c/o Montana Arts Council, 830 N. Warren Street, Helena, MT 59620

**MAC Staff**

Tatiana Gant, Executive Director  
tatiana.gant@mt.gov • 406-444-6546

Jenifer Alger, Chief Financial Officer  
jenifer.alger@mt.gov • 406-444-6489

Kristin Han Burgoyne, Deputy Director and Accessibility Coordinator  
kburgoyne@mt.gov • 406-444-6449

Monica Grable, Arts Education Director  
monica.grable@mt.gov • 406-444-6522

Eric Heidle, Communication Director  
eric.heidle@mt.gov • 406-444-6133

Brian Moody, Program Director  
brian.moody2@mt.gov • 406-444-4700

Ginny Newman, Business Specialist  
virginia.newman@mt.gov • 406-444-6354

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