

# Michigan arts





# michigan arts

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# Championing the Arts

AS LEARNING, RESEARCH, AND CONNECTION

The purpose of the Arts Initiative is to center the arts in everything we do at the University of Michigan. It's a mission both ambitious and deeply human. It brings creativity to every dimension of our work and brings our community closer together through collaboration.

But what does centering the arts look like in practice?

It can be seen when students find connection and well-being through shared creative experiences through Arts Rx, our prescribing partnership in which art becomes care. It can be seen in interdisciplinary synthesis, where art intersects engineering, science, and technology to spark new knowledge. It can be seen on a campus where art is a vital part of everyday life.

This second issue of *Michigan Arts Magazine* you now hold brings our vision into focus.

Across these pages, you'll see how the arts enhance learning at Michigan—from pedagogical design projects that merge anatomy and artmaking (p. 6), making creative research a vehicle for active discovery, to Course Connections grants (p. 8), which support faculty in integrating arts-based learning into their courses through artist collaborations, performances, exhibitions, and creative projects that expand how students engage with their learning.

You'll also see how the arts create key pathways for belonging and connection. Programs like our Arts for All workshops (p. 10) open doors for student participation across all disciplines and majors—inviting anyone, regardless of their previous level of arts experience, to step into their creative confidence with some of the world's most accomplished artists as their guide.

Through catalyst programs like

ARIA (pp. 15, 18) and Artists in the Archive (p. 32), faculty discover new ways of working together—leveraging creative practice as a method of inquiry to reveal new insights and dimensions that traditional approaches alone might not.

Collaboration is our method. Whether in partnership with our top tier arts schools and departments, the University Musical Society (p. 22), the University of Michigan Museum of Art (p. 27), Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum, Stamps Gallery, campus libraries, or community organizations, the arts are a bridge—connecting faculty, staff, students, and community members in meaningful and lasting ways.

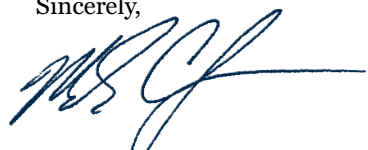
And perhaps most importantly, this year's issue reflects a growing understanding that the arts are essential infrastructure for a thriving university—

## But what does centering the arts look like in practice?

not just an add-on, but a force multiplier that inspires innovation, nurtures our humanity, and helps us navigate an increasingly complex world.

With art alive at its center, the University of Michigan is not only itself transformed, but learning, research, and connection combine to transform the life of every Wolverine.

Sincerely,



**MARK CLAGUE**

*Executive Director, U-M Arts Initiative*



Get the Arts in Your Inbox



# Arts

HELPING  
STUDENTS  
THRIVE  
THROUGH  
THE ARTS

**B**eing a student at the University of Michigan is both rewarding and challenging. In a culture shaped by tight deadlines, high expectations, and perpetual forward motion, students rarely have the space to pause and simply be with one another. Arts Rx creates that space for students—whether through beating a drum, writing a poem, attending a performance at Hill Auditorium, or exploring campus galleries with peers, often alongside people they’ve just met.

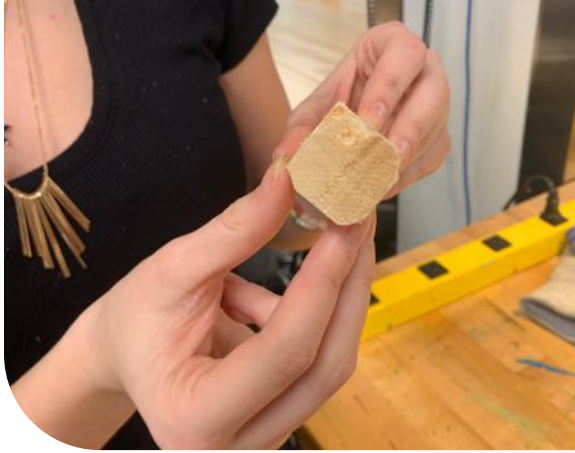
“There’s really nothing like Arts Rx on campus right now,” says Joy Pehlke, director of health promotion and Wolverine Wellness at U-M. “What we’ve heard from students is that they just need to decompress and connect.”

Arts Rx brings together Wolverine Wellness, University Health & Counseling (UHC), the Arts Initiative, and campus arts partners around the simple but radical idea that shared creative experiences support social connection, foster belonging, and promote well-being through self-expression.

By JESSICA JENKS

Arts Initiative Student Engagement Assistant Bella Orelowitz at a student art meetup.





## Arts Rx takes a multidisciplinary approach to treating the whole person.

With the launch of this program, U-M wellness coaches and mental health counselors can refer arts and cultural activities as a non-clinical complement to student care. Arts Rx meets students where they are, offering hands-on arts workshops, student art meetups, and free tickets to performances and events.

“What students really need are more opportunities to enter a state of flow,” Pehlke explains. “Engaging in an environment that involves connection, art activities, and well-being resource awareness all at once can have all sorts of benefits.”

The need for that kind of connection is not just anecdotal—it’s backed by growing data.

### [From Data to Design: Addressing Loneliness Head-On](#)

The need for programs that address mental health through the arts, like Arts Rx, is grounded in evidence. Thousands of [studies compiled by the World Health Organization](#) demonstrate the arts’ impact on human health. On college campuses, surveys such as the [Healthy Minds Study](#) consistently show that loneliness and lack of connection are among students’ top concerns. A [2025 Arts and Loneliness Survey](#) conducted by UHC found similar results, helping to inform this work at U-M.

“Loneliness is a risk factor for a range of issues, from poor academic performance to depression, and it connects to suicide ideation. It’s a red flag,” says Marsha Benz, Wolverine Wellness assistant director, who

oversees the wellness coaching program at U-M. “The arts are a powerful tool to create social connection and to help students thrive on campus and into the future.”

Arts Rx emerged from early conversations among campus leaders and partners, including the U-M Museum of Art; the University Musical Society (UMS); Stamps Gallery; the School of Music, Theatre & Dance; and the Matthaei Botanical Gardens & Nichols Arboretum. It joins other campus programs like [Nature Rx](#) under the banner of [Experience Rx](#)—a university-wide effort that connects individuals to community-based activities as part of a holistic approach to health.

In social prescribing, individuals receive a “prescription” aligned with their goals and interests—designed to foster meaningful experiences and social connection. Especially in the arts, social prescribing reflects a growing recognition that health and healing are managed not only in clinical settings, but through creativity, community, and shared experience.

“Art is an incredible part of society. It has saved me many times and I know that’s true for others,” said Briana Chalker, a licensed professional counselor and board-certified art therapist at UHC’s Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS). “That is the ethos of what we are hoping students will get out of Arts Rx.” The program takes a multidisciplinary approach to what Chalker calls “treating the whole person.”

With strong advocacy from Arts Initiative leadership, including Executive Director Mark Clague, the concept moved from inspiration to implementation.

### [How a “Prescription” Works](#)

Arts Rx operates on both clinical and non-clinical tracks. In the clinical pilot, UHC’s CAPS counselors can refer to Arts Rx programming and incorporate art as part of a student’s care plan. On the non-clinical side, wellness coaches from Wolverine Wellness and “Let’s Talk” facilitators from CAPS serve as link workers—guiding students toward supportive arts experiences.

The process begins with a brief loneliness screening which consists of three targeted questions. When a student screens positive for loneliness, they’re invited to complete a seven-minute Arts Rx survey that explores personal preferences: What kinds of arts experiences appeal to you? Do you prefer small groups? What barriers might prevent you from attending (e.g., transportation, cost, scheduling)?

Students may receive tailored recommendations based on their interests and goals. These can include the Arts Initiative’s free ticket program, [Passport to the Arts](#); hands-on art-making workshops; and [Student Art Meetups](#)—peer-led excursions where groups of students explore the arts together on and off campus. When appropriate, health and well-being staff introduce these opportunities and, if students are



“

Arts interventions designed to address specific health concerns and everyday engagement with arts and culture can lead to positive health outcomes.”

**TESSA BRINZA**

Arts Rx Program Manager and Experience Rx project lead at Wolverine Wellness

interested, help them explore options and sign up for relevant programs.

In practice, those pathways often lead students into shared experiences that feel both accessible and meaningful.

Arts Initiative Student Engagement Assistants Lana Oeschger, a first-year student in the School of Social Work, and Bella Orelowitz, a third-year student in the School of Public Health, lead the student art meetup program. They shared: “This job has been especially meaningful for both of us because we’ve been able to meet such a wide range of students and experience art created both in the community and by U-M students. It’s been inspiring to see how much art is available for free, on such a regular basis. It’s lovely to watch students connect with one another and step outside their comfort

zones. Experiences beyond the routine of school and work are so important—and that’s exactly what art meetups aim to provide. We’re excited to keep finding new opportunities to explore next semester.”

“The connections nurtured by the Student Art Meetups program are key,” Benz says. “Here’s this way I can connect with others without having to work hard at it.”

“Research indicates that both arts interventions designed to address specific health concerns and everyday engagement with arts and culture can lead to positive health outcomes,” says Tessa Brinza, who bridges campus programming as Arts Rx program manager at the Arts Initiative and Experience Rx project lead at Wolverine Wellness. “With so many arts and cultural resources within our campus ecosystem, it is about finding

a balance between these different approaches—being willing to explore innovative models and uplifting the incredible arts programming that already exists.”

Arts experiences are already widely available across campus through Taubman College; Stamps Gallery; and the School of Music, Theatre & Dance. Some partners are even creating custom activities for Arts Rx, like the U-M Museum of Art’s self-guided gallery activity that promotes reflection and mindfulness, the Stamps Gallery Be Well: Art, Design & Wellness Series, or UMS pop-up concerts curated to make art accessible in public spaces.

Even students who don’t screen positive for loneliness are invited to learn more about arts events and join a targeted mailing list. The program’s long-term vision includes expanding referral pathways for Arts Rx—including academic advisors and resident advisors, or even self-referral—and regularly extending Arts Rx opportunities to faculty and staff.

### *Behind the Scenes: Collaboration across Cultures*

While Arts Rx may appear seamless to students, building it required months of coordination behind the scenes, protocol development, and assessment planning to bring together the collaborating arts and health units.

# Mattering *and the* Power *of* Shared Experience

By SARA HOLLIDAY  
Office of the Chief Health Officer

At its heart, Arts Rx is not just about reducing stress or loneliness. It's about mattering, or the belief that you are valued by your community and have value to offer your community in turn.

"Sometimes people are referred to CAPS when they really just need community," Briana Chalker explained. "For many, they really just need a place where they feel like they fit."

Markie Silverman, CAPS associate director of mental health promotion, community engagement, & access, emphasized Arts Rx's proactive philosophy. "This is just good prevention," she said. "Let's take care of people before they have an issue or concern."

This approach addresses both mental health needs and the loneliness epidemic affecting college campuses nationwide. "You can't do healing or arts in isolation," Chalker noted. "I think students on this campus often want to do it all themselves and don't feel comfortable reaching out to the community for healing, entertainment, or non-school based experiences."



"What are we screening for? How do we screen? Are we taking too much time in the appointment?" Pehlke recalls. "It was a lot to iron out."

A defining feature of Arts Rx is its deep campus partnership between arts and health units. This collaboration not only strengthens the program but will also generate published research through the recently launched U-M Institute for Social Prescribing, co-directed by Mark Clague and Dr. Lindsey Mortenson, executive director of UHC and U-M's chief mental health officer for student life. The institute was launched with seed funding from the Impact Institute program in the Office of the Vice President for Research.

To prepare Arts Rx evaluation protocols, a team of arts, health, and professional research staff developed assessment tools and data-tracking systems, with UHC Data Analyst Libby McEvoy playing a key role in shaping the metrics and survey design. While an informal program evaluation has been underway over the past academic year, an IRB-approved study will launch in fall 2026 with two CAPS counselors. Non-clinical pathways will also continue through Wolverine Wellness and Let's Talk.

Bringing together health professionals, artists, researchers, and administrators was never simple. The arts and health sectors often operate in different languages, with different measures of success. Yet that difference proved to be an advantage in developing Arts Rx.

"I've been fortunate enough to be a part of many interdisciplinary teams throughout my career," Brinza

shares. "I always feel a sense of magic when so many diverse perspectives come together. Of course, challenges come up and we have to navigate the different ways that each of us would approach a given problem, but the work is so much better for it."

"It's fabulous to have a true and ongoing collaboration across campus with a variety of departments," Benz reflects. "And we're all working toward the same vision for students: connection."

That shared goal—well-being through community—became the common ground for the development of Arts Rx.

## *Rethinking the Role of the Arts*

Perhaps Arts Rx's most transformative potential lies in how it reframes the arts—not simply as aesthetic enrichment or entertainment, but as part of a new infrastructure for health.

"I don't think the average person thinks about the arts with health and well-being in mind," Pehlke says. "This is another way to think about health—actually, all of these community experiences are what drive well-being."

In that sense, Arts Rx is both innovative and ancestral. It looks forward to scalable social prescribing models, expanded partnerships, and cultural shifts in how all of us seek support. But it also looks back, toward a time when making, gathering, and storytelling were woven into community and daily life.

Five years from now, success may not be measured solely by survey scores or attendance. Instead, it might look like a campus where academic advisors suggest art-making alongside coursework; where students see creative gatherings as essential forms of care; and where visiting an art gallery is recognized not as a luxury, but as a necessity.

In a university culture driven by achievement and anticipation, Arts Rx offers something rare: permission to pause.

And for many students, that pause may be the most powerful prescription of all. **M**



# from Crypt to Canvas

## Arts Initiative-Funded Course Provides the Skeleton for New Approaches to Anatomical Artmaking

By SCOTT MOONEY

**N**ot many undergraduate course schedules include classes at both a dance studio and a dissection lab, but for Melissa Gross, PhD, nothing could be more natural.

While majoring in dance as an undergraduate, Gross took electives in anatomy, kinesiology, and biological anthropology. In one graduate-level course, which involved dissecting a cadaver, she realized how her perspective as a dancer yielded completely different insights from the perspectives of her medically- and anthropologically-minded classmates. Gross credits these early interdisciplinary experiences as “instrumental to me thinking differently.”

Gross’s fascination with the mechanics behind human movement drove her to earn a PhD in kinesiology. It then led her to the University of Michigan, where she is now an associate professor of movement science, director of the Behavioral Biomechanics Laboratory, and an associate professor of art and design. But the appreciation of the artistry of human movement that she developed as a dancer inspired new approaches when she began teaching musculoskeletal anatomy. “The students were just memorizing landmarks, and they weren’t really learning to look at the body... so I started thinking,

how can I get them to train their eyes?” Gross said. She began using art-based activities to encourage students “to start actually looking at the shapes of the bones and the muscles and connecting that to function.”

During a family trip to Florence, Gross went to the [Museum of Natural History, La Specola](#), a museum of anatomical wax figures from the 17th and 18th centuries that broadened her own view of what representations of the body could look like. “The wax versions of these cadavers didn’t look like dead people,” she remembered. “They looked like they were sleeping. They were beautiful. The woman even had pearls on.” This encounter inspired her to create the course “Art and Anatomy in the Italian Renaissance” in collaboration with U-M art historians. As part of the course, students took a trip to Italy to visit museums, churches, and anatomical theaters to examine various representations of the human form by Renaissance artists and anatomists.

One of the most impactful locations the class visited was the Capuchin Crypt in Rome. Starting in the 17th century, monks used the bones of over 3,700 members of their order to create an intricate ossuary of skeletal designs. Gross described exploring the crypt with her students as “an incredibly powerful experience for them, because not only am I running around saying, ‘look,

Students sketch during an 'Art of Anatomy' class led by Melissa Gross at U-M.



there's a calcaneus,' 'look, there's a rib,' but they're seeing these bones arranged decoratively as floral designs, garlands, medallions, and chandeliers." Discussing these creations with one of her students, Gross was struck with an idea: what would happen if students were given their own chance to experiment with bones as an artistic medium? What if she combined the centuries-old design approaches of these Capuchin monks with modern techniques of 3D printing? And that's where the Arts Initiative came in—to help transform Gross's "what if's" into a life-changing course for U-M students.

Gross applied for and received a grant from the Arts

sculptures, drawings, and recurring design motifs. One of Gross's intentions with these artistic activities was to encourage students, whether they were pursuing art or not, to "understand that creativity is something they have—and have not lost."

## What would happen if students were given their own chance to experiment with bones as an artistic medium?

Initiative for her curricular project, which promotes the integration of arts thinking in curricular development and enhances the connection between teaching and the arts. The funding helped Gross partner with art historian Jennifer Gear (PhD '18) to co-design the course and print hundreds of plastic "bones." The result was "Art of Anatomy," a seven-week course that brought together U-M students from various disciplines to explore the interplay between creative expression and the human body.

True to Gross's interdisciplinary mindset, the class connected multiple pedagogical approaches and academic disciplines. For students from art and design backgrounds, "Art of Anatomy" provided a venue to think about the mechanics and kinesthetics of the human form. Meanwhile, Gross saw the course as an opportunity for "STEM students to slow down, get away from memorizing and tap into their creativity, stimulate their curiosity, and understand how valuable art is."

In seven weeks, students took a whirlwind tour through the history of anatomical representations, from 500-year-old anatomical treatises in the depths of the Hatcher Library Special Collections Research Center to [cutting-edge touchscreen tables](#) with 3D anatomical models at the Taubman Health Science Library. The 3D-printed bones encouraged all learners, no matter their academic backgrounds, to create art, including

The class also explored the ethics of anatomical representation, from cultural biases to issues of who owns images of a patient's body. In the final session, students visited the Visualization Studio at the James and Anne Duderstadt Center, where they used virtual and extended reality tools to manipulate 3D bones and create art in a digital space. To Gross's surprise, this last activity engaged students so much that it inspired another new course.

This second iteration of "Art of Anatomy" grew to fourteen weeks, with the additional seven weeks focusing solely on digital methods of anatomical artmaking. Again, the Arts Initiative stepped in to help fund and promote the course, while Gross's colleagues at the Duderstadt Center helped with its technical aspects, even creating a virtual gallery where the students' creations could be viewed. Once again, students from various departments responded with enthusiasm and curiosity as they brought their unique perspectives to the interdisciplinary work.

The impact of the original grant has continued to ripple outwards, from its start in the depths of an Italian crypt to outcomes across the U-M campus. Gross intends to offer the course again in the future, and, in the meantime, it has informed her scholarship—she's currently at work on a paper exploring the ways in which the course used art-based pedagogy to nurture creativity and experiential learning. Gross said the course even encouraged some students to consider a future career in biomedical visualization.

Yet Gross hopes that all of her students walk away with something more universal and vitally human: "Hopefully, they'll take away an appreciation of the humanity in anatomy and not separate it, but always understand that it's people we're talking about." **M**

# Learning *by* Doing Art

By NATALIA HOLTZMAN



Students create VR sculptures in the Visualization Studio, view a Zoom demonstration led by Niels van der Donk, and share final animation frames by Jasper Morris and Jaden Serafin.

**Avery Lawrence, lecturer** at the Stamps School of Art and Design, says he “love[s] teaching as an opportunity to be performative and playful and experimental.”

In his quest to make his classes as engaging, collaborative, and enriching as possible, Lawrence has been awarded several Course Connections grants, an Arts Initiative funding program that helps faculty to bring arts-based learning into their classroom.

The grants, which are awarded in amounts of up to \$1,000, can be used to pay for admission to museums or arts performances, workshops from visiting artists, art making supplies, or expenses for other arts-related course projects. Faculty, staff, and graduate student instructors from the Ann Arbor, Flint, and Dearborn campuses are all eligible for funding and may apply twice each semester.

Lawrence, for example, used one of his Course Connections grants to host a virtual workshop with YONK, a renowned animation studio based in the Netherlands.

Over the course of two sessions held in a Duderstadt Center computer lab, Lawrence’s students were taught to “sculpt” in Virtual Reality (VR) “and then how to take those digital sculptures and animate them with [a 3D modeling/animation software called] Blender,” he says.

Lawrence laughed when remembering the creation process. By pressing the trigger on the hand controller, users “spray a substance that holds its form in the virtual, three-dimensional space, and then you can build around and off of that.”

Lawrence held the workshop in a computer lab equipped with VR headsets. Both he and his students got a kick out of the experience, he

says, “just flailing around in front of computers... wearing these ridiculous headsets.”

A year later, Lawrence offered the workshop again—but this time he was able to teach it on his own, using what he’d already learned from YONK. The Course Connections grant, which covered YONK’s fee, “created an opportunity that has benefited my teaching long-term,” he says.

Course Connections encourages faculty to incorporate what Alison Rivett, director of operations for the Arts Initiative calls “high-impact project-based art learning models” into their classrooms. Or, put another way, “ways to actually *do* the art or *be with* artists.”

Course Connections grants promote a kind of exploratory, engaged learning, Rivett says, one where “you’re not just talking about it—you’re doing it.” Rivett sees this as a way for learning to “become more real” as students begin to embody learning and knowledge.

Course Connections also solves a practical problem. In today’s financial environment, it can be hard for individual faculty to get small amounts of money for course enrichment. Some students cannot afford to add the cost of a concert ticket or museum entrance to their expenses, so Course Connections allows a faculty member to add arts and creativity to a course while making it equitable and accessible to all.

Rivett believes that knowledge in the classroom can be hypothetical, whereas “when you have a class visitor come in who’s actually working in that area, you start to feel like, ‘this is how practicing artists are really working.’” Students are given a sense of what “doing the thing in the world” might actually look like.

Lawrence later used a separate Course Connections grant to fund a public showcase of a semester-long collaboration between his own “Introduction to Animation” class and an acting class at U-M taught by Antonio Disla, clinical assistant professor of theatre & drama. Disla’s acting students performed monologues that Lawrence’s students then created animated characters to deliver—essentially having the characters lip sync the monologues.

“With animation, you’re building everything from the ground up; you are creating your entire world,” Lawrence says. “It’s fun to see students use their imaginations to do that.”

Some of the students “nailed it,” Lawrence says. “You made a character come to life,” he told them. But the experience was also meant to allow students to collaborate with artists in another field.

Lawrence too often sees students on campus siloed by discipline, where engineering students are separated from arts students, for example. Or they can be siloed within a specific arts practice, such as acting students interacting only with other acting students or animation students with other animation students.

But in the “real world,” he adds, artists, like everyone else, have to know how to work well with a wide variety of people, and he uses collaboration as a way of “busting through the silos within art practices.”

“Education is an inherently social endeavor,” says Rivett. Relationships among students and between students and faculty are important, and Course Connection funds can be used to support those relationships.

At the end of the semester, Lawrence and Disla rented a room at Ann Arbor’s State Theatre, where students were invited to share their work on the big screen. That aspect of the project made the work seem “more real,” in Rivett’s terms: students could view their work as any other actor or animator would—not just within the confines of a classroom.

That’s precisely the purpose of the Course Connections program, says Rivett—but it can also have an added benefit: placing students in the community as audience members. Streaming music at home isn’t the same thing as going to a live show, she adds, where you can feel the “people around you experiencing it with you.”

That “collective experience” is valuable in and of itself, Rivett says: “It sparks discussion.” **M**

The graphic features a blue microphone icon with radiating lines above the text. The text is in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. Below the main title, it says "A MICHIGAN ARTS PODCAST" and "POWERED BY THE" followed by a yellow "M" logo and "ARTS INITIATIVE". To the right is a QR code. Below the QR code, it says "SCAN TO LISTEN" and "Tap into Creative Currents wherever you get your podcasts."

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# More than a WORKS

How Arts  
for All Is  
Connecting  
Campus

By JESSICA JENKS



Participants mend and create together during a Mending Lab workshop at U-M Flint.

and collaboration. This past fall, the Arts Initiative co-hosted nine workshops with nine teaching artists and welcomed participants from across the University—undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff alike. Offered to participants free of charge with all materials provided, the workshops emphasize low-barrier access, creative exploration, and inclusive programming.

Zamora-Gómez partners with departments and units across U-M from ideation to execution, collaborating to bring local and visiting teaching artists to campus together creating opportunities to make art and engage new audiences in existing spaces on campus. These experiential workshops often take the form of classroom visits or pop-up workshops at places like Matthaei Botanical Gardens & Nichols Arboretum (MBGNA); the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) Humanities Gallery; or the Shapiro Gallery (yes, there’s an art gallery inside Shapiro Library!)



Félix Zamora-Gómez

“We see faculty bringing their classes, as well as people who have a personal connection to MBGNA. The audience [at the Arts for All workshops] is a real mix—faculty, staff, and students—for the most part it’s non-arts majors who are looking for a creative outlet they might not otherwise have,” says Andrea Clark, University outreach and education coordinator with MBGNA. “What’s so powerful about these workshops is that they introduce people to our space—inviting new audiences to engage with us in a fun, accessible way.”

Stephen Griffes, director of outreach and event services at the U-M Library, underscored Clark’s point: “A big challenge for us is thinking about how to engage people who are already here—and how to introduce them to spaces they might not even know exist.” For example, the Clark Commons, which includes the Shapiro Gallery, in the Shapiro Library opened in 2023 primarily as a study space, but the U-M Library also wanted to provide a space for

**A**s I spoke with colleagues across the University of Michigan—from galleries to libraries to gardens—they all echoed a similar sentiment about what the Arts Initiative Workshops Program has made possible: a shared space and a sense of belonging within a large university.

The Arts Initiative’s Arts for All Workshops Program began in 2024 through a unique partnership with the College of Engineering’s Department of Nuclear Engineering and Radiological Sciences. In its first iteration, neuroscience graduate students created monoprints in a workshop led by Ann Arbor artist Sajeew Visweswaran. The program has since expanded under the leadership of Arts Initiative Program Coordinator for Engagement Félix Zamora-Gómez. What started as a small series of drop-in workshops has grown over the past year and a half into a broader ecosystem of partner-led arts programming

“

Multi-generational, cross-disciplinary connections are things you don't fully appreciate until you see them happening.”



**STEPHEN GRIFFES**  
Director of outreach and event services  
at the U-M Library

student engagement activities. “The Shapiro Gallery has a very student-driven mission, so exhibitions and programs really need to feel peer-to-peer. This partnership with the Arts Initiative creates an opportunity to catch students while they're already on campus and invite them into activities they might not otherwise experience,” said Griffes. “What's especially powerful is seeing an undergraduate student sitting next to a faculty member from a completely different discipline—those multi-generational, cross-disciplinary connections are things you don't fully appreciate until you see them happening.”

Another recurring theme in conversations with staff and faculty was appreciation for the Arts Initiative's marketing support and its ability to bring new audiences into campus spaces. “A lot of our programming is designed for undergraduates who already use the space, but the way the Arts Initiative promotes its events—emphasizing that they're for all people and all levels of artists—brings in entirely new audiences. Actually seeing and hearing students talk about what these experiences mean to them is incredibly rewarding,” said Griffes.

“The shared marketing was incredibly successful—being jointly sponsored really helped extend our reach” said Clark. “What stood out most wasn't just the numbers, but the quality of participation and the relationships that formed as a result. Turnout is always wonderful, and it's never just students. We've had participants from U-M Flint, an ICU nurse, staff members, and people who bring friends along. It creates this welcoming ‘bring a friend, meet new people’ atmosphere that makes the experience especially meaningful.”



Jamie Lausch Vander Broek

In conversations with U-M staff across disciplines, a persistent sentiment emerged: many partners shared that this work simply would not be possible without the Arts Initiative—particularly for smaller teams navigating large institutional structures. Clark shared: “Working with the Arts Initiative makes me more confident that people will come to the event, and that talented artists will want to lead it.”

Caitlin Jacobs, sustainability program manager in LSA, described how that support translated into real capacity during Climate Week. “As a small team of two within a much larger campus ecosystem, the Arts Initiative makes it possible for us to take on projects that meaningfully engage students.”

Within Climate Week's “Together for Tomorrow” theme, Jacobs and her colleagues imagined integrative programming—like the [monarch butterfly project](#)—that offered a hopeful, creative entry point into climate work. “We had a goal of creating 2,000 to 3,000 monarch butterflies,” she said, “and having that extra support made it possible for us to say yes to this workshop.”

“It's incredibly helpful to know there's a group I can turn to—whether I need something as small as glue or as big as a sounding board for a new idea,” Jacobs added. “Having the Arts Initiative as a resource makes it easier for us to say ‘yes, and’ instead of ‘no’ when new ideas come up.”

Jacobs noted that the success of the workshop also served as a proof of concept. “Students loved it. It's something we're already thinking about expanding and integrating into other programming at LSA.”

Another common thread that emerged was a shared appreciation for the organic cross-pollination and collaboration that resulted. When asked how the idea for their workshop series originated, Ed Diven, gallery coordinator for the LSA Institute for the Humanities,



explained: “The idea for the workshop series came out of conversations with Jamie Lausch Vander Broek (U-M Library), who suggested partnering with Félix and the Arts Initiative—especially since Amanda Krugliak [the Institute for the Humanities arts curator] had worked with Félix before. For exhibiting artists, the real benefit of this kind of workshop is the hands-on component. The Arts Initiative was especially helpful with gathering materials, drawing on supplies from past workshops, and the structure stayed intentionally flexible. The response to new ideas is always very positive, and the team is open-minded and eager to help problem-solve.”

Vander Broek—librarian for art, design, and art history and the book arts curator at the U-M Library—said, “Without the Arts Initiative, the Book Arts Studio would be doing fundamentally different programming.”

Vander Broek built on this theme, noting the value of drawing multi-generational audiences together: “There’s a real mix of students, faculty, and community members in these workshops. They all coexist at the University, but there are very few things that actually bring those different groups together. The Arts Initiative has been amazing at helping us get people in the door to experience this space and its content in a hands-on way.”

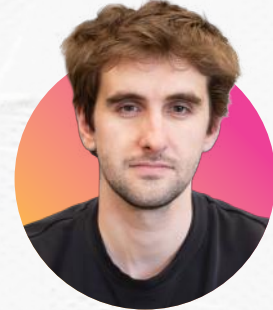
For Haley Perkins, public programs and engagement officer for Stamps Gallery, the Arts for All workshops opened new doors to engagement. “Working with the Arts Initiative created new avenues for Stamps Gallery to connect our exhibitions with audiences who had previously never been to or heard of the gallery. These workshops furthered our goal of using contemporary art to catalyze conversation and action around the urgent questions of our time.”

Arts for All workshops also complement Arts Rx programming and have a positive impact on well-being and connection. Students and staff alike described them as opportunities to unplug, try something new in a calming environment, and meet people outside their program or unit. These low-pressure, hands-on experiences created space for restoration, curiosity, and belonging—outcomes increasingly essential to a thriving campus life.

One idea surfaced again and again: workshops are not endpoints, but entryways. Zamora-Gómez agrees, “We see



Andrea Clark



Ed Diven



Caitlin Jacobs



Haley Perkins

workshops not just as events, but as pathways. They invite anyone—regardless of background or experience—to step into the process of creation. And when our partners embrace that same ethos, the impact multiplies.”

For the Arts Initiative’s Executive Director Mark Clague, the goal extends beyond producing individual workshops. This vision includes building long-term capacity and supporting units eager to bring hands-on art-making into their own spaces. “Our workshops remind people that creativity is a fundamentally human gift—it’s a practice anyone can and should nurture,” says Clague. “Making art makes us all better at what we do and Arts for All works with partners to bring that message to everyone.”

Through key partnerships with the U-M Library, MBGNA, LSA’s Institute for the Humanities, Stamps Gallery, the Bridge Scholars Program, the International Center, and student-facing units like LSA@Play and the Lab Swap Shop, the Arts Initiative is helping build a more connected and less siloed campus. To get involved in the Arts for All program, visit [arts.umich.edu](https://arts.umich.edu) to see the workshop calendar or to request support to bring art making to your unit. **M**



# How Arts Research Expands the Boundaries of Learning

By JESSICA JENKS

“Documentaries are research-based projects, much like any other discipline,” says Adam Sekuler, assistant professor of journalism and media production in the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters at UM-Dearborn. “You spend deep time with people and learn the histories of these spaces, but the focus evolves. And in our case, that evolution was made possible in large part by ARIA funding.”

Sekuler’s documentary film, *Untitled Clifftop Documentary*, was made possible by a nearly \$25,000 grant from the Arts Research: Incubation & Acceleration (ARIA) program, a collaboration between the U-M Arts Initiative and the Office of the Vice President for Research. Awarded through a rigorous and competitive peer review process, ARIA supports faculty from across the University who are advancing arts research and creative practice—a powerful approach for discovery that connects scholarship to lived experience.

Sekuler’s feature-length film captures the essence of the Appalachian String Band Music Festival, or “Clifftop,” in Clifftop, W.Va. For two weeks each summer, more than 4,000 musicians gather in the woods around “their shared love of traditional Americana old-time



Adam Sekuler and U-M student production assistant Ava Abramowicz capture footage for the *Untitled Clifftop Documentary*, filming on location in Clifftop, West Virginia.

music,” playing music with each other around the clock—some even falling asleep as fiddles and banjos echo through the hills.

Sekuler, one of UM-Dearborn’s interdisciplinary consortium of arts-focused faculty members, was drawn to Clifftop for both its music and its social complexities. “You see people from totally different backgrounds and politics (libertarians, conservatives, punk kids, anarchists) all coexisting in the same space around the music,” he notes. “The music creates a bridge between these communities that in the rest of our society don’t seem to be engaging with each other anywhere else.” Such connection across differences has become the central focus of the documentary. “We began by documenting the nonstop music experience,” Sekuler says, “but over

time uncovered an unexpected social and political layer to the festival.”

Filmmaking is time and resource intensive. Sekuler’s grant played a critical role in bringing the project to completion. Building on earlier support from the Dearborn Scholars and Experience+ programs, ARIA provided resources to finish the film, including a final trip to Clifftop and travel expenses for a UM-Dearborn student to serve as a production assistant. It also connected him with colleagues in Ann Arbor whose research overlapped with Sekuler’s own.

For Sekuler, ARIA represents more than a grant program. It is a vital investment in faculty and students whose work sits at the intersection of art, research, and public engagement across all three campuses. “This kind of support is critical for researchers like me in a big institution, and it does support faculty from all three campuses, not just Ann Arbor,” he says. “ARIA shows that the University of Michigan values arts research as a life-changing educational force: one that expands how, where, and with whom learning happens.” **M**

Footnote: The documentary is a collaboration with independent filmmaker Varvara Degtiarenko and musician **Lyle Werner**, whom Sekuler met at an outdoor theater performance in New Orleans focused on Appalachian music, leading to a conversation that sparked his interest in Clifftop.



# Three Campuses, One Creative Community

By BRITTANY MOSELEY

2025 Knight-Wallace Arts Journalism Fellow

**T**hrough **Art on the Move**, students, faculty, and staff at the UM-Flint and UM-Dearborn campuses can experience the creative and cultural offerings of the UM-Ann Arbor campus while fostering connections among students from across the University of Michigan's three campuses. Past Art on the Move outings have included attending a performance by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the University Musical Society (UMS) Choral Union and visits to the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) and Stamps Gallery.

Audrey Banks, Arts Initiative project and administrative coordinator, oversees Art on the Move and other tri-campus collaborations. The response from participants who attended the fall semester events was overwhelmingly positive. Banks, who is based at the UM-Flint campus and works with the Arts Initiative at UM-Ann Arbor, said several students have asked her about future trips to Ann Arbor.

"Students are so involved in their unit—what their projects are and what they're doing—that pursuing anything outside of that on their own can feel almost impossible," Banks said.

Shelby Newport, chair of the department of fine and performing arts at the UM-Flint campus, has worked with Banks on several cross-campus events. She noted that many UM-Flint students rarely travel outside the county, and access to transportation is often a barrier to attending events outside of Flint. Art on the Move makes it possible for those students to explore the arts and cultural identities of different cities within the state of Michigan.

"Flint's campus has about 8,000 students, and less than 10% of them live on campus. So it's a huge commuter campus," Newport said. "So on-campus life looks different than it does in Ann Arbor. Getting students together—even if it's a group of 20—you've gathered people to do something together, and that seems pretty meaningful."

Introducing UM-Flint students to the UM-Ann Arbor campus is just one facet of cross-campus collaborations. Last January, Banks took a group of UM-Ann Arbor students to Flint for the city's monthly ARTWALK. She also took UM-Flint psychology students on an Art on the Move excursion to the Museum of Illusions Detroit. She's also collaborating with the University of Michigan Detroit Center on a large-scale art exhibition titled *21st Century Natural-Industrial Landscapes*, bringing together students, faculty, and community artists.

"The spotlight on multi-campus language brings me lots of hope," Newport said. "We can celebrate the arts identities of each campus, while lifting one another up."

Looking ahead, Banks is expanding Art on the Move to the UM-Dearborn campus and continuing to build sustainable relationships with faculty and staff across the whole of the university.

"Every program, every workshop, everything that I do is that five-year plan of: how do I keep it sustainable? How can I keep this running?" Banks said. "And forming these partnerships to the point where, eventually I can just walk into UMMA and see a group of UM-Flint students or UM-Dearborn students, and I didn't facilitate it." **M**

# “That Heartbeat Feeling”

## STUDENTS TEACH STUDENTS THROUGH ARTS INITIATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

By SCOTT MOONEY

**T**hunderous drums, clashing gongs, the metallic patterns of percussion—the sounds of *samulnori* are not the typical accompaniment for a visit to U-M’s innovative IdeaHub, but that was part of the point for those attending the *samulnori* workshop. A neotraditional genre of Korean percussion drawing from traditional farmers’ music, *samulnori* uses different sized drums and gongs to evoke the sounds of rain, wind, clouds, and thunder. Leading students through this new soundscape was ethnomusicology PhD candidate Sunhong Kim, director of Sinaboro, a campus *samulnori* ensemble.

The event was part of the Arts Initiative’s Learn/With workshops co-created with one of U-M’s many arts-focused student organizations. Led by students for students, these opportunities invite peers to try something new, while connecting them to a network of dynamic student organizations. In recent workshops, attendees practiced Brazilian social dancing with the Zouk Dance Club; sharpened their improv comedy chops with the Improprofessionals; and relaxed with hot cocoa and knitting with the Very Important Primates, a volunteer organization that creates eco-friendly crafts. Each event opens doors to students without experience, providing instruction, supplies, and encouragement. And whether learners find their new favorite hobby or just enjoy a few hours of pressure-free artmaking, Learn/With programs build invaluable connections among the campus community.

Kim’s own journey to becoming the director of Sinaboro exemplifies both this focus on communal creativity and a willingness to experiment with new artistic pursuits. Growing up in the Republic of Korea, Kim originally trained to play the *p’iri*—a traditional double-reed wind instrument—placing in national competitions and earning multiple degrees. After deciding to pursue a doctorate in

ethnomusicology, Kim left her home country to come to the University of Michigan.

“To be honest, when I came to the United States,” she said, “I never imagined that I was going to perform traditional Korean music again,” as she thought there would be no interest in the genre from an American audience. But in Ann Arbor, Kim was inspired by other members of the Asian and Asian American communities sharing their cultures and identities. In 2022, she received word that students wanted to include a percussion performance in an upcoming concert featuring traditional Korean music alongside contemporary forms like K-pop. Despite Kim not having much experience with percussion performance, “when there was this need,” she said, “I felt I should step in.”

What began as a single performance turned into Kim reactivating Sinaboro, a Korean percussion ensemble founded at U-M in 1998 but that disbanded because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kim tracked down the club’s instruments in storage and used its archives to translate and arrange music. As the club came back to life, Kim emphasized the labor involved by the ensemble members, as they rehearsed, performed, and kept their instruments in pristine condition. Their greatest effort, however, has been recruiting new performers.

Most Sinaboro members find out about the club through word of mouth. Other recruits were so affected by a Sinaboro performance that they had to give performing a try. One student described hearing the loud, sonorous drums and thinking back to the marching drums from the *Lord of the Rings* movies. Another student described being at his first Sinaboro concert and feeling his heart rate change to match the speed of the percussion, inspiring him to join. “He wanted to feel that heartbeat feeling again,” Kim said. Still other Sinaboro members joined as a result of the Learn/With workshop.

By showcasing the talent and joy of students that make the campus arts scene so vibrant, the Arts Initiative encourages students to connect with one another and to discover something new about themselves, such as a new talent or creative passion. Learn/With workshops provide anyone on campus with the opportunity to lose themselves in the joy of learning alongside their peers. For Kim, this is a beautiful echo of the drumbeats of *samulnori* music that connect Korean farmers. “Music shapes the way we can educate a community,” she says, “and make sense of belonging.” **M**





# NYAMI NYAMI

# Water Never Lies

By JESSICA JENKS

**Michael Gould, a professor of percussion** at the School of Music, Theatre & Dance (SMTD), the Residential College (LSA) and director of the Center for World Performance Studies, has spent decades building bridges across disciplines—between engineers and artists, scientists and musicians, North Campus and Central Campus.

That instinct toward collaboration sits at the heart of *Nyami Nyami—Water Never Lies*, a multimedia installation exploring the ecological and cultural consequences of the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River between the African nations of Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project brings together sculpture, sound, technology, and performance, weaving scientific climate data with ancestral memory. At its center stands Nyami Nyami, a serpent river deity from Chidzimbahwe oral histories, a guardian spirit embodying nature's resistance to human intervention.

Gould's path to the project began years earlier with another climate-driven work in the classroom inspired by geophysicist Henry Pollack's book *A World Without Ice*. Funded for a decade by the Rockefeller Family Fund-Wiener Foundation,

Gould took on a new project working with U-M professor of music **Stephen Rush** where they layered Pollack's photographs of melting ice with newly composed piano music based on climate data. For the installation, Gould suspended blocks of ice above drums that melt in real time to accompany the film, transforming glacial melt into rhythm.

"I've always been interested in eccentric, crazy stuff," Gould says with a grin. But beneath the experimentation was a throughline: listening to water as a witness.

That sensibility found new depth when Gould reconnected with Zimbabwean artist **Masimba Hwati** (MFA '19), whom Gould mentored through the Center for World Performance Studies. Hwati's 2022 sound sculpture, *Ngoromera*, is featured in the permanent installation of the University of Michigan Museum of Art's African art collection. He is known for constructing sculptural instruments from reclaimed materials (e.g., spears, guitars, found objects) each infused with personal and socio-political symbolism. Together, the two artists merged their artistic histories and research areas.



That's my forte.  
Bringing ecosystems  
together.”

**MICHAEL GOULD**

Professor of percussion at the School of Music, Theatre & Dance

The result was an installation of sculpture, sound, and performance that treats history as something alive. “The Zebra Collective,” the name under which Gould and Hwati collaborate, builds “sound-worlds” shaped by rupture and persistence. Water pools atop perforated drumheads, forming reflective surfaces. Thirty electric guitars, fitted with spear-like extensions, become both sculpture and sounding mechanism. Some are activated live; others hum with prerecorded tracks created by Gould with guest collaborator Daniel Pinilla, a jazz guitarist and clinical assistant professor of music at U-M. Pinilla helped create some of the atmospheric sounds of *Nyami Nyami* by utilizing the same guitars used in the installation.

The serpent deity, Nyami Nyami, is not simply represented; it is invoked. The deity informs the structure and spatialization of sound: an echo that moves through performers’ bodies and reverberates in the audience. The installation becomes less a memorial and more a ritual of listening.

With support from an Arts Research: Incubation & Acceleration (ARIA) grant, a joint initiative funded by the Arts Initiative and the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) the team secured an artist residency in Johannesburg in 2025. ARIA funding made the trip feasible, opening doors to performances, lectures, and interviews broadcast across several countries. They later installed the work at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe and met the South

African photographer [Arthur Dlamini](#), who created striking portraits of the two artists.

Back in Ann Arbor, U-M associate professor of civil and environmental engineering and ARIA Co-Principal Investigator [Aline Cotel](#), an expert in river flow dynamics, contributed scientific insight that will eventually shape both the installation’s visual and sonic dimensions. U-M professor of ceramics [Susan Crowell](#) has created bowls for the installation embedded with iconography from Zimbabwean divination tablets, too fragile to travel abroad, but slated for future iterations.

The team plans to return to Zimbabwe to install the work along the Zambezi River itself, collaborating with local musicians and tribes. There, scientific data and ancestral narrative could meet at the water’s edge.

For Gould, the project embodies the Arts Initiative and OVPR’s interdisciplinary promise. “That’s my forte,” he says. “Bringing ecosystems together.”

But the deeper aim is experiential. The trance-like music elevates listeners beyond their everyday rhythms. The installation builds a world apart: one where viewers encounter themselves, and the planet, differently.

In a time of accelerating climate crisis, *Nyami Nyami* offers neither easy answers nor spectacle. Instead, it asks us to listen to the water, to the living history of the Zambezi River, and to the vibrations that persist despite rupture.

Because water, after all, never lies. **M**

# a seat at the Table

EXPANDING ACCESS TO THE ARTS

By JESSICA JENKS

**B**efore he was a PhD candidate in English language and literature, Nathan Omprasadham was a performer.

As a teenager, he competed in spoken word poetry and immersed himself in theater through his school system. “Engaging in art bridged the gap for everything I cared about,” he says.

Graduate school brought a different tempo. In the face of all that his program demanded, expectations diverged and the rigor intensified. The outcomes felt more consequential, yet Nathan found himself missing a creative outlet and the collaborative messiness of making art with other people.

The University of Michigan Arts Initiative’s Student Creative Fellowship (SCF) offered a way back to creativity in the midst of his fourth year in graduate school.



Actor and lead artist facilitator John Cameron Mitchell presents with Director of Operations Alison Rivett.



Nathan Omprasadham presents his final project at the Student Creative Fellowship showcase.

Open biennially to undergraduate and graduate students from any U-M school or college, the SCF invites participants to develop interdisciplinary projects inspired by a shared theme. This year’s theme: “Art Is for All.” Awardees included 15 undergraduate students and 10 graduate students, five of which were Graduate Student Arts Research Grant (GSARG) awardees from the prior year. Fellows received a \$300 stipend and access to additional funds for project materials.

The 25 students represented disciplines from education, computer science, and medicine to art and design and included participants from all three U-M campuses. Creative fellows worked in multiple art forms, such as book- and zine-making, 3D printing, and digital installation, to name a few.

“The incredible range of creative fellowship students from across the university proves we need more spaces where anyone proves we can join and meet others through a shared interest in creative expression,” says Alison Rivett, the Arts Initiative’s director of operations.

This fall, fellows worked with lead artist facilitator John Cameron Mitchell, an internationally recognized actor, writer, and director best known for the stage musical and later film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (1998, 2001), as well as feature films including *Shortbus* (2006), *Rabbit Hole* (2010), and *How to Talk to Girls at Parties* (2017). With decades of experience across stage, screen, television, and “audio cinema,” Mitchell brought both wisdom and play to the room.

“Creativity springs in fertile places and this is one of them,” he says of U-M. For Mitchell, the SCF is especially

important because it allows students to try new things and grow both as artists and people.

Omprasadhham's final project had two intertwined components: culinary and textual. He prepared Sri Lankan dishes that echoed the story's themes and the country's colonial history, photographing the food as visual companions to the narrative. At the same time, his group designed and bound a handmade book: editing, illustrating, and typesetting the final product. "If we're including everyone, it's got to include us [scholars and writers from Sri Lanka]," Omprasadhham says. "We need a seat at the table as well."

"It was my writing, but I couldn't have done it without the group," he says. "The Arts Initiative helped me bring it to life. Félix Zamora-Gómez, [Arts Initiative program coordinator for engagement], guided me through everything from printing to setting up the gallery."

Collaboration shaped the fellowship's final projects. Working with a small team of fellows, including [Creative Careers Resident Willie Cornish, Jr.](#), Omprasadhham received support with food photography, illustration, layout, and binding. While he led the cooking and writing, others helped bring the object into being.

John Cameron Mitchell floated in and out of groups, "a wise sage," Omprasadhham calls him, offering perspective without imposing direction.

SCF was structured to encourage that kind of shared authorship. In the first few weeks, students were encouraged to play, experiment, and talk with one another about their skill sets and what they brought to the table.

"The Student Creative Fellowship was really special to me because it broke down the distinctions between students from different departments, different life stages, and even different campuses," Omprasadhham reflects. "I went in thinking I had an idea of what my project was going to be, but meeting so many incredible creative people shaped my work in a way that I could have never imagined."

By November 2025, the 25 fellows presented projects ranging from recipe and picture books and zines, to documentary films and installations—including a capsule dispenser that offered poetry prompts and tiny tokens. Some works were polished; others were just beginnings.

"This is just the start," Mitchell says of the fellowship's impact.

For Omprasadhham, the SCF offered more than a project. It offered a seat at the creative table, a supportive community and an opportunity to infuse his academic research with creative experimentation. Though the fellowship lasts only a semester, the creative mindset it fosters—encouraging exploration, collaboration, and innovative approaches to art-making—leaves a lasting impact long after the showcase ends. **M**

“

Creativity  
springs in  
fertile places  
and this is  
one of them.”

JOHN CAMERON  
MITCHELL



Discover more  
about student  
arts bunding



2025 Creative Careers Resident Abigail Lowe (center) leads a group of participants at the Student Creative Fellowship showcase.

UMS CENTERS PARTNERSHIP  
IN A CAMPUS-WIDE  
ARTS MILESTONE



# Beyond the Stage

By **LILIAN VARNER**  
University Musical Society

**I**n January 2026, within a studio at the U-M School of Music, Theatre & Dance (SMTD), 31 students learned to move not just with grace, but with gravity. They were practicing the legendary “contraction and release”—physical vocabulary pioneered by Martha Graham that revolutionized modern dance—as part of a UMS residency with the Martha Graham Dance Company (MGDC), which would feature the students in two of the company’s performances at the Power Center.

This residency, part of the MGDC’s centennial “GRAHAM100” tour, encapsulates the University Musical Society’s (UMS) mission. With its 148th season beginning in September 2026, UMS has long served as a bridge welcoming the world’s most elite artists to Michigan.

#### *A Boundary-Pushing Mentorship*

The centerpiece of the Martha Graham collaboration was the choreographer’s 1935 work *Panorama*. A grueling, ten-minute athletic test of jumping and running, the work is a masterpiece

“  
I knew our new  
dancers would  
be hungry  
and ready.”

**JILLIAN HOPPER**  
SMTD clinical assistant professor of dance

of modern movement. Opening doors usually reserved for advanced dancers, this collaboration prioritized welcoming a cast of primarily first-year students on stage, immersing them in the high-stakes world of professional performance.

“I knew our new dancers would be hungry and ready,” said Jillian Hopper, SMTD clinical assistant professor of dance. The behind-the-scenes reality involved an intensive four-day staging residency in October with Kim Jones, a retired Graham member, in which the dance was restaged in record-breaking time. In the months leading up to the performance, students spent their weekly rehearsals and gaps between classes honing Graham’s famously difficult style.

### *Multi-Disciplinary Impact*

The residency’s impact rippled beyond the dance studio and across three distinct performance programs. The collaboration ensured that the Graham legacy was felt throughout the university’s musical landscape: in addition to the 31 dancers in *Panorama*, the U-M Contemporary Directions Ensemble provided live music for Graham’s iconic *Appalachian Spring*, while a student musician also performed live solo piano for *Lamentation*.

To ensure a true breadth of interaction, UMS coordinated a suite of opportunities for university students and faculty, K-12 educators, and the broader community. Visiting artists moved directly into U-M classrooms, connecting Graham’s technique to themes of community and artistic innovation in three different U-M courses. Beyond the lecture hall, SMTD students participated in a masterclass, Graham dancers visited local schools for 11 in-class workshops,

and over 500 regional K-12 students attended a School Day Performance.

The public was invited into the Graham Company process through an interactive UMS You Can Dance community workshop in Ypsilanti, where dancers of all skill levels experienced the Graham aesthetic firsthand.

### *A Legacy of Partnership, A Future of Discovery*

Beyond the stage, this residency exemplified the unique opportunities UMS facilitates for the University and the community. By acting as a catalyst for uncommon and engaging experiences, UMS strives to integrate the professional artistry of visiting creators into the very heart of the University’s academic and research mission.

“Since 1970, UMS has brought the Martha Graham Dance Company to Ann Arbor nearly 30 times. This 50-year relationship is more than a series of performances; it is a shared commitment to the evolution of the arts,” said Mark Jacobson, UMS vice president of programming and production. “Seeing first-year dance students sharing the stage with world-class professionals—and performing to live music by their peers—is seeing the impact of our work at its most potent.”

As UMS looks ahead to its 150th season in 2028/29, the University and the broader community can continue to expect this level of world-class artistry and immersive educational opportunities. UMS remains committed to hosting transformative residencies that challenge students and enrich Michigan’s cultural landscape. The upcoming season, running from September 2026 to April 2027, will bring a new array of global visionaries to the University of Michigan’s storied stages. **M**



# Puppets *Without* Borders

## Anima Théâtre Highlights Humanity Behind Migration During Taubman College Collaboration

By ERIC GALLIPPO

Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

When Anya Sirota first saw Anima Théâtre perform *Rebetiko* in a Paris suburb, she wasn't prepared for how much the puppet show would move her.

"The artistry was extraordinary, but what stayed with me was the way migration was rendered," she says. "Fragile and strong at once. Not as a spectacle, but as a lived condition."

Sirota is associate dean of academic initiatives and a professor of architecture at Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. She's also a refugee to the U.S. Watching the puppets express grief and vulnerability around themes of displacement was a visceral experience. Through puppetry, the Marseille-based troupe highlighted a humanity often missing from politicized discourse.

"I left thinking about portability," Sirota says. "What would it mean to bring this work into an American research university—an institution that produces knowledge about migration, policy, and borders, but is often insulated from their emotional reality?"

Last October, during the inaugural Michigan Arts Festival, Anima Théâtre staged the North American debut of *Rebetiko* with two performances at the Detroit Institute of Arts in collaboration with Taubman College and with funding from the U-M Arts Initiative. Set to a score inspired by Greek urban folk music of the 1920s, the contemporary odyssey of exile and resilience offers catharsis through simple gestures and layered imagery, spurring conversations about politics, policy, the humanities, social science, and spatial relationships. A companion exhibit was held at the Hellenic Museum of Michigan in Detroit.

"The performance functioned as common ground," Sirota said. "It gave us a shared language and demonstrated how the arts can activate collective imagination."

One technical aspect that enhanced the show for Martin Rodriguez Jr. (M.Arch '25), research





associate with the Taubman Visualization Lab (TVLab), a project also funded by the Arts Initiative, was the use of “Pepper’s ghost,” a visual illusion technique from the 19th century. This illusion involves reflected light that creates a “phantasmagoric” quality on the simple set and adds a dimension with which the characters can interact.

“This really cool, pre-cinema technique made it feel surprisingly futuristic and made you think about materials and how they can be used in a different way,” he said.

Months before the performance, Rodriguez Jr. joined students across disciplines to take part in a puppeteering workshop led by Yiorgos Karakantzas, Anima Théâtre’s artistic director, in the TVLab. The two-day workshop focused on assembling and operating puppets built from inexpensive, common materials, with about 20 students from Taubman College; the School of Music, Theatre & Dance; Stamps School of Art & Design; and the School of Social Work. It concluded with a performance that made use of the lab’s projection mapping equipment to help set the scene.

Students created characters by adding fabric, cardboard, and other materials to puppets and masks, before building up to larger puppets and

additional puppeteers. Then, working in groups of three or four, they built and animated their own large-scale creature puppets.

“There was a lot of focus on intention, directionality, and small movements that brought even a piece of cardboard to life,” says Ren Kosiorowski, an undergraduate studying design and production at SMTD. “Yiorgos and his team were so sweet, and I enjoyed working with people outside of the theater students I already knew there.”

“Architecture sometimes gets hung up on cleanliness when it comes to model making,” Rodriguez Jr. says. “This was a moment where we could let go, glue things together, and make something extraordinary.”

Through the workshop and performances, Sirota says students and audiences were able to experience the narrative impact of how spaces are constructed.

“The work operates like a design studio exercise: testing how minimal means can produce maximum experiential effect,” she says.

Working across schools also revealed how different disciplines can approach a shared problem through the lens of structure, sound, story, and social context, to align rather than compete, Sirota says.

“For Taubman College, this reinforces a direction we are already pursuing: integrating the arts into design education not as supplemental, but as method,” she says. “We are committed to testing new media, emerging technologies, and expanded forms of storytelling as serious instruments of inquiry—ways of deepening, rather than softening, disciplinary rigor.” **M**



# American Sampler Activating The Archive

*A Landmark Collaboration Between UMMA and the Labadie Collection  
Showcases the Breadth and Ambition of U-M's Cultural Resources*

By CHRISTOPHER ANKNEY  
University of Michigan Museum of Art

**I**nside the Vertical Gallery at the U-M Museum of Art (UMMA), the 40-foot-tall gallery wall stretches upward, layered with posters, printed matter, artworks, quilts, American flags, and photographs. The wall commands attention, but it does not stand alone. Posters adorn a balcony edge. Pamphlets cluster along edges. Documents fill the gallery's nooks. From a distance, it reads like a monumental collage, but move closer and something more intimate and more ambitious emerges.

Curated by acclaimed artist, curator, and MacArthur Fellow Julie Ault, *American Sampler: Activating the Archive* brings together an extraordinary selection of artifacts, artworks, and archival documents to illuminate the strategies, visual vocabularies, and effective methods of protest. Ault's focus spans the Black freedom struggle, civil rights organizing, and antiwar activism—particularly the resistance to the U.S. war in Vietnam—while tracing how these movements connect to broader, ongoing efforts for justice.

This eighteen-month exhibition inaugurates a groundbreaking partnership between UMMA and the Labadie Collection at the U-M Library, one of the world's largest repositories of political dissent and social movement materials from around the globe. Ault, the recipient of the inaugural

UMMA Labadie Artist Research Residency, brings her decades-long commitment to cultural activism and historical inquiry into an extensive installation that reframes the visual language of protest as a driving force in U.S. history.

The collaboration reshapes not just what is shown in art museums but how archival materials are encountered and engaged with. In *American Sampler*, the viewer is not simply looking at the archive—they are moving within it.

"The installation treats the archive as active, because it very much is," Ault said. "I wanted visitors to feel surrounded by the materials from these movements. So the space itself begins to echo the circulation of protest and how ideas travel, accumulate, and recycle."

In the installation, Freedom Rider testimonials sit near printed matter from the Black Panther Party. Courtroom records from the Chicago Seven Trial intersect with pacifist statements and underground newspapers. These documents are presented alongside works by artists including Romare Bearden, Corita Kent, Jacob Lawrence, Nancy Spero, and Félix González-Torres—artists whose work makes use of graphic language, repetition, and symbolism as tools for social change.

Rather than organizing the exhibition chronologically, Ault builds what she calls a

“

I wanted visitors to feel surrounded by the materials from these movements. So the space itself begins to echo the circulation of protest and how ideas travel, accumulate, and recycle.”

**JULIE AULT**

Inaugural UMMA Labadie Artist Research Resident  
Curator of *American Sampler*



*sampler*—borrowing from the American tradition of stitched compositions assembled from fragments. Here, fragments accumulate across the wall and throughout the gallery, revealing recurring visual strategies: bold typography, stark color contrasts, portable graphics, declarative slogans. In her arrangement of the gallery, the architecture of protest becomes visible.

“Across decades, you see very similar strategies recurring,” Ault said. “There’s an aesthetic quality to those strategies, but it’s also tactical. Protesters develop visual languages because they need to communicate quickly and collectively.”

Working closely with Labadie Collection Curator Julie Herrada, Ault developed *American Sampler* as a living installation. Over its two-year span, rotating selections will reflect the social landscape of historic activism and its present-day echoes.

“This is a moment when the mechanics of democracy are under intense scrutiny,” said Christina Olsen, UMMA Director. “Julie Ault’s *American Sampler* reminds us that the imagery and tactics of protest and the power of organized resistance are not only our political inheritance, but a vital part of the cultural imagination.”

This exhibition marks the first in a three-part series under the UMMA and Labadie collaboration, with future projects extending the conversation into new commissions and public dialogues. And for the next 12 months, the posters and prints and artworks in *American Sampler* will continue to greet visitors as they move through the space with a truth embedded in the archive itself: dissent is not an interruption of American history. It is one of its defining structures. **M**



# U-M Students Decide UMMA's Next Acquisition in Live "Art Tank" Event

*The Business of Art* course helps students understand the economics of the art market by providing real word experience

By CHRISTOPHER ANKNEY



**T**he University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) and the Ross School of Business partnered this fall to launch "The Business of Art" (BE 460), a groundbreaking new course that explores how art, economics, and curatorial decision making intersect. The course culminated in a live public event where students competed to select the museum's next acquisition.

Students in the class participated in [Subject Matters: Art Tank](#), a high-energy pitch competition at the museum where five student teams presented their final acquisition proposals before a live audience and a panel of UMMA curators.

The winning team proposed acquiring *The man disguised as night (Anansi #29)*, a 2023 work by Jamaican artist Leasho Johnson. In their pitch, the students made a compelling case for how Johnson's work would enrich UMMA's collection, highlighting the artist's use of materials deeply rooted in Jamaican history—such as charcoal and logwood, a plant tied to the island's plantation past—and his process of washing hand-cut paper with indigo and coffee before layering it onto canvas.

The team, which included Annika Chinnaiyan, Alisha Gandhi, Annika Gill, Greta Gmazel, Noelle Powers, and Liz Tracy, argued that Johnson's practice of layering reflects the Caribbean's colonial history as a site of trauma, extraction, and resilience, while also drawing on Anansi trickster narratives from the African diaspora to explore queer identity, reinvention, and survival.

Following the team's successful pitch, UMMA intends to purchase the work from Johnson's gallery and add it to the Museum's permanent collection. Once acquired, UMMA would be the first university art museum to collect his work.

Over the course of the fall 2025 semester, students in "The Business of Art" course took a deep dive into the inner workings of the art market, meeting with curators, visiting galleries and museums in Chicago and Detroit, and talking with art experts as they developed their acquisition proposals. Each team was given a

\$60,000 acquisition budget and the opportunity to learn firsthand how art moves through markets and institutions and becomes part of collections.

"The course gives students the chance to see how value is created, not just financially but culturally," said UMMA Curator of Art in Public Spaces Jennifer Carty, who co-teaches the class with Ross School of Business Professor Tom Buchmueller. "They are asked to think deeply about what it means for a museum to acquire an artwork, and what stories that choice will tell for future generations."

At the culminating Art Tank event, students showcased what they learned by pitching their acquisition to a panel of curators. To convince the panel, students weighed aesthetic merit, historical significance, market strategy, budget constraints, UMMA's collecting priorities, and more.

"At its core, this course is about how choices shape culture and create value," said UMMA Director Christina Olsen. "It reflects UMMA's mission to redefine the role of campus art museums and demonstrates the dynamic role art plays in research, learning, and collaboration across disciplines."

An exhibition related to the course, Curriculum / Collection: The Business of Art is on view at UMMA through Spring 2026. [M](#)

READ THE  
FULL ARTICLE  
ONLINE





Professor Michael Gould of SMTD collaborates on stage with pioneering Korean folk fusion trio, Sangjaru—performers who blend traditional Korean instruments with gypsy swing, funk, rock, and improvisation.

# Where the PANx Breathes & Interpretation Unfolds

## THE KOREAN PERFORMING ARTS INITIATIVE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

By **SUNHONG KIM**, School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Sangjaru provided a Masterclass for Sinaboro on February 10, 2026.



**Performance—a momentary flash** of sound, movement, and action—is ephemeral by nature. But extending the life of performing arts by turning them into lasting phenomena—this is the idea behind “PANx,” a creative philosophy emerging from the collaboration between the Nam Center for Korean Studies and the Korean Performing Arts Initiative (KPAI), funded by the Arts Initiative.

In Korean, *pan* (판, pronounced “paan”) refers to a physical yard or open ground, a quintessential space in Korean folk performances where community, spontaneity, and art converge. The “x” appended to PAN, like TEDx, invites us to extend our experiences beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. KPAI aims to transform all three U-M campuses into a *pan*, a physical site where artists of exceptional talent and creative vision from South Korea and the U.S. collaborate to breathe new life into Korean performing arts at U-M.

This partnership brings together the School of Music, Theatre & Dance (SMTD) and the Nam Center for Korean Studies in the International Institute within the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) and carries on the spirit of Elder Sang-Yong Nam and Mrs. Moon Sook Nam whose gift founded the first of its kind named U.S. center

for Korean studies. PANx is a project celebrating Korean culture, not as a collection of static objects or distilled experiences on display, but as a site of spontaneity and creativity, inexhaustible dynamism, and participatory energy. Energetic, innovative, and “audaciously hopeful” is how Youngju Ryu, a former director of the Nam Center for Korean Studies, remembers Elder Nam. Ryu credits him with first providing the *pan* upon which U-M’s Korean studies has grown into the most dynamic and creative program in the country.

To “make a better story” is to value the core idea over the mere spectacle of the performances. Outreach Coordinator Minyoung Song hopes that KPAI events will encourage performers and audiences to step beyond their comfort zones and linger in their minds long after the curtain falls. Christi-Anne Castro, associate dean for faculty development at SMTD and proponent of the study of world music, believes that KPAI encourages faculty and students to expand their global outlook beyond Western Europe through its support of student travel to South Korea and efforts to bring Korean artists to the U.S. and into U-M classrooms. By lifting Korean performing arts out from the shadow of other East Asian traditions, KPAI helps to enrich the personal and professional lives of our university community through creative activities. As Castro states, the “golden opportunity” presented by the KPAI takes advantage of the coalescence of performers, faculty, students, and staff already at U-M and provides momentum to make U-M one of the strongest hubs for Korean performing arts study in the U.S.

KPAI supports U-M in this larger mission not simply to reflect the world of Korean arts, but to participate in, learn from, and interpret them together. The goal is to maintain these ties between SMTD, the Nam Center, and others across campus for a sustained strength in Korean performing arts studies for many years to come. True to its name, with every breathtaking moment, KPAI opens space for Korean arts to become a vital presence within the community. **M**

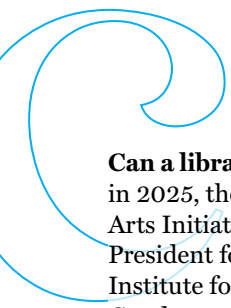
By lifting Korean performing arts out from the shadow of other East Asian traditions, KPAI helps to enrich the personal and professional lives of our university community through creative activities.



# Artists *in the Archive*

## NEW GRANT PROGRAM SPARKS CREATIVE RESEARCH AT U-M

By KRISTEN CASTELLANA, U-M Library



**Can a library inspire art?** To find out, in 2025, the University of Michigan's Arts Initiative, the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR), the Institute for Research on Women & Gender, and several U-M Libraries—including the U-M Library, the William L. Clements Library, and the Bentley Historical Library—launched a new grant program to inspire faculty to use library collections as the foundation for artistic and creative research. While U-M faculty across disciplines—including the arts—often travel far and wide to consult rare materials, the initiative emphasizes that artistic inspiration can also be found within the university's own vast library collections. At the same time, it recognizes that archival work is often overlooked by arts faculty, and that many curators and librarians are less accustomed to supporting artistic research. Artists in the Archive bridges this gap by fostering deeper engagement between artists and archivists and positioning archival material as a rich site for artmaking.

The Artists in the Archive program increases the visibility of these resources and encourages faculty to engage with them in new and imaginative ways. Like the Arts Initiative's other funding opportunities, the program creates pathways for faculty whose work takes the form of art or other creative formats.

Eight faculty members formed the inaugural cohort, representing the Stamps School of Art & Design; Taubman College of Architecture

and Urban Planning; the School of Music, Theatre & Dance; and multiple College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) departments. Their source material ranged from artists' books and archival photographs to historic cookbooks and botanical specimens.

The program fostered close collaboration between researchers and expert campus curators and librarians who assisted participants in navigating collections, identifying items for study, and contextualizing and interpreting the materials. Jamie Lausch Vander Broek, art and design librarian and curator of book arts in the U-M Library, reflected on the experience and the differences in supporting users doing more traditional research

**“[Artists] want to be inspired by the content, but also by the form, the themes, or even just the collection itself.”** JAMIE LAUSCH VANDER BROEK

versus artistic exploration. “The things artists are going to make or create are metaphorically related to the ideas or questions they're pursuing, so their use of the archive extends beyond the literal. They want to be inspired by the content, but also by the form, the themes, or even just the collection itself.”

For some participants, archival exploration was familiar territory,

while for others it was an entirely new adventure. Professor Halena Kays, head of the directing program in the Department of Theatre & Drama, got excited seeing the list of potential collections she could explore. When she saw the call for applications, she recognized it as a way to expand her work and, as a relative newcomer to U-M, to explore collections she didn't know about. “This is a huge untapped resource. It seemed like a great excuse to see what could happen if I spent some time in the library as part of an artistic practice that doesn't make itself immediately apparent in my project.”

Throughout the grant cycle, researchers and librarians convened to share progress and learn from one another and from other artists who derived creative inspiration from historic sources. A fall gathering included Rhiannon Giddens, the multigenre musician who served as the Arts Initiative's U-M artist-in-residence throughout 2025. Giddens herself carried out research at the Clements Library and, in meeting with the cohort, shared how archival research enabled her to unlock forgotten narratives, particularly of Black Americans and others whose contributions to American music

have been erased. In December, the year of collaboration culminated with a presentation of each artist's work-in-progress and a lively discussion of the questions, challenges, and future directions that emerged.

After a successful launch, a new round of Artists in the Archive grants is underway for 2026, promising further creative exploration of our campus collections. **M**



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**Questions?** Contact Tess Eastment, Office of University Development, [tesseast@umich.edu](mailto:tesseast@umich.edu), (734) 647-6979



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ABOVE  
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ABOVE  
Marianetta Porter, *Memory Vessel I*



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