

Please provide a short description and/or history of this organization

Mesa Arts Center (MAC) existed for almost 25 years as a vibrant community arts center in a former elementary school in Mesa, mounting exhibitions and youth theater programs, and providing visual and performing arts classes with great success. In 1998, citizens approved a sales tax referendum to build a magnificent new Mesa Arts Center, which opened in 2005 in the heart of downtown Mesa.

In addition to increasing its size many fold (at 212,000 square feet, MAC is the largest multidisciplinary arts center in the southwest U.S.), the organization has expanded its former programs and exploded with new offerings, including a diverse complement of exemplary engagement and education programs.

MAC's mission is to inspire people through engaging arts experiences that are diverse, accessible and relevant. Wide ranging programs help accomplish this mission. A world-class presenting program features 60-80 performances by established and emerging touring artists. MAC is home to six founding resident companies (Southwest Shakespeare Company, East Valley Children's Theatre, Metropolitan Youth Orchestra, Mesa Encore Theatre, Symphony of the Southwest and Ballet Etudes) and dozens of others present work there, including The Phoenix Symphony & Salt River Brass. Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum mounts 15-17 outstanding exhibitions annually, with diverse and provocative work by leading artists. MAC's 14 state-of-the-art studios offer almost 1,000 visual and performing arts classes annually. Four major festivals and numerous events provide free entry points for visitors of all ages.

Describe the contributions the nominee has made to the development and growth of the arts in Arizona

MAC and its staff members have been heavily involved in initiatives promoting the value of the arts to AZ citizens. The organization has actively experimented with new ways to engage citizens, and developed programs that model the benefits of a healthy arts ecosystem and ways the arts serve as a resource to other sectors.

MAC hosted and co-presented with the AZ Commission on the Arts last year's Creative Aging Summit to provide learning about this important movement for impacting the lives of older adults through participatory arts, in which MAC is becoming a national leader.

In 2015-16, MAC co-presented three (and hosted two) sessions on Creative Placemaking in partnership with LISC Phoenix and the San Francisco Federal Reserve, helping to expand knowledge and explore benefits and challenges of this work.

MAC staff leaders have served on AZ Cultural Data Project Task Force, the Arts Education Advisory Council of Americans for the Arts (AFTA), US Urban Arts Federation of AFTA, Visit Mesa Board, Mesa Urban Garden board, and many other regional and national initiatives or organizations seeking to infuse the arts into communities and strengthen the field.

In 2011, in response to financial pressures on non-profit arts organizations, MAC developed the Creative Economy Fund, an application-based support program to reduce rental fees for organizations wishing to use MAC facilities. The CEF provides \$25,000 annually in reduced fees, in a program that favors organizations increasing community engagement or strengthening their audience development initiatives.

Why does the nominee merit the award?

MAC has been recognized for excellence in programming, community engagement, diversity initiatives, and professional operations with numerous awards and competitive national grants. The Valley community has expressed its appreciation through participation—visitation has increased from 228,000 visits in 2007 to 420,000 visits in 2016, with over 3.7 million visits since the new MAC opened in 2005.

In January 2017, MAC will receive the Veora Johnson Spirit of Unity Award from the East Valley MLK, Jr. Celebration Committee. MAC received one of only six Creativity Connects: National Demonstration Project grants, funded by the Mellon Foundation as part of the NEA's 50th Anniversary Celebration, which is enabling expansion of MAC's Creative Aging Program. MAC won the 2012 Award of Excellence for Performing Arts Centers from the International Association of Venue Managers.

For its 10th Year Celebration last year, MAC created amazing experiences around great artists, with a free Latin Street Festival featuring Los Lonely Boys, exhibitions of Chicano art from the collection of Cheech Marin, residencies by Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Ballet Hispanico, and much more.

The Performing Live Series brings to the Valley artists such as Itzhak Perlman, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Lyle Lovett and Wynton Marsalis, but also engages important issues and ideas in shows like Nogales: Storytellers in Cartel Country, by Richard Montoya, and the World Premiere of X, a play of The Acting Company about Malcolm X, by Marcus Gardley.

Describe the impact this nominee has had on the lives of others in its community

MAC's expansive engagement & education programs include Project Lit, in which Music, Drama, Visual Arts, Improv and Spoken Word are tools to enhance K-12 critical literacies. Beginning by building safety in a student-centered environment, Project Lit then builds traditional literacy, 21st century job skills and resiliency. MAC Engagement Programs serve over 45,000 students annually and over 55,000 lifelong learners. Education programs have built skills in the performing & visual arts, a sense of community, and inspiration for hundreds of thousands of students of all ages.

Many teens in challenging circumstances have gained self-esteem, writing and performing skills, and a supportive learning environment.

Dementia patients have gained quality of life and enhanced self-expression through art-making and social interaction. Able-bodied older adults have found community, healthy activity and joy in participatory arts.

Community members have felt happy and honored to recognize their dearly departed in MAC's Dia de Los Muertos Community Altar Contest.

Arts enthusiasts have found friendships, leadership skills and ownership in the creative life of Mesa through participation in Creative Catalysts.

Artists have discovered mentors & peers with whom to share ideas, and opportunities to experiment, to learn through failure and to showcase their talent for a fair fee.

MAC participants have developed civic pride and a larger sense of being part of a community through shared experiences and community gatherings, identifying the Center as a special place for our region.

Describe the role this nominee has played in developing the community through the arts

MAC has been a field leader in expanding community engagement and accessibility, in showcasing & commissioning work of AZ artists, and developing innovative programs that enable experimentation and exploration of new ideas.

Creative Catalysts features creative community building programs organized by arts activists under 40, and aims to develop arts and community leaders.

Last year, MAC organized Street Pianos Mesa, bringing 24 artists and 24 community groups together to transform pianos into works of art, and then placed them in community settings for two months for anyone to play. The project fostered a sense of belonging and an understanding of the power of the arts.

The Center creates many opportunities for AZ artists to create work, including commissioning work for spark! Mesa's Festival of Creativity, and inviting independent curators to develop projects for spark! After Dark third Saturday events. Relationships with artist collectives including Phonetic Spit, Humor Writes, nueBOX, AZ BeatLab and more benefit artists & community.

The extraordinary Jazz from A to Z program provides teacher PD, workshops and performances that teach American history through jazz music and history. Classical Music Inside Out, with guest artistic director Zuill Bailey leading community residency work, breaks down barriers to enjoying classical music.

To continue building a community gathering place, MAC and commissioned artists, supported by an ArtPlace America grant, engaged community to conceive and design Musical Shadows, where visitors make music using their shadows.