

Mid-America Arts Alliance [Catalyze](#) Cohort 1 - Biographies and Headshots

For more information, contact:

Elizabeth Snell, Mid-America Arts Alliance, elizabeth@maaa.org or 816-800-0919

Headshot images courtesy of the artists.



Aaron Farris

Bluegrass Musician
he/him/his
Conway, AR

www.thegravelyard.com

IG: @gravelyardband

Aaron Farris is a musician, performer, and teacher residing in Central Arkansas. He has a degree in Music from Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas and currently teaches at Chicot Elementary and Palmer Music Company. His award winning bluegrass band: The Gravel Yard has played all over the country at festivals and events alongside artists such as Emmylou Harris, Ricky Skaggs, and Bela Fleck.



Andy Sarjahani

Documentary Filmmaker
he/him/his
Little Rock, AR

www.andysarjahani.com

IG: @andysarjahani

Andy Sarjahani is an Iranian-American documentary filmmaker raised outside the Arkansas Ozarks. He is interested in people, our relationship to place and how that shapes our worldview. He holds an MS in Sustainable Agriculture/Food Systems and left academia in 2012 to tell stories with a camera. He has worked as a documentary cinematographer for VICE, Al Jazeera, Story Syndicate, Storyville Productions, and Arkansas PBS. His personal work has been supported by The New Yorker, ITVS, DOC NYC, New Orleans Film Society, Southern Documentary Fund, PBS Reel South, Arkansas PBS, Arkansas Humanities Council, Asian Doc Network, Video Consortium, and Antenna.



Anna Wagner

Ceramic Artist

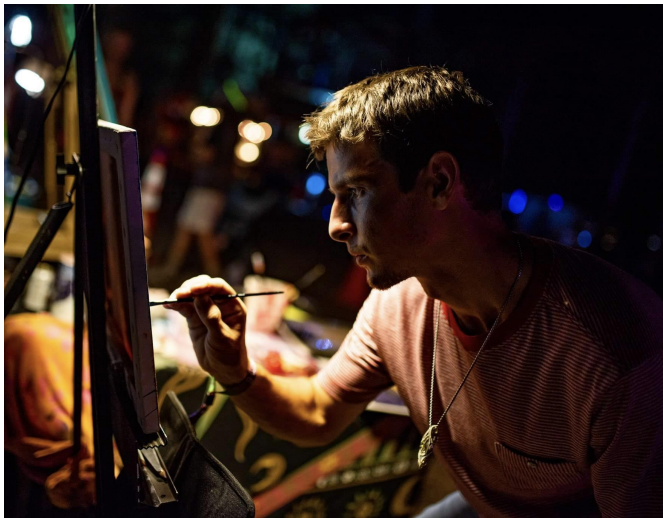
she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, any pronouns

Cabot, AR

<https://www.alwagnergallery.com/>

IG: @alwagnergallery

Anna Wagner received her BFA in Ceramics from the University of Central Arkansas in 2020 and received many scholarships, such as; Wingate Foundation scholarship and the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts scholarship. She has interned for the Clay Art Center in New York and with ceramic artist, Jason Briggs. Anna has exhibited her work in many national exhibitions, such as the Craven Arts Council, the Foundry Art Center, and was recently published in Ceramics Monthly in 2021. She attended a short-term resident at the Red Lodge Clay Center and worked as an Adjunct Professor at Northwestern Michigan College.



Antonio (Bruce) Carpenter

Painter / Craftsman

any pronouns

Sherwood, AR

FB: @bruceofearth

IG: @bonzai.bruce

Antonio "Bruce" Carpenter is a multi-faceted visual artist pairing partial university education with extensive self taught disciplines. While maintaining a wide range of skills he focuses foremost in acrylic painting and mixed mediums on canvas. Accompanied by carpentry and interactive installations, building is an integral part of his creative process. Post university he trained as an assistant for a professional studio artist and apprentice with a jeweler, later finding independence as a self employed artist and contractor. Carpenter by trade and painter by passion, one way or another, Bruce's life constantly evolves around art and creation.



Ben Grimes

Theatre Artist

he/him/his

North Little Rock, AR

<https://riversideactorstheatre.org>

FB: Ben Grimes and Riverside Actors Theatre

IG: @beegee76 and @riversideactorstheatre

Ben Grimes is a multifaceted theatre artist and the Executive Artistic Director of Riverside Actors Theatre. He received a BFA in acting from The Sargent Conservatory of Theatre Arts. Ben first began his career as an actor but searching for more he joined the Army in 2006. In 2017, Ben began to reintegrate back into theatre to heal from the stress of combat and service. These discoveries led him to enroll in the Clinton School of Public Service where he received a MPS. In 2020, Ben launched Riverside Actors Theatre, a company designed to address trauma that veterans commonly face.



Cheryl Humphrey

Singer / Songwriter / Performing Arts Coach

she/her/hers

North Little Rock, AR

www.candysoulonline.com

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/cherylcandysoul>

IG: CANDYSOULonline

Music has never sounded so SWEET as the sultry Soulful sounds of CandySoul. Not only is she a vocalist with perfect pitch, but she also excels as a comedic actress, songwriter, and music producer.

CandySoul has been making a name for herself in the realm of entertainment for over 15 years. CandySoul achieved HOLLYWOOD success on American Idol, won 1st place on Showtime at the Apollo, and also won ABC's Match Game with celebrity host Alec Baldwin in which they featured her all-natural, homemade-handcrafted skin moisturizer: Candy Butta on national television. Remember the name, CandySoul: "Ear Candy for your Soul!"



Chris Long

Music Producer

he/they/she

North Little Rock, AR

<https://www.monsterboylives.com/>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/chris.long.7146>

IG: @monsterboylives

Chris Long (he/him or they/them) is a composer, producer, and multi-instrumentalist in Little Rock, AR. Their music can be found on stages, streaming services, and in sync music libraries. Chris has toured all across the United States, along with having 7,000 households tuned in nightly for his live streams during the pandemic. Chris has spent over a decade creating opportunities for fellow LGBT+ artists on stage. Recently signed to the label Kinetik, Chris is currently working on a new collection of work in the indie act, Monsterboy LIVES.



Dazzmin Murry

Multi-Hyphenate Artist / Performing Artist / Composer /

Multimedia Artist

she/her/hers

Little Rock, AR

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100085330670142>

IG: @TheKingHoneyOfficial

Howdy, I'm Dazzmin "King Honey" Murry, EMMY-nominated, multi-hyphenate creative who advocates for artists while reaching new heights in my own endeavors. Since 2010, I've found comfort in Rock-n-Roll and "rebellious" music as I transitioned from Baptist Church drummer to rock artist and multi-genre producer. I've been able to exist in spaces as my authentic self while representing everything some have tried to discredit and discard, fueling my "live liberated" mantra that drives me and inspires others.

As a performing artist, producer, and photographer I approach art from multiple angles focused on my perspective as a marginalized artist from the South.



Denise Parkinson

Author & Filmmaker
she/her/hers
Bismarck, AR

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/HelenSpenceofArkansas>
FB: @Denise Parkinson

Denise White Parkinson is an Arkansas author, filmmaker, curator and artist creating Nature-centric work that explores the tragedy and triumph of her Delta birthplace through the lens of river culture. Her book "Daughter of the White River" (History Press of South Carolina, 2013 & 2018) and independent film of the same name reflect ongoing collaboration with River People. Parkinson's multimedia works take a talismanic approach, showcasing mussel shells, freshwater pearls and mother-of-pearl buttons. Her "River Series" includes handmade paper hearts containing organic seeds; Hoodoo Rivergirl Ragdolls with herbal sachet hearts; and the Shantyboat Series of assemblage reverencing levee life.



Derek Slagle

Photographer
he/him/his
Little Rock, AR

<http://derekslagle.com>
IG: @derekslagle

Derek Slagle, Ph.D., M.S. (he/him/his) is an American documentary and fine-art film photographer, based in Little Rock, Arkansas, covering environmental conservation narratives primarily in the Southern and Midwestern areas of the United States. His photographic work has expanded to partnerships with nonprofits and governmental entities for documentation of science of conservation practices. Dr. Slagle has published academic articles and technical reports on the topic(s); has multiple paid contracts for conservation research related to policy/ administrative reforms; has a forthcoming photography book focused on similar initiatives on public (federal) land management; and exhibited photographs broadly (i.e., museums, publications, and exhibitions).



Jennifer Gerber

Filmmaker

she/her/hers

Hot Springs, AR

www.jengerber.com

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/jennifer.gerber.148>

IG: @jennysuegerber

Jen Gerber holds an MFA in filmmaking from Columbia University. Her debut feature film THE REVIVAL received international festival exposure and was distributed on all major streaming platforms. Jen recently opened a year-round film school in Arkansas where she draws from 17 years experience as a professional filmmaker and seasoned professor to teach hands-on filmmaking courses. In addition, Jen has served as a mentor for the Sundance Film Festival Native Lab, was the Creative Director for the School of Creative and Performing Arts in LA and NY and served as the Executive Director of the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival.



Jennifer Perren

Ceramic Artist

she/her/hers

Little Rock, AR

www.jenniferperren.com

FB: <https://m.facebook.com/jennifer.perren.facebook>

IG: @jennifer.perren

Jennifer Perren holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and attended immersive programs at the Kansas City Art Institute and Penland School of Craft. She currently teaches ceramics classes at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. Her work is available for purchase at South Main Creative in Little Rock. To stay up to date with Jennifer's latest projects and to experience her unique perspective on figurative sculpture and pottery, visit www.jenniferperren.com.



Jonathan Wright

Printmaker

he/him/his

Pine Bluff, AR

IG: [@jrwrightart](#)

Jonathan Rashad Wright was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He graduated from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff with a Bachelor of Sciences in Visual Arts under the study of Henry Linton Sr. During this time, His artwork was juried into and chosen for a purchase award in their permanent collection at the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center's "2015 Creativity Arkansas Exhibition" in Little Rock, Arkansas. He has received his MFA in printmaking at Arizona State University. His most recent accomplishment was the 2019 juried ASU Galbut prize purchase award. He is currently an Instructor at his Alma Mater.



Kai Coggin

Poet / Author / Space Holder

she/her/hers

Hot Springs National Park, AR

<https://www.kaicoggin.com>

FB: Kai Coggin @skailight8

IG: @skailight8

Kai Coggin (she/her) is the Inaugural Poet Laureate of the City of Hot Springs, and author of four collections, most recently "Mining for Stardust" (FlowerSong Press 2021). She is a Certified Master Naturalist, a K-12 Teaching Artist with the Arkansas Arts Council, and host of the longest running consecutive weekly open mic series in the country—Wednesday Night Poetry. Recently awarded the 2021 Governor's Arts Award, named "Best Poet in Arkansas" by the Arkansas Times, and nominated for Arkansas State Poet Laureate and Hot Springs Woman of the Year, Kai lives with her wife in a peaceful valley where poems bloom.



Katherine Strause

Painter

she/her/hers

Little Rock, AR

www.katherinestrause.com

FB: @Katherine Strause

IG: @katherineannstrause

Katherine Strause's paintings persuade us to see hope in the unification of beauty and strength. Saturated, vibrant colors, with gemstone backgrounds, these heroic women are masters of their universe. Whether in a moment of control with a bow and arrow or personal bliss, as a hula hoop spins around the body, there is a profound sense of individual freedom in each painting. Katherine is a dream weaver; pulling on a life full of grit, grace, determination, and hope. Her belief in the possibility of a brighter more inclusive future is the underpainting in every composition and in her own life.



Katie Wilson

Visual & Performing Artist

she/her/hers

Conway, AR

<https://katiesunshine.com>

FB: @katiesunshine14

IG: @katiesunshine14

Katie Wilson (she/her/hers) is a visual artist, hoop dancer and educator. She has performed around the world including the World Expo in Dubai where she represented the state of Arkansas at the United States Pavilion. She uses performance art to express personal narratives and explore the exciting possibilities where creative mediums intersect. Recently, she has explored the theatrical elements of creating collaborative performances. This includes performances that incorporate her background as a visual artist, cinematography, video editing, and other performance artists. Katie holds a bachelor's degree in Studio Art and a master's degree in Art Education.



M Shelly Conner

Writer / Filmmaker

she/her/hers

Cabot, AR

<http://mshellyconner.com>

FB: @mshellyconner

IG: @mshellyconner

M Shelly Conner, Ph.D is a multi-genre and interdisciplinary writer. She is an assistant professor of creative writing and co-director of the MFA Program for Writers at the University of Central Arkansas. Her work explores the intersections of blackness, dapperqueer identity and self-sustainable living. She is the author of the Nautilus Award-winning novel everyman and creator of the web series Quare Life. Conner's work has been published and/or produced in NBC News, America's Test Kitchen's PROOF Podcast, The Root, and others.



Mark Wittig

Photographer

he/him/his

Little Rock, AR

<http://markwittig.com>

FB: @markdwittig

IG: @markdwittig

With Mark Wittig's active creative practice, he is engaged in a social practice that examines societal constructs of literacy and personal empowerment. In 2022, Wittig project Structures that Transformed Education was awarded an Artistic Innovations Grant, a program of Mid-America Arts Alliance. In 2021, his photographic work and writing are part of a collective image/text peer reviewed article Simple, Dark, and Deep: Photographic Theorizations of As-Yet Schools published by the academic journal Postdigital Science and Education. In 2021, a national group exhibition included his photographic work, 30 Over 50: at The Center for Fine Art Photography in Colorado.



Mitchell Crisp

Interdisciplinary Artist

she/her/hers

Little Rock, AR

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mitchell-crisp-9a64a735>

FB: Mitchell Crisp

IG: Mitchellcrispart

Mitchell Crisp is an established multidisciplinary filmmaker, painter and writer who has been working in the arts for decades. Based out of Little Rock, her work has been featured in notable Hollywood films such as "Mud," (2012) and "Law and Order." Locally, her work has been featured at "Cox Gallery," and "Gallery 26." She is a mother, sister, daughter and friend. Throughout her career, Mitchell has been dedicated to learning new skills and sharing them with audiences and peers.



Princeton Coleman (Yuni Wa)

Music Producer & DJ

he/him/his

Little Rock, AR

www.yuniwamusic.com

FB: @yuniwaofficial

IG: @yuniwaofficial

Princeton Coleman (he/him) is a multi genre music producer and DJ. Better known as Yuni Wa, he seamlessly blends elements of electronic, hip-hop, and experimental music to create unique soundscapes that express his love for abstract ideas based in futurism and the human experience. Since starting in 2012 he has DJed across Arkansas, accumulated over 17 million streams globally, and DJed in Los Angeles, New York, Orlando, Phoenix, and St Louis. He was named as one of top 20 Visionary Arkansans in 2017 by The Arkansas Times and has been co-signed by well known musicians such as Dam-Funk and George Clanton.



Ryan Howard

Filmmaker / Photographer / Musician
he/him/his
Little Rock, AR

<http://www.RAHoward.com>

FB: R.A. Howard

IG: rahhoward

Ryan "R.A." Howard is a fine art photographer, Documentary filmmaker, and musician from Little Rock, Arkansas. His work has been featured in media outlets such as MTV, Shade 45 radio, The Arkansas Times, and Arkansas PBS. His photography, film, and music work focuses on documenting the human experience and resonating with observers on an emotional level by creating a multisensory experience with his work.



Tiffany Pettus

Multimedia Specialist
she/her/hers
Little Rock, AR

www.songbirdmedia.com

FB: @tiffanyg.pettus

IG: @songbirdmedia

Songbird Multimedia and Performing Arts Foundation is a non-profit arts organization that was started to address the lack of performing arts opportunities and programs to improve literacy skills for youth within the Central Arkansas area. Within the mission of the non-profit, the goal is to provide educational services and increased access to arts to at-risk students who might not otherwise have access to those opportunities due to economic disadvantages. The performing arts are an integral part of society and cannot be ignored. Throughout the journey, the belief is that the arts positively affect the youth and community experiences.



Veronica Wirges

Music Artist
she/her/hers
North Little Rock, AR

<https://www.monsterboylives.com>

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IG: @monsterboylives

Veronica Wirges (she/her) is a multi-instrumentalist from Little Rock, Arkansas. She started her love affair with the baritone saxophone before she was tall enough to play one. She is a signed artist with Kinetik. She has performed on stages in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Texas. After becoming an Artist Inc. Fellow in 2018, she was inspired to support and educate fellow creatives through regional and state programs. Veronica is working on a full album that speaks of living on the edge of queer as a straight-passing member of the LGBTQ+ community.



Virmarie DePoyster

Multidisciplinary Artist
she/her/hers
North Little Rock, AR

www.virmarie.com

FB: @Virmarie.Depoyster

IG: @virmarie

Virmarie DePoyster is a Puerto Rican born multidisciplinary artist, educator, and community leader. As a practicing artist, she explores the complexities of identity. As an educator, she develops therapeutic art programs, providing safe spaces for self-reflection. And as a community leader, she advocates for equality and inclusion. Virmarie secured a solo exhibition "Revelation" which debuted at the United States Embassy in Rome, Italy. She was chosen to represent Arkansas in Her Flag, a national project commemorating 100 years of women's suffrage. In November 2023, "Beyond Labels," her latest solo exhibition will open at the Fort Smith Regional Art Museum.



Yelena Petroukhina

Visual Artist

she/her/hers

Little Rock, AR

www.yelenapetroukhina.net

FB: @Yelena Petroukhina

IG: @YelenaPetroukhina

Yelena Petroukhina (she/her) is a Russian-born contemporary ceramic artist living in Little Rock, Arkansas. In her sculptural ceramics, Petroukhina actively searches for new frameworks and relations to a sense of self with society. Her work is personal and rooted in the tradition of ceramic toys of Central Russia. Petroukhina received various grants and awards, including Best in Show 2021 Irene Rosenzweig Biennial Juried Exhibition, and is currently a visiting artist at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Petroukhina is a teaching artist passionate about helping students of all ages to create and appreciate art.