

Promoting and Preserving the Cultural Arts

# the COLLECTIVE ARTSake

Buffalo New York February 20 2010

## The Strategic Art of Sustaining Colorful Cultural Arts



Locust Street Art is celebrating 50 years of helping the children and families of Buffalo's Fruit Belt neighborhood to express themselves visually. - LSA photo

Pop culture effervesced into a world of real time value – and quality-of-life stock in the cultural arts dropped dramatically.

Changes in charitable and corporate giving and legislated funding; a rocky economy and 24/7 access to technology further depreciated investments in preserving the fine arts. To survive, small cultural arts organizations which historically have seeded large arts institutions are defining new ways to secure their future.

"I'm a rabid defender of the medium and small organization," John R. Oishei Foundation Vice President Paul T. Hogan says.

***"The main importance of The Collective coming together is to coordinate their messages and their strategies so they are able to have a larger impact."***

Paul T. Hogan Vice President, John R. Oishei Foundation

With 28 years in the not for profit arena – the last ten of those at the Oishei Foundation – Hogan speaks from the experiential perspective of both grantee and grantor.

"They are the ones that introduce people to arts and culture. They're the ones that bring the radical ideas. They start young people into cultural arts. That's not to say the larger ones don't, but there's a greater dedication on the part of the small organizations to do that."

The Collective was founded in 2006 by the African American Cultural Center, Buffalo City Ballet and Ujima Company to promote and preserve cultural arts organizations of color in Buffalo, NY. El Museo Francisco Oller y Diego Rivera, The Nash House, Colored Musicians Club and Locust Street Art joined the collaborative in late 2009.

Housed in a stalwart red brick former convent in the heart of Buffalo's Fruit Belt, Locust Street Art has provided free visual art education to families in the predominantly African American neighborhood for 50 years. Last year, the organization served approximately 275 children and adults.

Bethel is a painter educated in art history at Vassar. As a product of art classes initiated as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project under the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, she believes firmly in public funding for the arts. "I truly believe that anyone who is interested in any art form should have the opportunity to develop skills and talents in that art form," she contends. "And I truly believe that that opportunity should be free."

But finding money to sustain that philosophy has become increasingly fractured over the last ten years. "Funding is cut into so many tiny pieces. Everyone is demanding more and more paperwork," Bethel says. It's like you have to justify breathing."

At El Museo, Executive Director and Curator Craig Centrie says many current requirements for grant funding threaten the stability of small arts organizations. His storefront gallery in Allentown showcases creative visuals of Latino and other Buffalo-area artists of color.

"Funders are going in a direction that overburdens small institutions with reporting and demands for information we can't produce," he explains. "You can't take money away from us and after you take money away from us, which erodes the ability to hire staff, turn around and tell us we're inefficient."

Hogan admits that reporting and evaluation may be burdensome to organizations the size of those that make up The Collective. "Evaluation is focused on the short term. It needs to be for the longer term," he says. "But nobody wants to wait for the longer term, especially when you're talking about grant money."

Last November, The Collective was named one of ten local arts groups to participate in round two of a capacity-building grant from Fund for the Arts. Each organization has been provided with a consultant to help them prioritize and realize opportunities for growth. Eve Berry is working with The Collective.

Fund for the Arts is a coalition of ten Western New York foundations – including the Oishei Foundation. It is administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

"What we're funding is the work of the collective, not necessarily the work of the individual organizations," Hogan says. He points to shared purchases, integrated programming and collaborative grant writing as viable strategies for sustainable growth, and says that "shared pain and shared investment" is critical in order for cultural arts collaborations to succeed.

"With cooperative programming, why not produce some plays in Michigan Street Baptist Church where you could actually start bringing that kind of attention [to Michigan Street Corridor] on a broader level? That becomes attractive to funders because they believe that they're going to get more out of their \$10,000 or \$50,000 than they would from any one organization," he maintains.

"I think the main importance of The Collective coming together is to coordinate their messages and their strategies so they are able to have a larger impact."



***"I'm hoping that The Collective is going to help all of us acquire the necessary funding, staffing and marketing tools to not only allow us to continue at the present level but move forward and develop."***

Craig Centrie  
Executive Director / Curator, El Museo

Bethel, Centrie and the rest of The Collective membership are counting on the ability to make a larger impact.

"The mid-size and small organizations that are primarily of color really needed to have a way to be more of a presence in terms of the larger community. And the funding world wants to put a more public face on collaborations," Bethel says.

Centrie is glad that he now has cultural colleagues to bargain at the funding table with.

"We all know that in arts and culture that if the general audience institutions are in trouble, then the small community and ethnic organizations are experiencing trauma. Now you don't have one little voice any more calling for help, you have a much larger, stronger voice that's calling for help," says Centrie.

"I'm hoping that The Collective is going to help all of us acquire the necessary funding, staffing and marketing tools to not only allow us to continue at the present level but move forward and develop."  
- J. Thorpe



MARK YOUR  
SUMMER  
CALENDAR...  
AACC 2010  
PINE GRILL  
JAZZ REUNION  
IS SUNDAY AUG 1  
& SUNDAY AUG 8  
@ MLKing JR PARK

## From the Advisory Leadership

Like American small businesses, small and medium size cultural organizations are the backbone of the cultural community. They reach into neighborhoods to bring unearthed talent to the greater community. The journey always requires a first step and small and medium cultural arts organizations provide that step.

The organizations of The Collective have provided that first step by faith and not by sight. It is amazing they have survived for as long they have.

To grow The Collective we are prepared to do what all thriving organizations do. There is a rich pool of untapped support in our communities. It is our work to seek out and cultivate those resources for the arts to and for the beneficial health and well being of the families and children The Collective organizations serve.

We invite all who recognize the human value of pre-serving cultural art of all origins to join us in this task. Your support through volunteering, patronage, financial and in-kind donations will be appreciated.

Your voice on our journey will be generous company.

Daryl Rasuli | Glendora Johnson-Cooper  
Chair Vice Chair

## Advisory Council

// Officers: Daryl Rasuli (Chair), Glendora Johnson-Cooper (Vice Chair / Recording Secretary), Carl Johnson (Treasurer). Sitting Members: George K. Arthur, Francesca Mesiah, Chris Milhouse, Lavon Stephens, Shirley Wagstaff and Ronald Wofford. Consultants: Michael Unthank and Eve Berry. Marketing / Development Communications: Outside the Box.

ARTSake Editor | Jessica Thorpe  
Copy and Art | Outside the Box



**Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye ...on stage through Sunday March 7 2010** at the Paul Robeson Theatre at the African American Cultural Center, 350 Masten Avenue. Call 716.884.2013 for reservations.

**"Image and Identity" Exhibit @ ArtSpace 1216 Main Street** ...featuring local artists James Cooper III, Michael Biondo, Gerald Lillard and Jessica Thorpe. On the walls through Sunday, March 7, 2010. Gallery is open 12 to 4 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday and by appointment. Call Erika Aminata Mitchell at 716.381.8691.

**"BLACKBIRD SPEAKING" Exhibit Opening Friday March 5 2010 7 to 9 p.m.** El Museo Francisco Oller y Diego Rivera, 91 Allen Street ...an exhibit of 20 archival Giclee prints by Mexican American photographer Andrew Ortiz; on exhibit through April 9. El Museo gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 12 to 5 p.m. and by appointment. 716.884.1912.

**A Celebration of Community 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday March 7 2010 at the Buffalo Science Museum** 1020 Humboldt Parkway ...with Locust Street Art, Colored Musicians Club, Crusaders Drill Team, 50 Women with a Vision, Mary B. Talbert Civic and Cultural Club, Juneteenth of Buffalo and more... For information call 716.852.4562 or 716.896.5200.

**It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues May 7 - 30 2010 at the Paul Robeson Theatre** at the African American Cultural Center, 350 Masten Avenue ►► PRT 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Mother's Day Soul Food Dinner Theater – Sunday May 9 2010. For information and reservations call the PRT Box Office at 716.884.2013.

## NEW MEMBERS

### Colored Musicians Club

George Scott President  
145 Broadway Buffalo NY 14203  
716.855.9383 www.coloredmusiciansclub.org

The Colored Musicians Club is part of the infrastructure of Buffalo's history. The club formed as a result of a split from the Buffalo Musicians Union, the Local 43, which declined membership to African American musicians. Buffalo Local 553 was established in 1917. The club found its permanent home at 145 Broadway in 1934 after occupying several locations. Once established, the Colored Musicians Club created a positive atmosphere where people from diverse backgrounds could come together to celebrate the art of jazz. Its stage has been graced by jazz elites who include Dizzy Gillespie, Count Basie, Art Blakey, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Billie Holiday, and Ella Fitzgerald among others.

### Nash House Museum

George K. Arthur President  
36 Nash Street Buffalo NY 14204  
716.856.4490 nashhouse@verizon.net  
www.nashhousemuseum.org

The Nash House Museum is the former home of Reverend J. Edward Nash Sr., pastor of the historic Michigan Street Baptist Church and a respected leader of Buffalo's African American community for more than 50 years. The Buffalo treasure was uncovered by the members of the Michigan Street Preservation Corporation nearly the way the Nash family left it. The rooms showcase period furniture and furnishings, Reverend Nash's rolltop desk and collection of his letters, speeches, notes, photographs, church and civic programs and invitations to Booker T. Washington's meeting with "Afro-American citizens of Buffalo."

ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE | VOLUNTEERS ARE WELCOME...  
DONATIONS ARE APPRECIATED!

The Collective was founded to collaboratively promote and advance the mission and vision of Buffalo, NY cultural arts organizations of color. The Collective Advisory Council is a volunteer alliance organized in 2006 to ensure the shared and individual futures of these important community-based institutions.



- EL MUSEO PHOTO

### El Museo Francisco Oller y Diego Rivera

Craig Centrie Executive Director and Curator  
91 Allen Street Buffalo NY 14202  
716.886.9693 www.elmuseobuffalo.org

El Museo Francisco Oller y Diego Rivera is the only Buffalo visual arts venue dedicated to the exhibition of fine art by Latin/Caribbean, African American and other artists of color. It evolved from a grassroots coalition of Latin/Caribbean artists, faculty and graduate students emanating from the University at Buffalo circa 1981. After incorporating in 1986 and moving from its first gallery on Buffalo's West Side, executive director and curator Craig Centrie sustained the institution as a "gallery without walls." For nearly 11 years he "piled artwork in a shopping cart" and rolled it wherever he was granted wall space to mount an exhibit. El Museo acquired its present home at 91 Allen Street in 1997. The gallery mounts 10 to 12 shows annually and sponsors educational programming for area youth. "We invigorate inner-city neighborhoods with the art of local, national and international artists, giving the people of these communities the opportunity to see their own culture and experiences reflected in fine arts. We educate the mainstream population by enhancing public knowledge, understanding and appreciation for such art. We believe that tolerance and respect for differences among people follow such appreciation." – www.elmuseobuffalo.org

VISIT WWW.THECOLLECTIVEBUFFALO.ORG

### African American Cultural Center

Agnes M. Bain Executive Director  
350 Masten Avenue Buffalo NY 14209  
716.884.2013 aacc@wzrd.com www.africancultural.org

### Buffalo City Ballet

Marvin Askew Executive Director  
2495 Main Street, #351 Buffalo NY 14214  
716.883.1243 maskew9746@aol.com www.buffalocityballet.org

### Ujima Company Inc.

Rahwa Ghirmatzion Executive Director  
TheaterLoft 545 Elmwood Avenue Buffalo NY 14222  
716.883.4232 ujimacoinc@mac.com www.ujimatheatre.org

### Locust Street Art

Molly Bethel Founder / Director / Teacher  
138 Locust Street Buffalo NY 14204  
716.852.4562 locustst@verizon.net

Molly Bethel says she did not set out to found a cultural arts institution. Locust Street Art began when she ran out of space for the children crowding onto her front porch wanting her to teach them about visual art.



- OUTSIDE THE BOX PHOTO

That was 50 years ago, on Maple Street in the Fruit Belt neighborhood of East Side Buffalo. Today, Bethel is still providing the children of the same community – many of them the generations of her first students – with free classes in painting, drawing, clay sculpture and photography. All three stories of the red brick home of Locust Street Art are filled with their artistic visions. Locust Street Art also provides art instruction to high-risk kids at surrounding public schools. Adults are welcome too. The desire to create and communicate is an essential part of what makes people human, she says. "I have found that over the years, very often there's a correlation between some of the most creative people who come in and people who have had a very difficult time in the school system or work system."

### MANY THANKS TO THE COLLECTIVE SUPPORTERS

The Collective was founded in 2006 to promote and preserve cultural arts organizations of color in Buffalo New York. In addition to founding organizations African American Cultural Center and Buffalo City Ballet, the collaborative today includes the Colored Musicians Club, El Museo Francisco Oller y Diego Rivera, Locust Street Art and Nash House Museum. Past and present funding is through The Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, New York State Council for the Arts, M&T Bank, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York, the John R. Oishei Foundation, Fund for the Arts, corporate giving and the generosity of patrons, friends and in-kind supporters. Donations are appreciated and are tax deductible through the African American Cultural Center, a 501 (c) 3 not for profit agency. Volunteers are welcome. For information on how to support The Collective or to make a donation, call 716.362.0230 or email thecollectivebuffalo@gmail.com.

Visit our website at www.thecollectivebuffalo.org



Blue Cross Blue Shield  
of Western New York



NYSCA

Community Foundation  
for Greater Buffalo