

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Media Contact:**

Maria Davison

(501) 396-0352

mdavison@arkansasartscenter.org

**Arkansas Arts Center remains vibrant in year of historic progress**

*Incoming Executive Director Victoria Ramirez joins Arts Center leadership in celebrating the year's accomplishments*

**LITTLE ROCK, Ark.** – The Arkansas Arts Center continued to deliver accessible and engaging programs during a year of historic transition, leaders announced at the September 23 Annual Meeting. The Arts Center's new Executive Director Victoria Ramirez joined Board of Trustees President Merritt Dyke, Foundation President Bobby Tucker and Interim Executive Director Laine Harber in congratulating the board, foundation, staff and community on a year of remarkable accomplishments.

Throughout a year of monumental change for the 56-year-old organization, the Arkansas Arts Center continued to offer dynamic and diverse programming in the Museum, Museum School and Children's Theatre. Last year, the Arts Center also launched a \$128 million capital campaign, a crucial step in realizing the transformation of its MacArthur Park home into a stunning new Arts Center for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Arts Center also established initiatives to remain vibrant, accessible and community-oriented while its MacArthur Park building is under construction over the next two-and-a-half years, including its move to a temporary space in the Riverdale Shopping Center and partnerships with the Central Arkansas Library System and other community organizations.

"It has been an honor to serve as interim director during this exciting year at the Arts Center," Harber said. "I look forward to working closely with Victoria as she establishes a vision that will carry us into the future."

Harber has served as interim executive director since August 2018 while the Arts Center searched for a new permanent director. Last month, the Arts Center announced that Ramirez will join the Arkansas Arts Center as executive director.

"I congratulate and commend the board, foundation and staff on another successful year," Ramirez said. "The Arts Center is well-known for its high-quality exhibitions and engaging programming – and its past successes will undoubtedly chart the course for the future. I look forward to building on this work at the Riverdale location and at the reimagined Arkansas Arts Center when it opens in 2022."

At the meeting, Harber outlined several of the historic milestones reached over the past year.

In May, the Arts Center launched *Reimagining the Arkansas Arts Center: Campaign for Our Cultural Future*, a \$128 million fundraising campaign to realize a stunning new Arts Center. At the May 15 announcement, Campaign Co-Chairs Harriet and Warren Stephens announced that \$118 million of the \$128 million goal had been raised to-date.

"A remarkable group has come together with a clear understanding of the importance of reimagining the Arkansas Arts Center for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Campaign Co-Chair Harriet Stephens said. "We will now

reach out to the entire community and state for support to realize this once-in-a-lifetime project. Together, we can ensure that the Arkansas Arts Center is a thriving and influential cultural institution for present and future generations.”

The Arts Center also made significant strides toward its commitment to maintaining its community presence while construction begins on its MacArthur Park building with a partnership with the Central Arkansas Library System. Beginning this fall, visitors will find objects from the Arkansas Arts Center’s 1,500-work contemporary craft collection on view at 15 CALS locations. Carefully selected for the community relevance, each installation includes works that reference the environment, history and mission of the library branch where they’re located, illustrating the incredible diversity of the Arts Center’s collection of contemporary craft objects.

Visitors will also find some of their favorite Arts Center youth and adult programs at neighborhood libraries. Art Start, a collaboration between the Arkansas Arts Center and CALS, will be hosted monthly at the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children’s Library & Learning Center. The program, designed for toddlers and pre-school-aged children, includes stories about art and artists, gallery activities and art-making projects. Super Sunday Free Family Funday, a monthly, free art-making program is also being held at the Children’s Library. Art Together, a partnership with Alzheimer’s Arkansas to provide an art experience for adults with dementia-spectrum disorders and their care partners, will be offered at the Cox Creative Center.

In February, the Arts Center announced a move to a temporary location at 2510 Cantrell Road to continue programming during construction. The move is one piece of the AAC’s commitment to remaining accessible to the community while its MacArthur Park facility is under construction, and to working with arts partners across the region to expand programming reach. The Riverdale location, which includes studio space for Museum School classes, design and rehearsal space for the Children’s Theatre, office space, and flexible education and exhibition space, is now open.

In April, the Arts Center launched Children’s Theatre Restaged. Through the expanded Children’s Theatre on Tour program, literary-based theatre productions will continue to travel to schools, community centers and libraries across Arkansas. The 2019–2020 Children’s Theatre on Tour season will include *Wynken, Blynken and Nod: A Play for the Very Young* (September 24 – October 20), *A Christmas Carol* (November 12 – December 20), *The Arkansas Story Porch* (January 23 – March 6), and *The Wind in the Willows* (April 7 – May 15).

In June, the Arts Center premiered DELTA 60, a documentary exploration of the artists and artwork featured in the *Annual Delta Exhibition*. The original documentary explores the innovative work featured in the 60<sup>th</sup> *Annual Delta Exhibition* through the eyes of 10 Arkansas artists. Following these artists as they create work that addresses place, identity, representation and history, DELTA 60 proves the power of art to challenge its viewers – and its makers. The documentary will be featured in the upcoming Fayetteville Film Festival.

Harber enumerated the year’s successful exhibitions, highlighting visitors’ reflections on the art left in gallery comment books and on social media. The Arts Center’s calendar of featured exhibitions represented a diverse range of artistic expression. *Robert Baines: Living Treasure and Fabulous Follies* explored the artists’ use of ancient metalworking techniques to challenge contemporary culture. *Independent Vision: Modern and Contemporary Art from the Martin Muller Collection* featured

nearly 90 works San Francisco-based gallerist Martin Muller as a tribute to the Arts Center and the city of Little Rock. *Photographing Frida: Portraits of Frida Kahlo/Fotografiando Frida: Retratos de Frida Kahlo* offered a rare opportunity for visitors to see Frida Kahlo as she was captured by some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most important photographers. *POP! Out of the Vault: Andy Warhol's Little Red Book* explored a treasure trove of Pop Art found in the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection.

Harber also highlighted several programming successes. Statewide ArtsReach programs visited 50 communities in 44 Arkansas counties, reaching 420,999 people. He noted a particularly sharp increase in the number of students enrolled in Museum School Classes. He also noted the Arts Center's acquisition of 150 new memberships to the community of nearly 3,500 member households.

Foundation President Bobby Tucker briefly highlighted the acquisition of 89 works of art into the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection, including nine purchases and 80 donations.

Works from the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection traveled a total of 6,362 miles to be loaned to museums across the country, including the Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia, the San Antonio Museum of Art in San Antonio, the Zimmerli Museum of Art at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., the Metal Museum in Memphis, Tenn., Garvey|Simon in New York, the Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock, Ark., the Central Arkansas Library System Roberts Library in Little Rock, Ark., the Windgate Center for Art and Design in Little Rock, Ark., the Historic Arkansas Museum in Little Rock, Ark., the Bradbury Art Museum at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Ark., and the Arts & Sciences Center for Southeast Arkansas in Pine Bluff, Ark.

Little Rock Mayor Frank Scott, Jr. recognized outgoing trustees Sara Hendricks Batcheller and Brenda Mize, as well as outgoing ex-officio trustees Mark Stodola for the City of Little Rock, Kelly Phillips for the Junior League of North Little Rock, Neil Gillespie for the Friends of Contemporary Craft, Jessie McClarty for the Contemporaries, and Susan Day for the docents. Board President Merritt Dyke recognized incoming trustees Dr. Laurence Alexander, Dr. Loren Bartole and Amanda Wilson Denton, reappointed trustees Kaki Hockersmith, Diane Jonsson, Patrick O'Sullivan, Terri Snowden, and Van Tilbury, incoming ex-officio trustees Frank Scott, Jr. for the City of Little Rock, Shantea Nelson for the Junior League of Little Rock, Jim Gorman for the Docents, and Heather Wardle for the Contemporaries, and reappointed ex-officio trustees Joe Smith for the City of North Little Rock and Kenya Eddings for the Junior League of Little Rock. Dyke also recognized former trustees who passed away in the past year.

Harber presented the "Winthrop Rockefeller Memorial Award" to Board of Trustees President Merritt Dyke. The award, presented each year, honors those who serve and support the arts and the Arkansas Arts Center above and beyond the normal call of duty, as demonstrated by the late Winthrop Rockefeller, for whom the award is named. The awardees are selected by a committee of past recipients, who are – by definition – the experts in public service through the arts.

## **ABOUT THE ARKANSAS ARTS CENTER**

The Arkansas Arts Center is the state's premier center for visual and performing arts with a renowned collection of international art. The strength of the collection is works on paper with an emphasis on drawings and contemporary craft objects. The collection includes paintings, sculpture and the largest U.S. repository of watercolors and drawings by 19th century artist Paul Signac. The AAC also features the

award-winning Children's Theatre, art classes and public programs. In addition, the AAC offers touring programs for communities, such as Children's Theatre on Tour, the Artmobile and traveling exhibitions.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Contact:** [501-372-4000](tel:501-372-4000)

**Website:** [ArkansasArtsCenter.org](http://ArkansasArtsCenter.org)

**Arkansas Arts Center:** 501 E Commerce, Little Rock, AR 72202

**Arkansas Arts Center Riverdale:** 2510 Cantrell Road, Little Rock, AR 72202

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