

Annual Report 2021-2022

Letter from our Executive Director

November 2022

Founded in 1979 by a small volunteer group of artists and arts patrons, The Delaware Contemporary's core focus has always been the promotion of growth and understanding of the contemporary arts in Delaware. Today, forty-three years later, we are still operating on that foundation as we strive to remain responsive and committed to providing opportunity for engagement. Our strength lies in our desire to seek and value diversity with the intention to sustain relevance by adapting and changing to meet the evolving needs of the community. It has always been imperative, despite social and economic challenges, that our organization continues to push our exhibitions and programs forward to allow for deep involvement.

We are extremely grateful for the generous support of our diverse group of contributors in FY22 that made it possible for The Delaware Contemporary to take account of our history and programs, rethink the ways our resources are allocated, establish benchmarks for a more equitable and just organization, and identify sustainability strategies for supporting artists in the years to come. In addressing these goals, we looked to two key qualities to shape our FY22 approach to program development and execution: **perseverance** and **perspective**.

Perseverance

Throughout FY22, despite the tenacity of the pandemic, TDC remained dedicated to continuing our keystone programs: high quality cutting-edge exhibitions, collaborations and peer partnerships, and programs that support the growth of our creative community.

Contemporary art is a product and witness of a specific time and era. It enables viewers to state, gain insight, and question certain socio-cultural or ideological/political developments by raising awareness and encouraging debate. Our three, thematic exhibition seasons were designed to do just that—guide viewers to the issues that connect us all. This year through themes of Presentation, Narrative and Play, TDC featured 360 art objects through the work of 149 regional artists in 6 group exhibitions, 13 solo exhibitions, 9 two-person shows, and 6 newly commissioned works of art.

Our successful collaborations have demonstrated the appreciable value the visual arts can and must continue to hold in the health of vibrant communities. Partnerships enrich our abilities to do so; they bring new resources, shared audiences and opportunities to raise awareness. This year, TDC partnered with 22 unique organizations to offer 114 programs providing visual art access and support to learners of all ages, art enthusiasts, and the art makers.



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Gaining Perspective

TDC's approach to program development has been based on a multitude of internal perspectives. With artists at the center of our mission, this was a year of listening, learning and examining how to best support them. In FY22, our approach to increasing the diversity of our perspective involved three unique approaches: gathering stakeholder feedback, establishing an external advisory group, and piloting artist programs.

Building on data collected in FY21, TDC engaged with field experts to examine our organizational and programmatic practices through the lens of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. Our community of patrons, artists and the general public were interviewed and surveyed to collect candid feedback on all aspects of TDC's operations. Complementing the focused study, an external advisory committee was developed to expand our understanding of institutional relevance in our region, and approaches to expanding our presence in the community. Committee members were selected from a diversity of sectors in our region to provide essential evaluation and planning insight for current and future programs and exhibitions.

We learned that our exhibitions are a successful model in increasing visibility for artists and also connecting artists with audiences. In recognizing our strengths, we were also able to recognize systemic gaps for many artists to access exhibition opportunities both at TDC and at presenting organizations across the county. Still today, many museums and visual arts organizations select and favor artists with established and informed practices. This traditional, merit-based practice reinforces barriers to growth and visibility opportunities for emerging artists and artists from underrepresented communities. Visibility and connection to arts professionals are often unattainable and limited by access to resources. Seeking to increase access and inclusion and close the gap, TDC piloted two initiatives:

- Our **Artist-in-Residence** program guides a small group of artists through a studio program complemented by mentoring and professional experience in preparation for a cumulative exhibition. Participation in this year-long program provides studio-based training with professional practice workshops, mentorship, and public presentation opportunities.
- The Delaware Contemporary's artist registry, ArtSource, provides working artists of our region with portfolio building tools, professional opportunities, and connections with arts programmers.

Moving from perspective into practice

Informed by research and inspired by new and diverse perspectives, TDC launches into FY23 positioned to fully execute and grow our opportunities for artists, creative professionals, and our community to come together.

Our FY23 goals are to:

- Expand use of and access to our uniquely designed artist registry, ArtSource. This tool offers artists of all levels and disciplines a public platform to increase visibility and opportunities for career development.
- Dismantle traditional approaches to art presentation by cultivating new ways of thinking around artist training, development and eligibility, and to break down barriers to resources for emerging artists through the growth of an onsite residency program.

- Deepen our connections to the richness of our neighborhoods through the launch of community-developed public art projects.
- Implement programs and products that illustrate the engaging ability of visual art to allow individuals to approach broad topic areas from a place that bears unique personal relevance.

Sincere gratitude goes to our ongoing supporters, visitors, and to those who generously participated in our year of learning. We remain committed to listening, learning, and continuing to advance accessibility. Please consider a donation to our year-end campaign and help us achieve our 2023 goals and deepen our connections to the community. Thank you for your continued support. Stay well and healthy during the approaching holiday season. We hope to see you soon!

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Leslie Shaffer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Leslie Shaffer
Executive Director