

# Annual Report 2020-2021

## Letter from our Executive Director

### November 2021

About a year ago—6 months into a world-changing pandemic—it became apparent that the role of museums in our culture would be forever different from before we all closed our doors in March 2020. And, while we have been open to visitors since June 2020, The Delaware Contemporary has faced profound challenges. We took innumerable actions in order to sustain the museum and the communities it serves, with a particular focus on supporting the people who make us who we are—our employees and our artists.

The Delaware Contemporary (TDC) is a cultural institution that has been supporting regional artists for more than 40 years — we value the importance of pushing boundaries and challenging the status quo towards social change through the arts. At its heart, TDC is a community of people: our staff, artists, educators, and visitors. The impact of the past year has been complicated and unimaginably difficult for everyone. We embrace the importance of fostering a cohesive, empathic environment for all, and the role TDC can and should play in bringing forth difficult conversations—museums cannot be neutral. As we move forward with new purpose as an organization, I want to share with you how we have progressed in diversifying our voice and expanding our input to amplify dialogue and grow opportunity in this past year.

This past year we implemented three major shifts—**process, practice, partnerships**—that fundamentally changed the way we develop and execute exhibitions and public programs to be more inclusive of and responsive to our community:

- The development **process** of our exhibitions is now taken on by a team of professional educators, curators, adjunct curators, and community program specialists to ensure inclusion and relevancy is in the fabric of our curatorial and public programming.
- The **practice** of moving to a seasonal schedule has enabled us to align exhibitions with the academic community and program within an overarching theme. Our tandem exhibitions provide a platform to push definitions, create associations and push forward related understanding. Also virtually, our Art Fitness workshop kept the minds of our artists active while our On Art discussion series kept the minds of our art enthusiasts on track with exhibiting artists and curatorial themes.
- It is without saying that the work of our exhibiting artists has opened the door to so many new programmatic **partners** including the League of Women Voters, Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence, Wilmington Ballet, Delaware College of Art and Design, and Brandywine Zoo. Despite continued COVID-related social distancing, we successfully worked with our strategic partners to provide children, youth, teens and college students with unique, amazing (and surprising) virtual experiences. For example, our Spanish language pre-K's from LACC zoomed into sessions with our Teaching Artist located in Puerto Rico. Together they explored art through live and imagined rainforests, tropical foliage and exotic bugs.



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## EXHIBITIONS:

The **FALL 2020** exhibition season of large, provocatively painted canvases traced Theresa Chromati's journey through our inequitable world to find power and strength. Forty-seven of Chawky Frenn's mixed media paintings brought to light the influence of money on politics and policy, and the history of the struggle for human rights. Rounding out the season was Shawn Baron Pinckney's centennial celebration of the 19th amendment through a collection of fashion designs inspired by women of strength, conviction, and character who broke down the walls of gender inequality.

The **SPRING 2021** season showcased the much-anticipated exhibition *Vessel Invitational: Revisioning the Receptacle* with 31 representations of "vessels" by 23 artists from across the country. Two other group exhibitions *Round About* and *Appearances*, through sculpture and painting respectively, brought the work of 20 regional artists into our galleries to break from traditional definitions of "object." In addition, TDC commissioned spoken word artist Jasmine L. Combs to create an original poem exploring the theme of "object" and "objectification", and in turn, solicited visual and written responses from 1st year college students.

Finally, our **SUMMER 2021** season celebrated individuality through five exhibitions that focused on how we "Identify." Yikui (Coy) Gu's series of mixed media work revealed issues of assimilation through collaged imagery from popular culture, political references, and personal experiences to engage viewers in a shared and personal American experience. *Family History* presented five regional artists whose work asked viewers to reflect and consider who we are as individuals in relation to our ancestors and to the people we call family. Through a diversity of media representing fourteen artists, *Unapologetic Conversations of Hair & Nonconformity* brought attention to the Crown Act and past discriminatory practices that have threatened to remove people of color from professional and social opportunities.

Launched in June 2020, our **Platform Gallery** public art project has celebrated three installations by internationally recognized artists: Theresa Chromati, Anna K.E, and Meleko Mokgosi. These artists invite the visually curious visitor traveling by foot, bike, car or train, into a dialogue with the timely themes and provocative imagery of their works.

Last but not least, TDC welcomed a cohort of two **Artist Residencies**, one **Curatorial Residency**, and one **Creative Residency**. These creative professionals have brought a diversity of perspectives through their varied backgrounds, experiences, interests, and upcoming projects to be showcased in our exhibition galleries.

As we enter into Fiscal Year 2022, we strive to:

- Continue to support and invest in individuals at the cutting edge of their fields, whose work impacts the cultural landscape at large.
- Bring artists and thinking into a dynamic community of local and regional artists with international recognition: a professional network of creative practitioners and thinkers.
- Encourage hundreds of artists to explore their ideas and work within the context of the MidAtlantic region.
- Bring a community of artists to the MidAtlantic region and create opportunities for engagement and cross-cultural exchange with audiences.

I remain deeply grateful to our staff and board for keeping The Delaware Contemporary open to the public since last June in ways that are meaningful and urgent. Thank you to the artists who demonstrated flexibility and patience to accommodate shifts due to COVID-related closures, changes and adaptations. And sincere gratitude goes to our visitors and program participants. The power of art to bring connection, comfort, joy, and inspiration has never been more important. We stand profoundly changed by the events of this last 18 months, yet The Delaware Contemporary's relevance and renewed commitment to social bonds are unwavering.

Gratefully,

Leslie Shaffer  
Executive Director

200 South Madison Street, Wilmington, DELAWARE 19801  
302.656.6466 - [decontemporary.org](http://decontemporary.org)