



NEWS / UTAH

Curators Brainstorm Big Dreams for—and Identify Gaps in—Utah's Contemporary Arts

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A believed first-time gathering of Utah contemporary art curators at the 2022 Spring Summit in Green River yields big dreams and ideas for improvement.

WORDS

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The first-time gathering of Utah curators on March 31, 2022 included (from left to right) Bolton Colburn of Nora Eccles Harrison Museum, independent curator Jorge Rojas, Amy Jorgensen of Granary Arts, Nancy Rivera of Utah Arts and Museums, independent curator Kristina Lenzi, Jared Steffensen of the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, John Sproul of Nox Contemporary, and Emily Larsen of the Springville Museum of Art.

GREEN RIVER, UT—Eight contemporary art curators gathered around five tables that had been loosely arranged to echo the shape of a monument, where oversized notepads quickly filled with colorfully-marked text such as “shuttle service for the arts” and “more focus/continued focus on social/racial justice.”

Here, in the lower level of the John Wesley Powell River History Museum in Green River, Utah, was likely the first-of-its-kind gathering of some of the state’s most creative minds. As part of the 2022 Spring Summit in Green River, co-hosted by Epicenter and Granary Arts, eight of the state’s contemporary art curators—including curators from the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art in Salt Lake City and the Springville Museum of Art—brainstormed what’s working and what needed to improve in the Utah art ecosystem.

Amy Jorgensen, executive director and chief curator of Granary Arts, a nonprofit contemporary art space in Ephraim, organized and led the “Curators: Peer to Peer” workshop. During introductions, Jorgensen explained the significance of the March 31, 2022 event.



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“Anecdotally, I think this may be the first time a group of curators has officially met in the history of the state of Utah,” said Jorgensen, who was joined by Bolton Colburn of the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum in Logan, Emily Larsen of Springville Museum of Art, Nancy Rivera of Utah Arts and Museums, John Sproul of Nox Contemporary in Salt Lake City, Jared Steffensen of UMOCA, and independent curators Kristina Lenzi and Jorge Rojas.

The curators split into two groups, rotated between the tables, and responded to discussion prompts: gaps, big dreams, points of collaboration, and action items. An idea for future collaborations included more connections between artists and institutions, potentially in the form of a shared database. One of the highlighted gaps was the lack of resources for the arts, ranging from funding concerns to a lack of mentorship opportunities, while a big dream was more coverage and critical reviews from national media.



The opening ceremony for the 2022 Spring Summit, March 30-April 1, took place at Monument Hill in Green River, Utah. Photo: Kamilla Earlywine. Courtesy Granary Arts.



After about forty-five minutes, the curators gathered at the head table—a configuration inspired by Green River’s Monument Hill, a massive concrete block installation that was the site of the summit’s opening ceremony—to go over their vision statements, which included ideas such as:

A thriving, inclusive, and well-funded arts ecosystem at the forefront of the contemporary arts and cultural dialogue.

I envision a creative think-tank that would break away from the old-fashioned way of thinking about limited ideas. Instead, we can promote abundance-thinking versus scarcity-thinking.

The Utah art scene fosters abundance, connection, and relevance through a thriving, supportive network of artists, institutions, and benefactors. Think big and create connection across the state and beyond.

I envision a community of contemporary curators that is supportive of each other and of our collective work as it relates to our broader arts and culture ecosystem. We envision learning from each other, challenging each other, inspiring each other, [and] supporting each other as we nurture a new era of curators that will help determine and contribute to the future of our state’s contemporary art scene.





Utah contemporary art curators gathered for the "Curators: Peer to Peer" workshop on March 31, 2022. Photo: Kamilla Earlywine. Courtesy Granary Arts.



The closed workshop was part of the three-day 2022 Spring Summit, an experiential conference of approximately seventy invited participants—including designers, architects, artists, curators, cultural producers, and community organizers—who traveled from all over the region to gather in the small town of Green River, located off of Interstate 70 approximately fifty miles northwest of Moab.

The summit featured artist and curator presentations, workshops, a community service project, and keynote presentations by Elpitha Tsoutsounakis, assistant professor and founding faculty in the Multi-Disciplinary Design program at the University of Utah; Matthew Smith and Joseph Kunkel (Northern Cheyenne) of MASS Design Group's Santa Fe, New Mexico office, a social justice and human dignity-focused architecture firm; and artist Chip Thomas (AKA jetsonorama), who installed new work during the shindig at Tacos La Pasadita.

The 2022 Spring Summit, held March 30 through April 1, was sponsored by Utah Arts and Museums and the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation and co-hosted by Green River's Epicenter, a rural investment and cultural exploration nonprofit.



Epicenter in Green River, Utah co-hosted the 2022 Spring Summit, which included approximately seventy designers, architects, artists, curators, cultural producers, and community organizers. Photo: Kamilla Earlywine. Courtesy Granary Arts.





Chip Thomas, a wheatpaste artist who installed new work at Tacos La Pasadita, gave a keynote inside the Green River High School auditorium on April 1, 2022. Photo: Steve Jansen.





Artist Chip Thomas, AKA jetsonorama, installed a site-specific work at Tacos La Pasadita in Green River, Utah. Photo: Steve Jansen.





Nancy Rivera, a Salt Lake City-based artist and curator for Utah Arts and Museums, presented during the 2022 Spring Summit in Green River, Utah on April 1, 2022. Photo: Kamilla Earlywine. Courtesy Granary Arts.





The three-day experiential summit included workshops such as a mountain medicine course. Photo: Steve Jansen.





Epicenter is a rural investment and cultural exploration nonprofit based in Green River, Utah. Photo: Steve Jansen.





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STEVE JANSEN

Steve Jansen is the news editor at *Southwest Contemporary*. An Albuquerque-based investigative news reporter and arts writer, he has won and been nominated for various state, regional, and national awards. In 2013, his investigation into two crumbling Houston dams attained first place for Best Print News/Feature Story in the Texas statewide Lone Star Awards. He's a former staff writer for *Phoenix New Times* and *Houston Press*.

