



# NORTH DAKOTA COUNCIL ON THE ARTS: Fostering the *Arts* in North Dakota

Painting by Walter Piehl



Fargo-Moorhead Symphony



Pottery by Jon Offutt

By Kylie Blanchard, Co-Editor

The mission of North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA) is to strengthen the creative capacity of North Dakota for all who live and visit through honoring cultural traditions, empowering excellence and innovation, and inspiring arts and culture opportunities for all.

For more than 50 years, NDCA has worked to ensure the role of arts across the state has continued to grow through supporting creators, art providers and participants in telling the story of North Dakota and inspiring its visitors through the arts. “We’ve always been a strong grant maker and have always tried to serve our state and communities,” says Kim Konikow, NDCA executive director.

NDCA has also worked to build on the success of the creative individuals and community organizations nurturing the arts across the state. Not only is North Dakota known for its beauty and abundant resources, it is also a haven for creative spirits, a place where the arts flourish. The arts offer hope, excitement and opportunities to

experience something new. Arts organizations and artists provide countless art activities, events and exhibits throughout the state.

## The Beginning

Two years after national legislation created the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965, the North Dakota State Legislature established the North Dakota Arts and Humanities in 1967, as an official agency of the State of North Dakota. In 1980, the official name was changed to the North Dakota Council on the Arts. For nearly 30 years, NDCA’s office operated in Fargo, until the council’s office was moved to Bismarck in 1994. In the past 55 years, NDCA has had seven board chairs and 10 executive directors.

Throughout the decades, NDCA has provided a variety of services to the citizens of North Dakota, first through funding from the NEA and later with the addition of state allocations, which allowed the council

to address the need for creativity in public education and enhancing arts education. In addition, NDCA has worked to increase the economic impact of the arts on the state and in local communities, improve the wellness of the state's citizens through the use of arts programming, preserve North Dakota's cultural heritage through folk and traditional arts mentorships, and enhance the quality of life for the state's citizens.

In celebration of its 50th anniversary in 2017, NDCA and the North Dakota Art Gallery Association, with support from Starion Bank, organized two art exhibits. The "50 Artists for 50 Years" exhibits displayed the artwork of 50 North Dakota artists, as well as the work of the exhibit curator. One of the exhibits was displayed in the Heritage Center in Bismarck and the other toured the state during the anniversary year.

## A Big Impact

"The number of arts organizations in both urban and rural communities has expanded immensely over the past 50 years," says Jan Webb, who served as NDCA executive director from 2000 – 2014.

Webb notes many programs created by the NDCA have had a significant impact on the arts and reaching individuals across North Dakota. This includes the Arts in Education program, which has continued arts curriculum for children after many schools dropped arts programming, as well as the Community Arts Access Program, which has given rural communities financial support to expand their arts programming. "NDCA is sometimes the only funding option for rural arts programs and organizations," notes Webb,



Western Plains Opera Company, Minot



The Art for Life Program reaches residence in long-term care facilities across the state.



Hamzat Koriko teaches an apprentice the art of traditional African drumming.



International Music Camp



Scandinavian art by Pieper Bloomquist



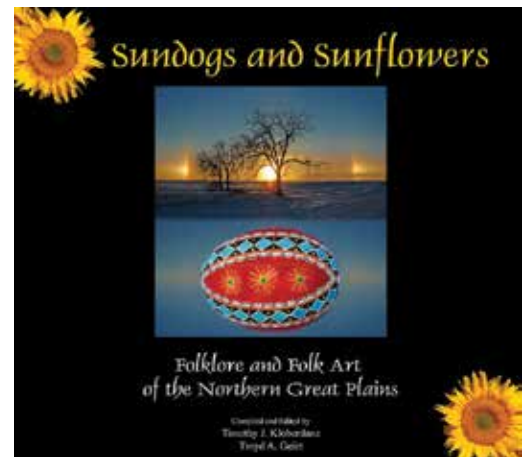
adding an increase in funding levels both at the federal and state levels has also helped the arts grow across North Dakota.

Another area of growth and impact is the Folk Arts and Apprenticeship programs. “These programs have really helped people recognize the traditional arts in our state and have helped to promote them and ensure the folk arts continue,” says Webb. “It is really about taking pride in our cultural heritage and providing exposure to all different kinds of arts to broaden people’s perspectives.”

Troyd Geist has served as NDCA Folklorist for nearly 30 years and says the programs created and supported by NDCA have been key to maintaining and growing the arts in the state.

“The work that has been done in arts education and getting arts more utilized in schools and life-long learning is very important,” he notes. “When an artist does something, it is for the broader community, and it has a ripple effect.”

Geist points to a program that began as a pilot study in 2001-2003 to provide intensive, long-term exposure to the arts for residents in long-term care facilities. “This started the Art for Life Program, which brought together arts organizations, long-term care facilities, schools, and artists,” he notes. “This type of thing is big now, but we started it more than 15 years before the rest of the nation.”



He notes NDCA also published “Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the North Great Plains,” a 352-page, full-color, hard-cover book, which features more than 1,000 examples of folklore and folk art to share the variety of art across the state. “The arts can mean so much to a person and who that person is,” says Geist. “They go to the core of what our state is and our identity. Our history, landscape and weather all shape our arts in our state.”

“The power of the arts is to bring us together,” says Searle Swedlund, NDCA board chairman. “How do we gather around something? Arts are at the core of this and NDCA works very hard to foster this.”

Swedlund notes many artists and arts organizations across the state operate because of their passion for the arts. “They do it for the love of the arts,” he notes. “NDCA is about making sure we can provide the resources, expertise and money for the arts and arts organizations when they are looking for support. We want to provide collaboration to build on



Keith Bear, left, teaching as part of the Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program.



Performance at 2019 Arts Convening



Sculptures by Dean Cohn Fay



Sleepy Hollow Theatre & Arts Park, Bismarck

successes across the state.”

Konikow says a new program called Arts Across the Prairie: Placemaking in Rural North Dakota is in the works to establish creative place-making in rural North Dakota. She said the program will consist of eight large-scale installations across the state, which will attract both residents and visitors. “This requires a network of stakeholders in all the counties in each region,” she notes. “People are coming together across regional and county lines to discover our history through art.”

## The Future

“When we look back at who we are and who we have been, we are going to continue to be the agency that supports artists and arts organizations in the state,” says Swedlund.

NDCA recently completed a 2020-2025 strategic plan titled “Vision 2030,” which is working to shift the council’s focus to directly relate to what is happening in the world, notes Konikow. “During the COVID-19 pandemic, people have turned to the arts more than ever in our state,” she says. “In the last few years there has been a real recognition of how important the arts are in our lives.”

“There are so many areas of our life that include art. The more people are exposed to it, the better they can look at things from a different perspective and broaden their viewpoints,” Webb notes. “There is an emotional connection that takes place through the arts

and when there is exposure to the arts.”

Geist says NDCA will continue to explore new opportunities to reach residents and visitors through the arts. “The agency has really evolved to address new challenges and new opportu-

nities in our state, while maintaining the roots of what it does,” he says.

“The arts council is a small but mighty organization,” says Konikow. “It is unbelievable how much we do, and our reach is wide.”

### For more information:

The NDCA highlights the arts through its website, [www.arts.nd.gov](http://www.arts.nd.gov), and a variety of social media channels. “Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the North Great Plains” can be ordered by contacting the NDCA office at 701-328-7590 or [arts@nd.gov](mailto:arts@nd.gov). A “Guide to North Dakota Art and Cultural Destinations” is also available online at [www.arts.nd.gov/guide-nd-art-and-cultural-destinations](http://www.arts.nd.gov/guide-nd-art-and-cultural-destinations), and the NDCA “Vision 2030” strategic plan can be viewed at [www.arts.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/PDF/ndc\\_strat\\_plan20-25\\_0.pdf](http://www.arts.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/PDF/ndc_strat_plan20-25_0.pdf).



Grandma's Garden by William Brien