

# OLY ARTS

Issue No. 29 | Spring 2024



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Cover photo by Kelli Carmony

## OLY ARTS ISSUE No. 29

Spring 2024

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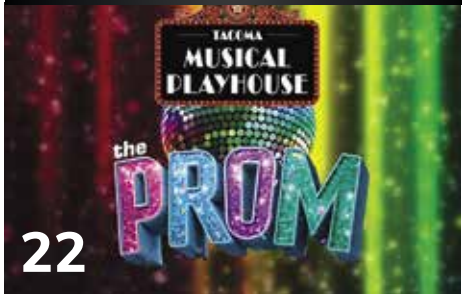
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# Processing the Procession

By John Longenbaugh

## A Talk with The Procession of Species founder and “Director Guy” Eli Sterling

After a four-year hiatus, the Procession of the Species returns to downtown Olympia this April 26th and 27th as part of Arts Walk. If you’ve never attended, you might assume it’s a classic small-town parade with an environmental vibe and plenty of costumes, masks, puppets, music and dancing — and you’d be sort of right.

But to get the real story of why, for example, it’s a Procession and not a Parade, or the reasons for the Three Rules for participants, or why there’s a Luminary Procession at Dusk, you have to talk to Eli Sterling, the creator of the Procession and its “Director Guy.”

Sterling spent years preparing the groundwork for Olympia’s first Procession of the Species in 1995 to celebrate Earth Day and the passage of the Endangered Species Act. From then until 2019, his Earthbound Productions undertook an increasingly massive operation which grew to include over a hundred volunteer teachers, craftspeople, dancers, musicians, designers, painters, videographers and others, along with thousands of participants and many more spectators.

Since its founding every aspect of the Procession has received analysis and evaluation from Sterling and his crew, and the result reflects idealism tempered by realistic experience. Ask about his “Director Guy” title and he’ll talk expansively about refuting traditional hierarchical conventions, while admitting “there has to be someone to get blamed, who’s not at the forefront but takes contributions to the whole, who will answer when the cry goes up ‘Someone, please, make a decision.’”

Asking him “Why is it a Procession and not a Parade?” also reveals a deeply-considered philosophy — Parades denote conquest, while Processions express liberation. The pre-event workspace is open for seven weeks to reflect Iroquois ideas of “seven generations,” but also to provide time for artists’ friends to join them. Similar seemingly simple questions lead inevitably to deeply involved discussions; a lot of sober thought has gone into what might seem woo-woo or whimsy.



And then there are the Procession’s Three Rules, established at its founding — no written or spoken words, no motorized vehicles, no live pets or animals. Sterling thinks all three were prescient, but particularly the “no words” provision. He recalls his own experience as an environmental activist. “We saw that you can have a voice in the media, but you can never win,” he recalls. “You put up your peace signs, the timber corporations put up bigger signs. We couldn’t compete with language, and we certainly couldn’t compete with money.” As a result, the Procession has created a remarkably rhetoric-free zone in a society increasingly divided and not united by words.

# Processing the Procession *Continued*

But does all of this admittedly fascinating philosophy translate into what people experience at The Procession? Oddly enough, it seems to, even when the intentionality extends to decisions like not having food booths for the crowds. “We don’t have white food tents, and we don’t sell elephant ears,” says Sterling. “Our ‘white tents’ are the downtown businesses. From restaurants to bookstores to tattoo parlors and the hotels, we want to highlight what’s here year-round.”

In a similar vein, the colored chalk distributed for writing on the sidewalks not only contributes to the festive atmosphere, but counters fearful narratives of downtown streets as sources only of homelessness and other urban problems.

Even the Luminary Procession is more than a series of gorgeously lit costumes, puppets and masked figures displayed at dusk. “We originally chose it because it’s the twilight hour, the time of consciousness,” explains Sterling. “As things shifted from a one to two-day event, it revealed a second value to the lights, in making people feel safe. When you see lit things, whether it’s Christmas lights or a candle in a window of a church or home, there’s a welcoming spirituality to it.”

This year’s theme is “The Rise of Reflection,” referring to a collective need to reflect on our societies and actions, but also on the value of a Procession itself — and its audience. “We wanted to make sure we weren’t just replicating what it had been prior to 2020,” Sterling says. “A lot of people want to come watch The Procession, and hope that whatever was there before will just show up again. But this year we want people to ask themselves: what are they showing up for, and why?”

It’s got to be something more than entertainment. “Pure entertainment means pure ‘no responsibility,’” he insists. “We let too much of this world become pure entertainment. The hope is to go past entertainment, to give people a sense of individual identity in their community.”

While there’s no written or spoken message in The Procession, the mix and mélange of colors, costumes, music, creatures, dancers, masks and creativity celebrates a lot,

including the marvel of our own ecosystem. For both the planet and Olympia, Sterling believes that The Procession “should be something that says ‘this is a good place to live.’”



**WHAT, WHEN, and WHERE:** (See map opposite)

**Luminary Procession:** Begins at 8:30 p.m. between 4th and 5th Ave. and ends between 4th and 5th on Water St. Artesian Orchestra Rumble and Samba OlyWa will perform for participants while a theater of fire spinners performs in the adjacent lot next to the Fountain Park.

**Procession of the Species:** Begins at 4:30 p.m. on April 27th at Cherry Street and Legion Way and ends in Heritage Park.

**HOW MUCH:** Free.

**LEARN MORE:**  
oly-wa.us/procession







**The Luminary Procession · April 26**

Begins at 8:30pm between 4th & 5th on Washington and ends on Water St.

**The Procession of the Species · April 27**

Begins at 4:30pm at Cherry Street and Legion Way and ends in Heritage Park

# OLY ARTS



Photo by  
Amanda Stevens

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# Poetry Popping Up for Arts Walk

By Molly Gilmore

Collaboration is at the center of Olympia Arts Walk when the city's creative community transforms downtown businesses, nonprofits and vacant spaces into temporary galleries, markets and performance spaces — and even the Thurston County Museum of Fine Art, a pop-up museum created by a group of artists.

This time around, the impromptu institution (located, for now, at 509 4th Ave. E.) will be home to the work featured on the Arts Walk map: “Lion’s Mane,” a digital photograph by David Hoekje. “My goal is to create something unreal out of the real and highlight the transformation inherent in the photographic medium,” Hoekje (pronounced Hoke-yuh) said of the photo, in which a 1-pound lion’s mane mushroom looks more alien than earthly. “At the same time, I’m trying to evoke some really basic and essential themes of spring: growth, renewal, birth.”

On the map for the twice-yearly festival’s spring edition, happening April 26 and 27, are 100 participating locations hosting visual art, music, dance, puppetry, aerial arts and much more. Amid the wealth of options, collaborative work among literary and visual artists is one of the themes that emerge.

“We’ve had poetry in the past, but this year, there’s definitely a lot out there,” said Arts Walk coordinator Jessica Strauss Tomy. Like this Arts Walk itself, the poetic projects involve a lot of students and a certain amount of serendipity.



Photo by David Hoekje

David Hoekje’s *Lion’s Mane*, featured on the cover of the Arts Walk map, is at once a still-life photo of a locally grown mushroom and a surreal image of a mysterious object.



Courtesy of South Puget Sound Community College

*Canada Thistle (Cirsium Arvense)*, by Luna Kardes-Grover, is part of *Habitats*, a collaborative exhibition of art and poetry.



Olympia Poet Laureate Kathleen Byrd has teamed up with fellow South Sound Community College professor Liza Brenner for *Habitats: Climate, Art and Poetry*, an exhibit of paintings along with poems designed and printed by Sherwood Press. The show — on view at KXXO, 119 Washington St. SE, Olympia — will also include poems and paintings by students at the college.

The work by the creative-writing and art students came out of study, observation and research. The art students created work on the theme “Looks Can Be Deceiving: Invasive Species and Repairing the Riparian Zone,” the zone where land meets a river or stream.

The event will include a reception, reading and question-and-answer session with the professors and their students from 5 to 10 p.m. April 26. Byrd and Brenner will also be on hand from 1 to 4 p.m. April 27 to show the installation.

Also focusing their Arts Walk collaboration on the environment are artist Carrie Ziegler and poet Jennifer Johnson. Ziegler, well known for facilitating group artmaking around environmental themes, is showing her studio paintings at The Bandha Room, 119 Capitol Way N., Olympia. She and Johnson will offer “Ritual, Reflection, Writing: A Workshop on Emergence,” from 6 to 7 p.m. April 26. All are welcome to the workshop, which will offer participants the opportunity to reflect on Ziegler’s work and explore their responses in writing. “I find ritual and poetry to be incredibly moving ... and accessible, particularly when we strip away the ‘shoulds,’” Ziegler said.

“Carrie’s work is deeply evocative and I hope to help people gain insight and begin to process what is evoked for them, personally as well as communally,” Johnson said. “My goal is to encourage people to write from their hearts to help understand what and how they are feeling.”

At Browsers Bookshop, members of the Olympia High School Poetry Club will be selling chapbooks of their poems. On offer will be chapbooks by 16 student poets along with one featuring poetry by Carolyn Gilman, who teaches English and advises the club. “We try to do a special project every April for National Poetry Month, and this is this year’s project,” Gilman said.

Browsers is also showing papercuts by celebrated local artist, illustrator and author Nikki McClure, who’ll be on hand to sign books from 6 to 7 p.m. April 26. The store will display papercuts from McClure’s latest book, *Something About the Sky*, a collaboration with the late environmentalist Rachel Carson. *Sky* — based on a piece Carson wrote in response to a child’s request — is not a poetry book, but Carson wrote poems and came to believe that there was poetry in writing truthfully about nature.



Courtesy of the City of Olympia  
Kathleen Byrd, Olympia poet laureate, is showing her poems and those of her students as part of *Habitats*, a collaborative exhibition.



Courtesy of Carrie Ziegler  
*Talequah*, named for an orca who carried the body of her dead calf for 17 days, is part of Carrie Ziegler’s series “Sea Level Rise/ The Mother’s Tears,” which explores themes of climate grief.

## Poetry Popping Up for Arts Walk *Continued*

Maria Popova, who reviewed the book for the New York Times ([nytimes.com/2024/02/09/books/review/rachel-carson-nikki-mcclure-something-about-the-sky.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/09/books/review/rachel-carson-nikki-mcclure-something-about-the-sky.html)), had this to say of McClure's illustrations: "What emerges is a kind of tender visual poem, as boldly defiant of category as Carson's writing."

The juxtaposition of McClure's illustrations and the student poetry was a happy accident, said bookstore owner Andrea Griffith. "We didn't mastermind the pairing," she said, "but we're eagerly anticipating the celebration of words, poetry and creativity at Arts Walk this year." 0



*Courtesy of Nikki McClure*

*Cloudy skies fill the pages of Nikki McClure's latest book, Something About the Sky, which has text by the late Rachel Carson.*

**WHAT:** Olympia Arts Walk

**WHERE:** Downtown Olympia, with street closure at Fifth Avenue from Washington to Jefferson streets

**WHEN:** April 26 and 27

**HOW MUCH:** Free

**LEARN MORE:** [artswalkoly.com](http://artswalkoly.com)



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# South Sound Studio Tour

by Alec Clayton

Visiting artists in their studios, seeing them at work and talking about their art, tremendously enhances one's appreciation for the art and enlarges the sheer joy in looking at art. The South Sound Studio Tour in Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater offer unique opportunities to visit, watch and learn from South Sound artists.

Artists invite the public into their studios in commercial buildings and in their homes to view artworks (some for sale and some not), talk to the artists, watch them work and learn about equipment, materials and methods. There will be demonstrations and direct sales by artists. More than 37 artists are scheduled to take part.

Local working artists first proposed the tours at an Olympia Arts Commission meeting in 1998. The commission took on the event and managed the studio tours through 2007, and then replaced the tour with the Artist Garage Sale that was held annually at the Armory for another two years. Ten years later, in 2019, another group of artists set about to revitalize the tour with the help of ceramicist Nicole Gugliotti and painter Hart James. Soon after the pandemic



interrupted the tour for another two years, but it resurfaced strong with another all-volunteer committee made up of Douglas Cochrane, LeeAnn Perry and Neeltje (Nellie) Vos. Kathy Gore Fuss worked behind the scenes for several years, but officially joined the studio tour board in the summer of 2022. Cochrane and Perry retired, and a new board was formed in 2023 consisting of Gore Fuss, Marion Pollman, Randi Parkhurst, Susan Aurand and Sandra Bocas. Erika Naficy was hired as a consultant (Third Hand Artist Support) and has supported the board in taking the organization to a 501C3 status, upgrading the operating systems, and streamlining the event registration.



In the early years, small passport booklets were Xeroxed and stapled together and sold through local art businesses. A visitor on the tour could get their 'passport' stamped or have something pasted on it that was reminiscent of that artist's work. Gore Fuss said, "I remember how excited the tour's visitors were to see where and how the art is made and to have a chance to ask artists questions. Seeing the diversity of workspaces offered an intimate experience for the viewer that was a contrast to Arts Walk."

The tour has evolved over the years branding itself as an alternative to Arts Walk events. It is "an all-volunteer event managed by artists to highlight local studio spaces and help the community understand that artists live and work right in their own neighborhoods," Gore Fuss said. "The tour also offers interactive experiences with the artists where they have an opportunity to watch demonstrations and try their hand at making something. And lastly, it offers an opportunity for the public and art enthusiasts to purchase original artwork directly from the artist."

South Puget Sound Community College art faculty member and sculptor Joe Batt maintains a garage studio behind his home at 1511 6th Ave. SW on Olympia's West Side. Batt creates Cartoon-like narrative ceramic figures depicting people and animals in various dreamlike settings. These pieces are often finished with mixed media after the firing, using colored pencils or pastels. His works explore our relationship with nature and technology, sometimes depicting dystopian worlds. Sharing his studio for the tour are artists Dan Meuse and Liza Brenner.

Four well known Olympia women artists will be displaying their work in Lucy Gentry's LGM Studios upstairs over Browsers Books and Ossa Skinworks (enter down the alley between the Stardust Salon and The Botherhood Tavern). 109 Capital Way N.

"I will be showing a variety of old and new work, which will include new abstract paintings, black and white ink drawings on paper, monoprints, and cyanotype prints," Gentry said. "I have recently started a new series of ink paintings of significant



*On the Bus*  
by Lucy Gentry



*Missing Harriet Hemings*  
by Lynette Charters



*I Love You, I Love You Too*  
By Sandra Bocas



*Celestial Beings*  
By Mikaela Shafer

contemporary activists which will be shown as works in progress. I am continuing my research of new materials, and on display will be an experiment with roots of wheat grass. A station will be set up for visitors to experiment-play with ink and homemade paint brushes."

Showing work along with Gentry will be Lynette Charters, Sandra Bocas, and Mikaela Shafer.

Lynette Charters, internationally recognized for her "Missing Women" series, will be showing work from a new series celebrating the history of women's achievements, "which tends to be less documented, less compensated, and often appropriated, leading us to believe that women are only useful in supporting roles, not the trailblazers they really are," Charters says.

From "The Missing Women Series," she will be showing "Da Vinci's Muses and Children."

Sandra Bocas is known for her colorful and enigmatic portrait faces. "My fascination with faces is that they provide me with an endless opportunity to explore, through the medium of paint, the expressions of the soul," Bocas says. "I will be showing some new original works and some prints. I've been creating a new series called 'Love Between Humans.' My endeavor is to contribute to peace in the world by showing how much we as humans have in common rather than how different we are."

Native American artist (Hopi) Mikaela Shafer was the cover artist for the Fall 2023 Arts Walk map and brochure. She rounds out the foursome at LGM Studio.

Kathy Gore Fuss, a Studio Tour board member will be showing her paintings with Randi Parkhurst at Gore Fuss/Parkhurst Studios, 1302 Pioneer AVE NE, Olympia, a studio connected to her home.

Gore Fuss explains: "I have shared a variety of work over the recent years, from floral garlands used in some installations I made around town during the Pandemic, to my paintings and drawings about our forests. I also teach art classes in my studio annually and will have class descriptions available. I will be sharing a painting series that I have been working on since June 2023.

## South Sound Studio Tour *Continued*



*Layers of Consciousness* by Debra Van Tuinen



*Nurse Stump* by Kathy Gore Fuua



Randi Parkhurst at Gore Fuss/Parkhurst Studios

I have been painting plein air (outdoors) in a small ravine at Squaxin Park working from one particular nurse stump over the last nine months. Focusing on the place this stump occupies in the woods, the intricacies of her form, and the sustenance provided to the younger trees who grow from the stump are all part of her story.

As I move around the stump the weather and the seasons weave themselves into each painting, capturing the different time and point of view from June through January.” See her paintings, drawings, mixed media, floral garlands, paper art, hand-bound books, and paper structures.

Parkhurst’s studio on the northeast corner of the property, is where she will be featuring her intricate paper houses, hand-bound books and elegant botanical prints.

Julie Ratner will be sharing an audio version of ‘trees singing’ from an app that produces ambient sounds of the tree’s inner life, and Hailey Akers, an AVANTI ACE student, will be showing recent paintings.

In Debra Van Tuinen’s studio at 429 4th Ave. W next to Heritage Park in Olympia you will see Van Tuinen’s large acrylic, oil, and encaustic paintings. Her large acrylics tend to depict or have the feel of water with rhythical slashes of mostly monochromatic colors. Her studio front door opens into a gallery space, and behind the gallery is her working studio where you can see works in progress and learn about the art of encaustic and other painting techniques. Also featured will be art by Dean Popek, Bob Coble, and Austen Lyon.

These and more than 30 artists are scheduled to take part in the tours. 0

**WHAT:** South Sound Studio Tour

**WHERE:** Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater

**WHEN:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 20, and Sunday, April 21, 2024

**HOW MUCH:** Free

**LEARN MORE:** Maps and info available online at [southsoundstudiotour.wordpress.com](https://southsoundstudiotour.wordpress.com)



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Karin Terry as Sally Bowles  
Photo by Shanna Paxton

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# The Multidimensional World of Travis Johnson

by Lynette Charters Serembe

Travis Johnson is a multidisciplinary artist, a prolific painter, sculptor, ceramicist, knowledgeable curator, and he has a deeply moving voice which will touch your soul when you hear it. He sings solo and tours with his family group Fivacious. (Fivacious is composed of the five Johnson siblings who have been singing acappella afro roots music for the last three decades). Johnson is a man with an easy smile and a friendly demeanor. Anything he sets his mind to, he follows through purposefully and unflinchingly; he is extremely serious about his art and art mentoring practices and if you spend time appreciating his many talents and disciplines, you'll notice there is a strong common thread that runs through them.

Since he arrived in Olympia/Lacey area, he has blazed a trail of brilliance. He shows regularly at the Leonor R. Fuller Gallery at SPSCC, Vermillion Art Gallery in Seattle, has shown at TESC, and has been invited to show at Marfa, the huge indoor/outdoor desert arts festival in Texas. He has just finished his MFA at Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland, Ore. and has retained many ties there. He shows other artist's work as well as his own in the gallery in his studio. Receptions are by invitation only.

Johnson grew up in Phelan, California with his family who were farmers in previous generations; they lived off the land amidst a strong community. (The animals from his formative years make an appearance throughout his paintings and sculptures). Later, as a young man, he encountered the LA art scene while working there and indeed worked closely with artists, but never seemed to find a way to be a more meaningful part of their community. He arrived in Olympia/Lacey on March 18, 2018. At the time he was working for a ride share company but had long known he had so much more to offer the world. He decided to put down roots here and seriously commit to launching his long-held practice as an artist.

To begin with, he didn't know anyone in the arts community here; he knocked on many doors until at length, he got his first break. A friend introduced him to the owners of Tart Cider who at the time were looking for an artist for their tasting room. He says he got help from his friend with transport and help from another friend framing prints of his work. The show was a huge success, he sold the first piece on the first day of the show after which his artworks sold rapidly. He showed at Tart Cider for a span of 2-3 years.

This was validating, and an affirmation that he was on the right path. Soon after the pandemic hit, he was invited to Nicole Gugliotti's "Creative Something" through South Puget Sound Community College. This was a series of very successful interviews set up to continue the arts dialogue and strengthen our community during the days when we were all quarantining (you can still find his recorded



interview on SPSCCs website listed under LEARN MORE). This interview was followed by an invitation to show in SPSCC's Futures Rising exhibition, which was a group show in celebration of local black artists curated by Thresea "Mama Tee" Yost involving 12 other artists and the Black Well Red Thread Collective. In this exhibition, Alan Motley, a freelance curator in Seattle, saw his work. Motley worked with Vermillion Art Gallery in Seattle owned by Diana Adams. Johnson has shown several times at this venue and has established himself as part of the community there.

Johnson's paintings are powerful, colorful, and energetic; they are highly spirited but not aggressive. He employs layering of color and bold decisive brushstrokes sometimes with cartoonish effect but never overproduced or polished.



There is an exuberance to his work with a loaded sobering narrative. He said that to explain, we must go back to the beginning when black people were introduced to the US as slaves, where families, relationships, and communities were divided and dispersed as possessions at the whim and convenience of white slave owners. Because there is little to no acknowledgment of the tremendous damage done to African American communities during slave years and after, and a distinct lack of reparation or restoration (indeed history tells of sabotage by white people at African Americans own successful efforts in restoring and thriving), dehumanizing stereotypes with which black people are generally represented, thrive in our culture. "But the body insists on its humanity" Johnson says. He says there are usually a number of ways in which black people are portrayed, and none of them are authentic. In his paintings, Johnson revives rural black identity. He says he uses a variety of painting styles, from African, African American, to popular culture and street style to subvert the stereotypes and portray the real people with whom he grew up. They stand in unison with a strong, long suffering but unapologetic and steady gaze, steadfastly denying the stereotypes that are projected onto them. In the US, black stories do not get told properly. He gives rural black communities visibility from their own perspective.

Johnson tells us that the idea of the multidimensional perspective that artists in Africa had been exploring for generations was repackaged and sold as a new idea by Braque and Picasso in the beginning of the twentieth century. Johnson reclaims this concept of multiple perspectives to represent black lives and black communities from their own vantage point.

Johnson's sculptures are both charming and raw. They walk a fine line in both denying the materials they were made from, and at the same time celebrating them. Johnson says he observes in our society a relationship with materials which causes an excess in consumption, which he would rather not be part of but instead make use of. He repurposes

what others deem as waste. His sculptures are made of discarded materials reimagined into familiar objects, or familiar objects repurposed into abstract art. They are charming and essential, and very personal in style, which references naïve/folk art but with an added intelligent wit; always staying in the moment and keeping it real. His ceramics carry the same theme.

His bowls are handmade but some of them are finished on the potter's wheel, playing with the two disciplines inviting you to guess the difference and celebrating the juxtaposition. His bowls are also charming, individual, mercurial, and defy mass production. He says, "I am not a factory". He is influenced by Japanese potters and African Mingei, a term coined by Theaster Gates.

Mingei is defined as art of the people. He tells me he is honoring the ceramicist David Drake, whose works contain their own individual essence and personality.

Johnson also has a clothing line sporting his individual style. He makes t-shirts and hoodies with his familiar logo, again with their individual flare and personalities. No one clothing piece is like another, but they are all uncannily familiar with his design sensibilities. He says his designer line is the fulfillment of an over-two-decades dream which started when he and his brother wanted to make a line of designer t-shirts when they were kids in high school. They were trying to figure out if they could afford the t-shirts to start their business or buy clothes to wear for school. The school clothes won, and the designer t-shirts were put on hold, but after over two decades they are here, and they have been selling well. He says he loves the connection he feels when someone identifies with their perfect piece of his clothing. He says there's an affinity with the garment and owner which is hugely rewarding. His designs are statement clothes that are comfortable and wearable, his logos are distinctive; check them out. We like to think that art creates culture but as Johnson says, "Art practice is in opposition to the production of culture." This is true also, especially if you don't identify with the predominant culture.

Johnson also has a mentoring service where he nurtures artists with a wide range of professional development: career planning, defining your art practice, art educational planning for higher education, critical critiques portfolio review, and social media branding/story telling. He is looking for sponsors. "Creativity is a methodology" he says. "There is so much to learn and pass on."



## The Multidimensional World of Travis Johnson *Continued*

“If art and art practice is to be sustainable, it has to come from the realest place possible”. This common theme runs through Johnson’s art, his life, and the communities he has nurtured.

Johnson exudes creativity. While chatting, he idly fiddles with some of the objects on the table in front of him, toying with compositions. “There it is!” He celebrates when he finds the composition he is looking for. He calls the creative process “digging into the abyss and pulling out the unseen.” In many ways, respects, and disciplines, he is a master.

Johnson has ongoing pop-up events so check his website regularly, but listed below are the events he has on the calendar coming up. 0

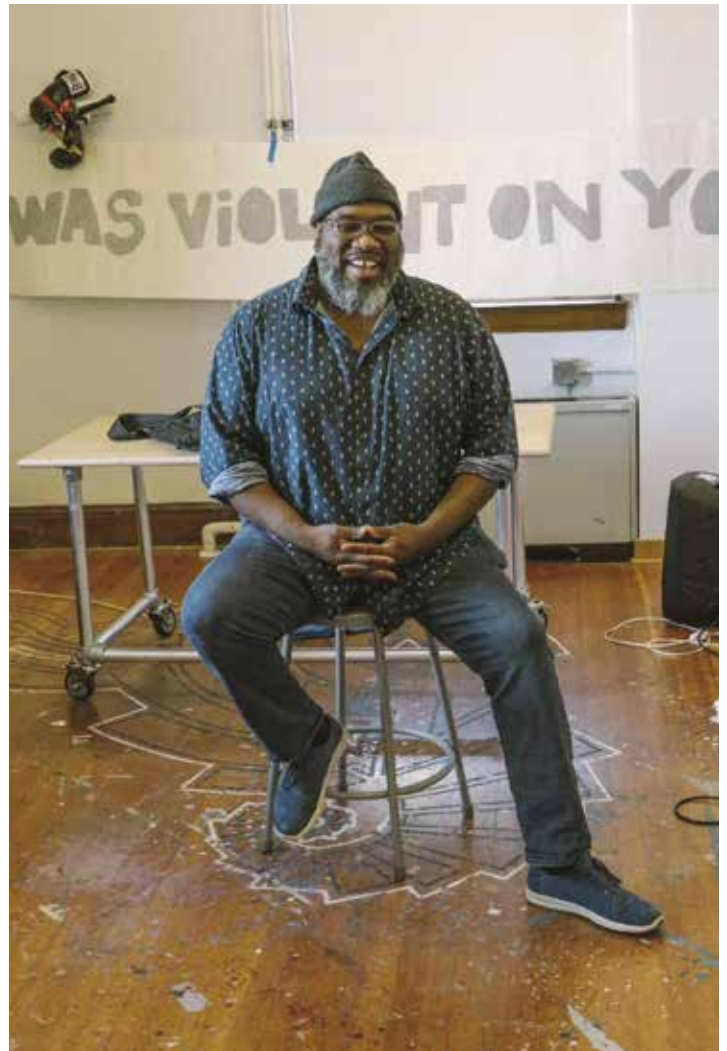
**WHAT:** Black Salon showing in Travis Johnson Studio  
Marfa indoor/outdoor desert arts festival

**WHERE:** Black Salon: By invitation only, check Johnson’s website for details. Marfa: 102 S Plateau St, Marfa, TX 79843

**WHEN:** Black Salon: April 24  
Marfa: April 1-15

**HOW MUCH:** Black Salon: \$25.00  
Marfa: Check website for details

**LEARN MORE:**  
[travisjohnsonart.squarespace.com](http://travisjohnsonart.squarespace.com)  
[marfaopen.org](http://marfaopen.org)  
[youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=OukMw6PQsrg](https://youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=OukMw6PQsrg)



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# “Learn, Listed, Enjoy, Experience” at Tacoma Ocean Fest 2024

By Molly Walsh

This June, the Foss Waterway Seaport in Tacoma will deliver a fresh take to Tacoma Ocean Fest. The menu of events will include water-based activities, live music, educational booths and art installations. And to couple the summertime festivities, attendees can take in the local marine landscape and waterfront’s natural beauty.

Tacoma Ocean Fest was originally established and organized by former festival director Rosemary Ponnekanti, with the support of the Foss Waterway Seaport, a maritime-related history museum and event venue located along Tacoma’s waterfront. Brent Mason, executive director of the Foss Waterway Seaport said Ponnekanti is a strong supporter of the environment and combined her passion for the natural world with the arts, inviting the community to join in that celebration during Ocean Fest. After Ponnekanti moved back to her home country of Australia, Mason said 2024 marks the first year the seaport is fully organizing the festival.

In this new era of Tacoma Ocean Fest, the Foss Waterway Seaport plans to stay true to the original mission of the event by coupling the main festival with additional gatherings that may resonate with different facets of the community. Mason added that the diverse festivities will also help to bring the focus of the festival to the water and emphasize the importance of conserving this vital local resource.

There will be opportunities for attendees to be in the water itself, including paddle boarding or kayaking during the Lantern Paddle. Foodies can take in the delectable treats and eats, and for creative spirits, art installations and live music will abound.

“Whether it’s dance, music, maybe it’s a lecture, whatever it might be,” said Mason. “The whole idea is to be able to get people motivated to come down and learn, listen, enjoy, experience.”

Through the Lantern Paddle of the Species, participants can take in the beauty of the Thea Foss Waterway alongside loved ones and fellow community members, while also raising awareness about the water’s vital role in the environment. Mason described the event as reminiscent of a holiday or charity run, where participants can decorate their crafts to resemble familiar critters and wildlife with illumination to float into the evening hours. For those wanting to stay on land, there will be food, drink and music available.

For those interested in protecting and beautifying the waterfront near the Foss Waterway Seaport, the Waterfront Clean-up is a way to give back ahead of the main festival. Mason said it can be a great way for participants to make a difference and connect with fellow community members toward a shared goal.



Visual art is a primary component of Tacoma Ocean Fest, with artists utilizing mediums such as glass and paint, and Mason said art displayed at the festival will all connect through celebrating the water. River Meschi, a Tacoma-based painter will display a mural during the festival, as well as another Tacoma-based visual artist, Ricky Loves Painting, who will be working on an orca-themed mural at the festival, according to Mason.

Other festival artists include Amber Stephens, who will present a paddle carving, Joseph Rossano, Nives Čičin-Šain, as well as Tacoma Ocean Fest’s featured artist for 2024, Paula Nishikawara.

Food and drink vendors, as well as live music will be abundant, in addition to Eco-Booths which will be located on the promenade outside the Foss Waterway Seaport. These booths will include educational activities and displays that highlight environmental conservation and methods to support local marine life and landscapes. The Foss Waterway Seaport Museum will also be open, and additional activities and attractions will take place inside the Heritage Boat Shop during the festival.

“I’m pretty certain that if you come down the first time this year, that you’ll want to come back and check it out years after that,” said Mason.

Mason also noted that onsite parking is limited and it is recommended that Tacoma Ocean Fest attendees park in or around downtown Tacoma, then walk to the festival.

Ocean Fest will be family friendly, with attractions for attendees young and young-at-heart, and at its core, Mason said the festival is an invitation to the Tacoma community and beyond, welcoming those who are longtime maritime enthusiasts, alongside community members who don’t often make it down to the waterfront.

“Our mission is to be able to celebrate Tacoma’s rich maritime history, past, present future,” said Mason. “But there is no maritime history without the water, right? There is no future without the water. We’re all about being able to teach our kids about... why it’s important to take care of it. We’re already seeing, right the... impact of not taking care of our planet... with climate change, which is going to impact the water. So we’ve got to be able to draw attention to it.” 0



**WHAT:** Tacoma Ocean Fest 2024

**WHERE:** Foss Waterway Seaport, 705 Dock St, Tacoma, WA 98402

**WHEN:** Lantern Paddle for Species Friday, June 28, 7 to 10 p.m.  
Waterfront Clean-up, Saturday, June 29, 10 a.m. to noon  
Festival, Saturday, June 29, noon to 5 p.m.

**HOW MUCH:** Free

**LEARN MORE:** [tacomaoccanfest.org](http://tacomaoccanfest.org)



# Tacoma Spring Theatre Preview

by Adam McKinney

By now, we've become used to the bounty of quality offerings that local theaters in South Puget Sound routinely churn out. No matter where you may find yourself, you're constantly reminded of just how much talent is bound to be lurking in the woodwork. So, just as a taste from up north, here are some theatrical Spring gems to look out for in the Tacoma area.



## STEPPING OUT

Here's a role first played on film by Liza Minnelli, and it's somehow not *Cabaret!* In the case of *Stepping Out*, we're dealing with a dancer whose disillusion with the entertainment industry is cured by her teaching a ragtag group of would-be dancers the fine art of tap dance. Frankly, we're suckers for any entertainers who can tap dance their hearts out, which *Stepping Out* seems to promise. Plus, this is the kind of brassy underdog story that Tacoma Musical Playhouse tends to knock out of the park.

**WHAT:** *Stepping Out*

**WHERE:** Tacoma Musical Playhouse, 7116 6th Ave, Tacoma

**WHEN:** Fridays & Saturdays April 12 – April 28  
7:30 p.m., Matinees at 2 p.m. Sundays

**HOW MUCH:** \$25-\$35

**LEARN MORE:** [tmp.org](http://tmp.org)

## THE PROM

*The Prom*, though praised as a stage musical, was adapted into a limply received film in 2020. Perhaps something was lost in translation, as *The Prom* is absolutely steeped in the world of musical theatre, satirizing the vanity of aging Broadway stars as they adopt a "cause" to get themselves back in the good graces of the paying public — in this case, a pair of LGBTQ+ students who have been banned from attending prom together. For those who like their musical brightly-colored with a bit of bite, this one may be for you.

**WHAT:** *The Prom*

**WHERE:** Tacoma Musical Playhouse, 7116 6th Ave, Tacoma

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays May 17 to June 9, matinees 2 p.m. Sundays

**HOW MUCH:** \$25-\$35

**LEARN MORE:** [tmp.org](http://tmp.org)

## INCORRUPTIBLE

Michael Hollinger's *Incorruptible* is a comedy that's mired in the filth and absurdism of religion in the Dark Ages. Dealing, as it does, with monks who sell the bones of cadavers to others to use as props for religious grifts, *Incorruptible* promises a satirical edge nearly as cutting as its wit. Though originally staged in the '90s, *Incorruptible* feels like the type of religious skewering that could still find vocal critics in these bizarre days we live in, and more power to Lakewood Playhouse for bringing it to us.

**WHAT:** *Incorruptible*

**WHERE:** Lakewood Playhouse, 5729 Lakewood Towne Center Blvd SW, Lakewood

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays, matinees 2 p.m. Sundays April 5 – 21

**HOW MUCH:** \$23-\$29

**LEARN MORE:** [lakewoodplayhouse.org](http://lakewoodplayhouse.org)

## BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK

In the '30s, a Black maid finds her way into the film business, starting in the background and using her voice more as time goes on. That's the premise of *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*, a show that covers decades in the life of a woman who would otherwise go unnoticed. In the same vein as *Hollywood Shuffle* and the recent *American Fiction*, *Vera Stark* is a smart, perceptive comedy that mines humor out of the wobbly relationship the entertainment industry has to race.

**WHAT:** *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*

**WHERE:** Lakewood Playhouse, 5729 Lakewood Towne Center Blvd SW, Lakewood

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. matinees Sundays, May 31 to June 16

**HOW MUCH:** \$23-\$29

**LEARN MORE:** [lakewoodplayhouse.org](http://lakewoodplayhouse.org)





### ALMOST, MAINE

Here's an offbeat selection from Tacoma Little Theatre. *Almost, Maine* is a collection of nine short plays. Like *Paris, je t'aime*, *Nine Lives*, or *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*; *Almost, Maine* frames its short subjects around a unifying theme – in this case, the inhabitants of the mythical town of Almost, and the trials of love they endure. For those new to a compilation of shorts, know that they can sometimes be more than the sum of their parts.

**WHAT:** *Almost, Maine*

**WHERE:** Tacoma Little Theatre, 210 N I St., Tacoma

**WHEN:** Fridays and Saturdays, 7:30 p.m., matinees  
Sundays at 2 p.m., at 7:30 p.m, Apr. 26 – May 12

**HOW MUCH:** \$22-\$29

**LEARN MORE:** [tacomalittletheatre.com](http://tacomalittletheatre.com)



The poster for "Theater for Kids of All Ages" features a group of children wearing bunny masks and denim jackets, dancing on a stage. The background is a black and white checkered pattern. The text "THEATER FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES" is written in large, white, bold letters at the top. In the bottom right corner, there is a purple circular logo for "OLYMPIA FAMILY THEATER". At the bottom, there is a white box with text: "All tickets ACCESS FOR ALL! Buy online at a sliding scale of \$5-\$35. FREE day-of walk-ups to every show!" and the website "www.olyft.org".

# Celebrate Father's Day Weekend at the 2024 Olympic Air Show

By Molly Walsh

Look to the skies this Father's Day weekend during the 24th Anniversary Olympic Air Show organized by the Olympic Flight Museum. On June 15 and 16, crowds are expected to gather at the Olympia Regional Airport for stunning displays and aerobatic demonstrations from antique aircraft and beyond. The Olympic Air Show grants a unique opportunity to watch these types of aircraft in action in the South Puget Sound region, with additional family-friendly activities and attractions on the ground.

The Olympic Flight Museum is home to a collection of aircraft that span the decades, ranging from historic World War II-era combat planes such as the P-51D Mustang, to the mid-20th century military rescue helicopter, Kaman HH-43 Huskie.

Teri Thorning, coordinator for the Olympic Air Show said there will be both museum aircraft in addition to visiting headlining aircraft that will be performing throughout the weekend. Gates will be open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. both days of the show, and the opening ceremony will begin around noon each day, with flight performances following soon after. Thorning added that this airshow is one of the few of its type still operating in Washington state, especially outside of a military base.

"There's greater emphasis on air shows because there are so few of them around," said Thorning. "This is the museum's way of engaging with the community and showcasing what we do and ... what our mission is, is education and preservation of historic airplanes and helicopters. And it is a ... privilege of ours to actually exhibit them to the public for their enjoyment and for them to learn more about their history."

Two classics in this year's lineup are from the Olympic Flight Museum collection, including the AH-1 Cobra and UH-1 Huey helicopters. Thorning said these helicopter demonstrations can help educate the public about the important role, versatility and precision required in military aircraft flight.

"Those are two Vietnam-era helicopters that fly in a sequence or perform together," said Thorning. "And they're very impressive helicopters that crowds absolutely love seeing."

Also from the flight museum is the North American P-51D Mustang, a fighter plane that garnered widespread use during World War II. Another World War II-related plane in the lineup is The Mitsubishi A6M "Tora" Zero, which Thorning said is a replica of the authentic Japanese fighter planes that were used during the Second World War, and is included in the airshow each year. The Aero Vodochody L-39ZO Albatross was created in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and was an often-used jet for Warsaw Pact countries, according to Thorning.

An anticipated lineup of guest aircraft is also part of this year's airshow, including a Consolidated PBY-5A CATALINA, also known as "Princess of the Stars" from 1943. The airshow will welcome this visiting plane from the Soaring by the Sea Foundation based in Eugene, Oregon. Thorning said this large, amphibious "flying boat" will be part of the aerobatic performances on both days of the airshow. There will also be ground tours of the plane available for a small fee.

From the Erickson Aircraft Collection in Madras, Oregon, is the Curtiss P-40E Kittyhawk. Thorning said although over 13,000 P-40 aircraft were built by the end of their production in 1944, there are not many remaining in flying capacity.

A main attraction for the air show is a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, which also hails from the Erickson Aircraft Collection. This particular plane is named "Ye Olde Pub" to pay tribute to service members who flew over German skies in World War II, said Thorning. There will also be rides available in the B-17 during the event.

"Sticking with our reputation for bringing great historical planes to the Olympia area, Thurston County, for the airshow, this is what the Museum does and it's what we do best," said Thorning "And we are excited to feature these ... for the enjoyment of our public and our visiting community people and citizens. We just love doing this."





Olympic Flight Museum's P-51D Mustang



Olympic Flight Museum's AH-1 Cobra (on top) and the UH-1H Huey helicopters



Olympic Flight Museum's L-39 Albatros

Photo credits David Shultz Photography  
 Courtesy of Teri Thorning, Olympic Air Show Coordinator

The airshow will also feature a Huey helicopter aerial firefighting demonstration from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and the Wildland Fire Management Division. The Washington State Patrol (WSP) has their aviation division headquartered at the Olympia Regional Airport, said Thorning, and will be holding an open house where attendees can visit the WSP hangar and learn more about their aviation-related operations.

There will also be performances from the "Sky Dancing," Anna Serbinenko in a Super Decathlon, an aerobatic-friendly plane from the Canadian Flight Centre as well as the West Coast Ravens, a group of pilots who fly RV aircraft in formation.

On the ground, attendees can also enjoy a range of family-friendly attractions, food vendors and a beer garden. Displays include a patrol boat from the Vietnam War period, from the Northwest Chapter of The Game Wardens Association and a World War II pop-up "museum" from the Friends of Willie and Joe group. 0

**WHAT:** 24th Anniversary Olympic Air Show

**WHEN:** 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, June-Sunday, June 15-16

**WHERE:** Olympic Flight Museum/Olympia Regional Airport, 7637 Old Hwy 99 SE, Tumwater

**HOW MUCH:** Per person: \$20 online, \$25 at the door, \$35 for a weekend pass, free for Age 6 & under

**LEARN MORE:**  
[olympicairshow.com](http://olympicairshow.com)



A woman in a burlesque costume, featuring a pink top and a large pink flower in her hair, is performing on stage. She is holding a bouquet of flowers and looking towards the audience. The background is dark with some decorative elements, including a large, dried floral arrangement.

# Strip at the Crypt Returns to Olympia's Cryptatropa Bar this May

By Molly Walsh

Through Strip at the Crypt, the art of burlesque is melded with elements of improvisational comedy into one tongue-in-cheek show that's bound to skirt expectations. Unlike a more traditional-style burlesque show, each member of the diverse lineup will have no specific routine prepared, and instead will perform off the cuff with some help from the audience. And on May 18, lovers of the cinema who are 21 and over can look forward to the of-the-moment burlesque interpretation, with the backing of classic movie soundtracks.

Strip at the Crypt was established in 2019, and after experimenting with the layout over the years, each one-night show features around eight performers as well as a live song from co-creators and hosts, Hattie Hotpants and Vanessa the Witch. In addition to the movie-themed show on May 18, the next show on August 3 will follow up with beloved television tunes.

Both Hattie Hotpants and Vanessa the Witch have a rich background in burlesque performance, as well as in improv, including through Something Wicked, a former improv group that was created by Harlequin Productions in Olympia.



As the duo started to develop a blueprint for Strip at the Crypt, Hotpants said a primary objective along the way has been to upend expectations and invite a diverse mix of burlesque performers onstage, incorporating a basis of improv with traits common in burlesque, like the playful tongue-in-cheek tone, for a one-of-a-kind performance.

“You are trusting the audience is going to be there to hold you and applaud for you and give you the warmth that you need to do this,” said Hotpants. “And you’re trusting yourself to give it a shot. And it is kind of amazing, how that... random synchronicity thing happens.”

And so far, Hotpants has observed that both audience and performers have responded well to this impromptu arrangement during shows.

“Every single person who has performed with us has blown us away, we’ve never had a bad act, not that there is such a thing,” added Hotpants.

Leading up to showtime for Strip at the Crypt, each member of the show’s lineup will be aware of the possible songs that they may be asked to perform, but they won’t know their particular musical number until the time of performance.

“We want to kind of shake up people’s paradigms a little bit,” said Hotpants. “You don’t get to do the acts you normally do, and in the spirit of improv, you get your prompt on the fly.”

At the top of the show, the hosts will chat with the audience, discussing the show’s unique layout and list of songs for the evening, as well as consent. With the help of the audience, song selection begins, while the performer waits in the wings. And during upcoming shows, there may be new elements incorporated during the song selection process.

“We let them know the song list, and we have been having people choose at random from a caldron,” explained Hotpants. “So somebody gets the honor of picking, but they don’t know what they’re picking.”

Burlesque performers, both newcomer and longtime, will gather from across the Pacific Northwest, including hometown Olympia-based artists, as well as artists from Tacoma and Portland. The lineup for the May 18 show includes Ava D’Jour, Puff the Magic System, Solangerie, Baby Le’Strange, Ra D’Lyte, Hexy Lexi, Siempre Bruja and Nani Poonani.

And this upcoming May show will be a special treat for viewers and fans of cinema, as this show looks to films with iconic songs and scores. Hotpants recounted that song selection has been one of the most difficult elements to prepare for, going through rounds of debates with Vanessa the Witch, and dancing through each song to determine how it might work with a crowd while onstage.

“We try to offer a spectrum,” said Hotpants. “So you might hear the “Imperial March,” you might hear the *Psycho* theme,

you might hear something off the *Clueless* soundtrack. You know, we really want to give everybody something.”

This off-the-cuff arrangement for Strip at the Crypt is about breaking free from the mold, away from any preconceived notion for a certain kind of costume, glitz and glam, and instead, employs a more come-as-you-are experience. In the future, Hotpants said the production also hopes to increase accessibility, including finding ways to solve current space constraints so that wheelchairs can fit onstage.

“We want to provide a platform for people, audience and performer, and us as producing artists, to flourish in embodied creativity, to be in the moment together,” said Hotpants. “And to make something really special and unique that can’t be replicated.”



Hattie Hotpants and Vanessa the Witch in the Crowd, Strip at the Crypt Feb 2024  
Photo by Scott Foster, Courtesy of Hattie Hotpants

For those new to Strip at the Crypt, Hotpants described a welcoming venue that is home to many strains of live art, music and performance, and that this show carves out room for both performers and audience members to embrace their creative selves.

“A lot of times it feels like a...rock show, or a different live experience, because the performer’s so into it, the audience is so into it, nobody knows what’s coming next, you know. Nobody could have seen your act, it’s all brand new,” said Hotpants. “And that is really special to us, and that is why we keep it going.”

**WHAT:** Strip at the Crypt

**WHEN:** “Movie Things” Theme: May 18 at 8:00 pm (Doors and tickets open at 7pm; front seating begins at 7:30 p.m.)

**WHERE:** The Cryptatropa Bar (The Crypt), 421 4th Ave E, Olympia

**HOW MUCH:** \$15 cash at the door (ATM will be available) Show is 21 and over with ID

**LEARN MORE:** @strip\_crypt on Instagram, questions/accessibility requests: stripcrypt@gmail.com



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