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OREGON ARTSWATCH

OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

Going, going, gone: 2019 in review

A look back at the ups and downs and curious side trips of the year on Oregon's cultural front
December 31, 2019

What a year, right? End of the teens, start of the '20s, and who knows if they'll rattle or roar?

But today we're looking back, not ahead. Let's start by getting the big bad news out of the way. One thing's sure in Oregon arts and cultural circles: 2019's the year the state's once-fabled craft scene took another staggering punch square on the chin. The death rattles of the Oregon College of Art and Craft – chronicled deeply by ArtsWatch's Barry Johnson in a barrage of news stories and analyses spiced with a couple of sharp commentaries, *Democracy and the arts* and *How dead is OCAC?* – were heard far and wide, and the college's demise unleashed a flood of anger and lament.

The crashing and burning of the venerable craft college early in the year followed the equally drawn-out and lamented [closure of Portland's nationally noted Museum of Contemporary Craft](#) in 2016, leaving the state's lively crafts scene without its two major institutions. In both cases the sense that irreversible decisions were being made with scant public input, let alone input from crafters themselves, left much of the craft community fuming. When, after the closure, ArtsWatch published a [piece by the craft college's former president](#), Denise Mullen, the fury hit the fan with an outpouring of outraged online comments, most by anonymous posters with obvious connections to the school.

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Vanessa German, *no admittance apply at office*, 2016, mixed media assemblage, 70 x 30 x 16 inches, in the opening exhibit of the new Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at Portland State University. Photo: Spencer Rutledge, courtesy PSU

MUCH HAPPIER ART NEWS came in the fall with the [birth of a bouncing baby museum in Portland](#): The Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at Portland State University. The PSU museum, with 7,500 square feet of gallery space, joins two other Schnitzer-named university museums in the Northwest – at the University of Oregon in Eugene and Washington State University in Pullman – and although it has no permanent collection, it has Schnitzers’ large collection to draw on for many shows, with other programming to be determined by its eventual permanent director. The museum, which has free admission, opened with a boffo installation of contemporary art chosen by the veteran curator Linda Tesner from the Schnitzer collections. And the museum’s downtown location just a few blocks from the Portland Art Museum makes it easily accessible not just to students but to a broad cross-section of the public as well.

IN ASHLAND, THE OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL [picked a new artistic director, Nataki Garrett](#), who had been acting artistic director at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. This was big news in several ways. With a \$44 million annual budget, OSF is Oregon’s biggest cultural institution. Garrett is the second woman artistic director (Libby Appel was the first) and first person of color to lead the festival in its almost 85-year history. And she arrives at a time when climate change and the possibility of heavy fire and smoke during peak visiting times presents the festival with a challenge that has nothing to do with what’s on stage. Garrett leaped right in, directing the festival’s summer production of *How To Catch Creation* even before she officially began her new job. Meanwhile, ArtsWatch’s theater editor and columnist [Marty Hughley wrote a](#)

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fond farewell to the era of Garrett's predecessor, Bill Rauch, who among other things greatly broadened the festival's cultural base, making the company itself and the shows it produced much more inclusive.



Nataki Garrett takes the reins at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Photo: Bill Geenen

PORTLAND OPERA, STUNG BY A STRING of financially weak seasons, made some major changes in 2019. Christopher Mattaliano, general director since 2003, stepped down and was replaced by the team of Sue Dixon as general director and Palm Beach Opera's Daniel Biaggi as interim artistic director. Just as substantively, the company scrapped its experiment with a mostly summer season of productions and went back to a fall-through-spring season. Mattaliano, a good director of operas, had been peppering smaller and more adventurous pieces among the company's war horses, but the shift to summer shows didn't work: The timing changed, but by and large the programming didn't. Successful summer opera companies tend to be in smaller, destination towns such as Santa Fe. What might have made a splash – and would have been extraordinarily risky and costly – would have been the creation of a semi-rural summer festival along the lines of Northern Virginia's Wolf Trap, shared by the opera and perhaps the symphony and other performing groups, in Yamhill County wine country or rural Washington or Clackamas county. But no one we know of was talking about such a thing, let alone putting cash on the barrelhead. A QUIET CHANGE IN HOW TAX MONEY FOR THE ARTS is distributed was announced in February, and it could have an effect on cultural organizations large and small in the greater Portland area. The Regional Arts and Culture Council, which oversees government arts programs in Washington,

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Clackamas, and Multnomah counties, [voted to shift a larger chunk of its operating grants](#) away from large organizations such as the Oregon Symphony and Oregon Ballet Theatre, and toward small-budget groups, many of which serve diverse communities. RACC hopes the effect will be a healthier arts scene that better reflects the cultures and demographics of the region's population, and there's little question that the increased funding will help adventurous small companies survive. Larger companies will need to rely more on corporate, foundation, and individual donations. Government funding is limited, and no matter how the pie is sliced, some groups will feel left out. It won't be easy for big groups to fill their gap, and the cuts come at a time when the Portland Art Museum, for instance, has never been more active in its diversity, inclusion, and outreach – programs that take money to expand and maintain.



Alicia Hueni and Amy Newman in Artists Rep's current show *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*. With its home space a construction zone, the company's current show is in the nearby Tiffany Center. Photo: Kathleen Kelly

ARTISTS REP, FACED WITH FINANCIAL CRISES and a home space turned into a massive construction site, hit the road in 2019. Portland's second-biggest theater company is taking its reduced season to other spots around the city, and will be itinerant at least one more season while its home space is being cut in half and rebuilt. Strapped for money, the company sold half of its West End property to a real-estate developer and planned to reconfigure the remaining half

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to include two performances spaces and shop, rehearsal, and office room. [Barry Johnson talked with J.S. May](#), Artists Rep's executive director, about money realities, how the project's shaping up, and the radical shift's effect on resident companies Profile Theatre and Portland Actors Conservatory, which have also had to take their shows on the road, and the dozen or so small companies that had been using the Artists Rep space for offices and support in the Arts Hub.

TRENDS & IDEAS

BUT ENOUGH OF THE BIG NEWSY STUFF. Let's move on to the fun and challenge and controversies of 2019's big trends and audacious ideas.



With the steamroller waiting to roll on the grounds of Maryhill Museum of Art, the *Exquisite Gorge* artists lay out 66 feet of plate to create a giant collaborative print. Photo: Friderike Heuer

[Exquisite Gorge: It's a print!](#) Surely one of the year's most audacious and fascinating undertakings was the Maryhill Museum of Art's *Exquisite Gorge* project, a grand plan to create a 66-foot-long steamrolled print reflecting the life and land along a 220-mile stretch of the Columbia River

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between the confluences of the Willamette and Snake rivers. The project, which involved artists from around the country working with communities along both the Oregon and Washington sides of the river, took many months and emphasized the river as a uniting rather than a dividing force: To borrow the title of one of the year's most significant visual art exhibitions (see the Visual Arts section below), the map is not the territory. Friderike Heuer followed the project from beginning to end for ArtsWatch in a series of illuminating photographic essays.

[Is Portland the newest dance destination?](#) Beth Whelan, herself a relatively recent addition to the city's dance scene, said an emphatic yes. To prove her point, she talked with half a dozen new creative Portlanders who've moved here to make their marks in the dance world.

[In an attention economy, the critic's most powerful tool is silence.](#) Sure, it can be satisfying to slice a mediocre work of art to shreds in print. But in a media atmosphere where any kind of attention – even excoriating attention – is good because it amplifies the artmaker's work, Jennifer Rabin argues, sometimes the best thing for a critic to do when encountering bad art is simply to write nothing at all.

["Aladdin": Middle Eastern enough?](#) Iranian American writer and theater artist Melory Mirashrafi took a sharp look for ArtsWatch at pop-cultural attitudes toward the Middle East through the lens of stage and movie versions of *Aladdin* and other historical depictions of fantasy Arabians from the musical *Kismet* to the movies *Back to the Future* and *Prince of Persia*. Most of the action seems to take place in Stereotype City, and while there's been improvement, there's a long way to go.

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Right Brain learning with Homowo African Arts at Hollydale Elementary. Photo courtesy Right Brain Initiative

[The Right Brain for Learning.](#) How do we learn? What do music and art have to do with it? Why is providing integrated art programs in its curricula one of the best things a school district can do for its students? Danielle Vermette takes a deep look at the art and science of learning and how it's playing out in the Portland metropolitan area through the Right Brain Initiative, an innovative program to spur learning for all kinds of students. Watch for more as Vermette follows arts integration specialist Shannon McClure from classroom to classroom.

[Notes from Eastern Oregon: Art centers keep culture alive.](#) It's not all big-city, big-name stuff. Culture is everywhere, and as David Bates writes, devoted people and organizations are keeping it thriving in small-town Oregon. He tours former Carnegie Libraries-turned-cultural centers in Pendleton, LaGrande, and Baker City to learn how it's done.

[The art of giving, large and small.](#) In an essay that travels from artist Sara Siestrem's process of creating Coos weaving to a student's challenge at the Newport Visual Arts Center to a heroine of a school librarian, Laura Grimes writes about the complex human activity of giving as a process, and what art has to do with it.

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McMinnville gets its weird on for May's UFO Festival 2019. Photo: Kathleen Nyberg, courtesy McMinnville Hotel Oregon

[UFO Festival: Keeping McMinnville weird for 20 years.](#) Sometimes, a town just wants to have fun. And sometimes, ArtsWatch followers love reading about it. It helps if there's a genuine UFO mystery buried in the area's lore, and Yamhill County has that. It also has this annual celebration of otherworldly wackiness. David Bates gets to the bottom of what's up in the sky – or not.

[PHAME and friends rock out.](#) Writer Brett Campbell and photographer Friderike Heuer follow the fascinating collaboration between Portland Opera and PHAME, which serves adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, to create and perform an original rock opera, *The Poet's Shadow*.

[At Shop La Famiglia, hip hop digs in.](#) In a city with a hot real-estate market, affordable spaces for any sorts of arts use are hard to come by. So sometimes you've just got to do it yourself. Christen McCurdy writes about the hideaway space on North Lombard Avenue that rapper Swiggle Mandela has transformed into a retail shop and a gathering place for Portland's hip-hop scene.

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[Field of Vision](#). Brett Campbell takes a deep look at the 2019 National Field Network Conference, hosted by Portland arts laureate Subashini Ganesan's New Expressive Works, and the impact that the New York organization The Field had on about 200 Oregon artists and arts advocates who showed up to hash things out and look for fresh ways of thinking about things.

WORDS ON PAGES: LITERARY LIGHTS

SOMETIMES YOU JUST WANT TO CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK. Or knuckle down to an intense writing workshop or prowl around an encyclopedic writers' conference. Or talk to a memoirist or a poet. In 2019 we did that stuff, too.

[The family that vanished](#). There's nothing in the book world quite like a well-turned mystery, and for ArtsWatch readers it seems there's nothing quite like a page-turner real-life mystery with local roots. Portland writer JB Fisher's *Echo of Distant Water: The 1958 Disappearance of Portland's Martin Family* tells the tale of a family that drove out the Columbia Gorge to get a Christmas tree and was never seen again. David Bates's interview with Fisher was ArtsWatch's second-most-read story of the year, after only the news break of the Oregon College of Art and Craft terminating its degree program.

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***The Hillsboro Story* author Susan Banyas, near her home in Astoria. Photo: Dorinda Holler**

[*The Hillsboro Story: Weaving a web of memories.*](#) Longtime Oregon writer and performance artist Susan Banyas grew up in the 1950s in the little town of Hillsboro, Ohio, where she witnessed an unlikely chapter in the American Civil Rights Movement unfold. She's been incorporating those memories into her work for many years, and in 2019, after much research and many conversations with people who were part of the story, published it in kaleidoscopic book form. Marty Hughley interviewed her on the process, commenting: "*The Hillsboro Story* is Banyas' own Soul Story, on paper and writ large."

[*Playing chicken at the book bash.*](#) This year's national AWP Conference – that's the Association of Writers and Writing Programs – dropped down on the Oregon Convention Center in Portland in March, and Danielle Vermette was on hand for ArtsWatch for a little literary March Madness of her own. It had more writers and panels and discussion sections than you could shake an iambic pentameter at, and it even had the terrific novelist Colson Whitehead as its keynote speaker, peppering his talk, if you will, with chicken recipes, which Vermette enjoyed, even though she neither cooks nor eats the beasts herself.

[*"It's not my poetry that matters. It's poetry that matters."*](#) David Bates talked with Oregon Book Awards finalist José Angel Araguz, a passionate advocate for work by writers from marginalized

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communities. “I can’t stress enough how important this shift is,” he told Bates. “Without a platform for one’s work, without representation and visibility of one’s culture and identity, and without a feeling that there is a space for you somewhere in the world, writers can be sent down a discouraging path, questioning the worth not only of one’s words but of one’s existence. Things aren’t perfect, but good work is being done, and good work is being honored.”

[Tin House: vulnerability & risk](#). Ben Bartu arrived at his first Tin House Summer Workshop on the Reed College campus at an odd juncture in the celebrated Portland publishing house’s history – right about the time that the final Tin House Quarterly journal was rolling off the presses. Unlike the literary journal, Bartu wrote, the workshop showed no signs of ending any time soon. It seemed in major ways to be keeping up with the times. Bartu asked workshop coordinator Lance Cleland if he’d noticed a theme emerging from the week’s events: “He answered without hesitation. ‘Vulnerability,’ he said. ‘Vulnerability, and risk’.”

ARTS PEOPLE: PROFILES

PEOPLE MAKE ART, AND PEOPLE CREATE AN ARTS CULTURE. ArtsWatch sat down with a lot of Oregon artists in 2019, and told a lot of their stories. Here are a few:



Be Calm and Keep Breathing is part of photographer Darnell McAdams’ *Black Santa Project*.

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[Darnell McAdams: "It started with poetry."](#) "Those of us who write about the arts at some point trot out 'visual poetry' to describe something other than actual verse — a painting, a film, even a tour de force staging of a dance or scene in a play," David Bates began his profile of the Oregon photographer. Turns out, that's not far off the mark. "Poetry sparked my interest from the first time I learned about a haiku in elementary school," McAdams told Bates.

[Darrell Grant: jazz master & more.](#) When the Portland pianist and composer was named 2019's Portland Jazz Master by PDX Jazz Festival early in the year, Brett Campbell set out to show why — and to show that in addition to his jazz chops, Grant is a composer, teacher, and social force of note.

[Barbara LaMorticella: a woman of her words.](#) We sat down with LaMorticella, winner of the first Soapstone Bread and Roses Award, and took notes as she told us the tale of her life in poetry, from the early days of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and handing out free food with the Diggers in Golden Gate Park to creating her own poetry and becoming the voice of poetry on Portland radio.

[Celebrating Schiff.](#) Brett Campbell profiles David Schiff, the hugely talented Portland composer whose influences range from jazz to opera to klezmer and Broadway and the spiky music of his teacher Elliott Carter, and who is also a graceful and insightful writer who's done biographies of Carter, Duke Ellington, and George Gershwin.

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Asner, still acting up at 89. Photo: Tim Leyes

[Ed Asner: on politics and performing.](#) Lori Tobias chatted with the legendary actor, who was on his way to the Oregon Coast to star as God (really!) in a play being staged as a fundraiser for the Newport Performing Arts Center. Anything he's still hoping to accomplish? she asked the 89-year-old actor and political activist. "Have they picked the Nobel Peace Prize this year?" he replied.

[Stan Foote, at the top.](#) On the day in May when he stood on a stage in Atlanta to accept a top honor at the national Theatre for Young Audiences/USA festival and conference, we told the tale of Foote's rise in the theater world and how, as artistic director, he helped build Oregon Children's Theatre to national prominence. Foote retired this year after 28 years with the company.

[Dani Baldwin forges her own path.](#) Bobby Bermea talks with Baldwin about how she's helped turn Oregon Children's Theatre's innovative Young Professionals Company into a creative hot spot for teen theater, and why she didn't want to replace Foote as head of the parent company.

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Storm Large: a diva moves into symphony territory.

[Storm Large: Deadly Sins to Holiday Ordeal](#). Matthew Neil Andrews talks with the Portland diva about life, singing, Miriam Makeba, the White Album, the differences between classical and pop/rock audiences, and branching out as an orchestra vocalist on Kurt Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins* and a slightly twisted holiday show with the Oregon Symphony.

[Roady Trip: Ortega in Prague](#). Bobby Bermea talks with in-demand sound designer and theater composer (and commercial pilot) Rodolfo Ortega about his booming career and his invitation to exhibit his work at the prestigious Prague Quadrennial.

IN THE FRAME: PICTURE THIS

IN 2019 SEVERAL TALENTED PHOTOGRAPHERS took the lead on stories for ArtsWatch, telling their tales in words but also, and for the most part primarily, in visual images. All have distinctive styles that are their own. They are artists, adept in the art of visual storytelling.

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Afghani dance at the Beaverton Night Market in August. Photo: Joe Cantrell

Joe Cantrell turned his lens on projects and events as varied as the [Waterfront Blues Festival](#); the [design and building of Mozart's garden](#) for PSU Opera's *La Finta Giardiniera*, a [chalk art festival](#) in Beaverton; Beaverton's [first little night market of the summer](#); and the [second Saturday night in the international marketplace](#), which on one August evening provided a sterling counterpoint to the day's invasion of white supremacist demonstrators a few miles away in downtown Portland.

K.B. Dixon's images in black and white included, among several other striking visual stories: a [Day of the Dead](#) celebration at the Portland Art Museum; [Portland coffeehouse culture](#); the [Portland Womxn's March](#); [Tuba Christmas](#) in Pioneer Courthouse Square; and portraits of Oregon writers, [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

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Among the artists of *The Inside Show* at Columbia River Correctional Institution. Photo: Friderike Heuer

Friderike Heuer, in addition to her striking reporting on Maryhill’s Exquisite Gorge project and several Art on the Road stories, from the [Whitney Biennial](#) in New York to [Käthe Kollwitz](#) in Los Angeles, wove themes of justice into visual stories about a 20th anniversary celebration of the advocacy newspaper [Street Roots](#); an [inmate video art project](#) inside a minimum-security prison; and a [soldier’s journey](#) from military life to an art academy.

Dee Moore’s photo essay [Profiles in Gender](#) looked at the stories of ten genderfluid artists, including herself: “For me it all ended when I was eight years old and screaming that I was a boy and begging to be allowed to go to the boys’ bathroom at a posh restaurant.”

Angela Allen followed the route of the late Indian photojournalist Raghbir Singh, who proclaimed that “its unique sense of color” was his country’s biggest cultural contribution, and came back from a journey across the subcontinent with a bulging portfolio of color, turning seventeen of her images into the photo essay [Art on the Road: Colors of India](#).

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Boys crowd onto a motorcycle in the Udaipur marketplace. Photo: Angela Allen

PASSAGES: SAYING OUR FAREWELLS

IN 2019 ARTSWATCH AND OREGON SAID GOODBYE to several arts figures who died during the year. Each left an enduring legacy on the culture of the state.

[Isabella Chappell](#). For many years Isabella (she would not have liked to be called simply “Chappell”) was the prime minister of Portland theater, a onetime dancer from New Jersey who became a legendary leader of the old Portland Civic Theatre and something of a mother figure for all sorts of theater people in all corners of the city. “People talk about the magic of theater, and for many years PCT thrived on a wing and a prayer,” we wrote. “Isabella was the magician, keeping the wing airborne and making sure the prayers were practical enough to be answered.” She died on February 1, at 95.

[Bonnie Merrill](#). “Merrill kept her Portland dance card full for close to 40 years,” Heather Wisner wrote. “She worked with modern and ballet companies, public school students, and collegiate dancers from Portland State, Lewis and Clark, and Reed. She created more than 100 works that were performed on film, onstage, and in city streets. Along the way, she forged creative alliances with musicians and visual artists, and earned accolades including the only Oregon Governor’s

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Award for the Arts given to an individual dance artist.” Born in 1935, Merrill died on Valentine’s Day.

Russ Fast. The longtime Portland stage and film actor died from cancer on February 20 at age 71. “He was a sometime musician – a drummer and backup singer – and made an early name for himself as a tap-dancer and lip-syncher,” we wrote. “He was a man of the theater, performing, by his own count, in 143 productions in Portland, New York, Seattle, and elsewhere. He sometimes made his living as an accomplished voice actor, and worked regularly in film: movies, television, commercials, industrials. He directed, and taught acting. And with his friend, the actor B. Joe Medley, and Jeanne Medley he opened Character Actors, one of the first talent agencies in the Pacific Northwest.”

Jim Mesi. The “stone brilliant,” in writer John Foyston’s words, blues guitarist died on March 4 from complications of emphysema, at age 69. “He was universally respected for his inventive and exuberant style, which could range from an achingly sweet, subtle *Sleepwalk* played with volume-knob swells and chiming harmonics to the speed-picking *sturm und drang* of *Miserlou*,” Foyston wrote. “It wasn’t just locals who revered the man, either: He counted guitarists such as ZZ Top’s Billy Gibbons as fans, and the Jim Mesi Band web site shows him onstage with Les Paul, backstage with B.B.King.

D.E. May. May died of cancer on February 27, at age 66. A legend in his native “island Salem,” he was known far more widely for his meticulously geometric, blueprint-like abstract paintings. “When we met him in person, we immediately liked the man as much as the things he made,” his artist friends Anna Gray and Ryan Wilson Paulsen wrote. “We felt refreshed by his matter-of-fact approach to art making, as if being an artist was no more mythic than being a carpenter or steel-worker, no less necessary than being a bartender or a cab driver. His humility, dedication, and sureness of purpose were reflected in the things he created. It is as if his drawings and small constructions weren’t made, but evolved over time without the overly conscious intervention of an artistic hand. Because of this, his meticulous abstractions hold a subtle magic.”

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D.E. May in his Salem studio in 2015. Photo: Sabina Poole

[Carola Penn](#). The longtime Portland painter died April 2 of cancer, at 74. Her bold paintings often broke free of rectangular expectation, as critic Randy Gragg once noted: “She slices up her paintings, as she puts it, using the ‘jigsaw as a cubist weapon.’” Her urban landscapes often felt like disruptions or deliberately clashing juxtapositions, perhaps reflecting on her time in the Civil Rights movement, including an arrest in Washington, D.C., for participating in a sit-in to unseat the Mississippi delegation during the 1964 Democratic National Convention. During the Vietnam War she and her husband headed for Canada, stopped in Portland, and never left: Here is where she too her stand and made her mark.

[Lyndee Mah](#). “Every culture needs at least one Lyndee Mah—an indomitably positive source of energy, compassion and commitment to art, a connector and facilitator, an advisor and advocate, someone to console us when that is necessary,” Barry Johnson wrote of the talented vocalist, a founding member of Pink Martini. “A gifted artist, Mah was possibly even more gifted at the creation of community, in her case, a community that included many artists.” Mah, who was born in 1958, died in her sleep of a heart attack on April 1.

[James B. Thompson](#). Born and raised in Chicago, Thompson lived for many years in Salem, teaching at Willamette University and building his own career as a printmaker, painter, and fused-glass artist. He possessed a restless mind that found the material for his art in, as we wrote, “medieval books of hours and their free-floating sense of space, the mysteries of Neolithic stone

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art, the techniques and possibilities of fused glassmaking, the game of golf, the act of mapping, geological shifts, the ways in which science and nature and human beings interact, the human impact on the changing landscape, the fading of traditional cultures in a modern world, the cultural and artistic implications of the fragmentation of the universe, the liberating breakup of Renaissance perspective in contemporary art.” Thompson died on October 27 from effects of the cancer mesothelioma, at 68. “I’m still making things,” he said in 2016, on the occasion of a twenty-year retrospective of his work at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art. “I am still using my hands and my mind. You have such a short time on this planet. You really want to try to figure out a few things before you go.”

[Juergen Eckstein](#). Eckstein, a fixture in Newport who founded the coast city’s co-op For Artsake, died October 31 from complications of a stroke, at 77. His work cropped up most anywhere: public driftwood sculptures in Newport, a parade of yellow umbrellas on Nye Beach, a 20-foot sculpture at Burning Man in the Nevada desert. “The German native liked beer, was passionate about the environment, eschewed medicine, and traveled the world with his family,” Lori Tobias wrote. She quoted his friend and fellow artist Cynthia Jacobi: “I think he was just a really free spirit. He always liked to say he was an unschooled autodidact. He had a unique way of looking at things.”

[Michael Bowley](#). Paul Sutinen pays homage to his longtime friend, who died in the fall at age 72. Bowley worked on big pieces as a studio assistant for sculptor Mel Katz, actually enjoyed art theory, and taught for some years at Marylhurst University, in addition to being a handyman. “In March last year Michael had a show of ‘napkin drawings’ at Nine Gallery,” Sutinen wrote. “These were little sketches on restaurant napkins—maybe as notes for himself or when he was explaining something, like he did back in the ’70s when we were having coffee. He’d been saving them for years. They have the kind of intriguing modesty that I identify with Michael. He never sought the limelight, never had a show in a commercial gallery. But he was THERE when needed over the history of art in Portland during the past four decades. He was the kind of artist that artists know about.”

MUSIC: 365 DAYS OF STRUCTURED SOUND

FROM ROCK CLUBS TO CABARETS, CONCERT HALLS to outdoor festivals, Oregon is in a perpetual state of playing and listening to music. It might be hip hop, it might be Mozart, it might be punk, it might be Gregorian chant: From January through December, music’s everywhere. Here’s just a small taste of the sounds we found compelling in 2019:

[Hello from Bali!](#) – Regular contributor Matthew Neil Andrews took over as Artswatch’s music editor and columnist in 2019 (replacing Brett Campbell, who moved to a senior editor position)

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and almost immediately took off for a pre-planned six weeks in Bali to immerse himself in Indonesian gamelan orchestra practices and learn from the masters. During his heady residency he sent back illuminating dispatches.

[A century of Leonard Bernstein](#). The Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education opened a traveling exhibition of mementos, film clips, and other artifacts celebrating the great composer/conductor/musical popularizer's centennial, and Evan Lewis put it into perspective for ArtsWatch readers. Having worked for the Leonard Bernstein Office in New York as a young man, Lewis knew the territory.

["As One": e pluribus unum](#) / [Kimberly Reed: always in transition](#). Matthew Neil Andrews reviewed Portland Opera's premiere production of the transgender chamber opera, and Brett Campbell interviewed Reed, the co-librettist and video projection designer, and not coincidentally the inspiration, for the new work.

[Florence Price's compelling musical world](#). Eighty-six years after the Chicago Symphony Orchestra premiered Price's Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Portland's Metropolitan Youth Symphony performed its West Coast premiere. Singer and writer Damien Geter talks about why this performance, and the pioneering African American woman composer, are important.



Cheers to all that: some vintage chamber music. Photo: Dan Lewis

[Music in the wineries: a fine pairing](#). Angela Allen braved the barrels in Yamhill County wine country to find out what was up with the fourth summer Willamette Valley Chamber Music

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Festival. She also [interviewed featured composer and violinist Jessie Montgomery](#), a “rising star – or risen constellation.”

[Loving the chaos: Hunter Noack in the wild](#). Brett Campbell contemplated the 30-year-old pianist’s summer adventures as he took “a 9-foot Steinway piano and 300 pairs of wireless headphones to some of Oregon’s most beautiful outdoor spaces.” The headphones were for Noack’s audience, which eagerly followed him into the wilderness.

[Music Watch: How to decide](#). “I know what you’re thinking. ‘Hey Mr. Music Editor Guy, how the [redacted] am I supposed to pick one of these million shows you’re always telling us about?’ Good question, dear foul-mouthed reader. The short answer, as always, is: follow your bliss!” Matthew Neil Andrews kindly helps you sort it out.

[Meaning and quality on a shoestring: the Woody Guthrie opera](#). Angela Allen considered the many charms and accomplishments of Opera Theater Oregon’s *This Land Sings: Songs of Wandering, Love and Protest*, Michael Daugherty’s radio-show-style chamber opera.

[The meanings of music 3: community grooves](#). In the final chapter of a three-part series, Matthew Neil Andrews writes about music and its meanings through the lens of Third Angle New Music’s *Back in the Groove*, which mixed some hot contemporary “classical” flute-playing with references to Jethro Tull.

[Percussion’s vast instrumentarium](#). Charles Rose thinks rhythmically about the Portland Percussion Group and the vast variety of shakes, rattles, rolls, snaps, and bangs that make up the percussive world.

[Embracing creativity: Gabriel Kahane and the Oregon Symphony](#). Matthew Neil Andrews talks with the composer about his new creative chair post with the orchestra. Kahane: “This is a vital art form, and this living art form connects to older pieces, just like you enter a museum and see Renaissance paintings next to conceptual video pieces from the present. You can walk through and see how these ideas evolved.”

[Makrokosmos Project: expansive vision](#). Brett Campbell considers the glories of Stephanie Ho and Saar Ahuvia’s fifth annual “five-hour, come-and-go-as-you-please music marathon”: “The festival started because Ho and Ahuvia, a married couple who live in New York City, visited Ho’s native Portland each summer to catch up with family — and nature. Their friend Harold Gray, the Portland State University professor and pianist who founded Portland Piano International, suggested that ‘instead of only doing so much hiking, we should do something musical, too,’ Ahuvia recalled.”

[Shape-note singing across the centuries](#). Daniel Heila visits Portland Sacred Harp and discovers a world – nay, a wondrous time warp – of music open to anyone.

VISUAL ARTS: A YEAR OF CHALLENGE & SURPRISE

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Lucinda Parker, *Star (in the Winner's Circle)*, (1979) acrylic on canvas, 44 x 48 in., collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem. Gift of Marilyn and Robert Shotola. Photo: Dale Peterson

[Lucinda Parker's force fields](#). "Lucinda Parker is the premier Portland painter of her generation," Paul Sutinen began his insightful review of the Portland artist's half-century retrospective at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, and then proceeded to make his persuasive case.

["The map is not the territory": Whose border is it?](#) Laurel Reed Pavic, ArtsWatch's visual arts editor, reviewed the Portland Art Museum's fascinating and challenging spring exhibit: "You—with your personal history, your anxieties, hopes, and dreams for the present and future—you are more than your driver's license. Identity is more complex than that, and in the same way, a region is more complicated than its borders and topographic elevations."

[A history of Portland women artists](#). Sometimes the artists are also the art. ArtsWatch joined a packed house in June at Froelick Gallery to hear a group of women talk about a giant painting in which they "starred": "The crowd, many of whom were also artists, packed the place to get a

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close look at *9 Portraits*, artist Katherine Ace's 10-foot-wide diptych group portrait of nine prominent veteran Portland women artists, and to hear those artists talk about the painting, their careers, and the often difficult path of making it as a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field." Collector Arlene Schnitzer bought the painting and donated it to the Portland Art Museum, where it becomes a part of the city's art history.

[Hank Willis Thomas: How to unmake race](#). "The neon above the main entrance of the Portland Art Museum reads 'LOVERULES.' Illuminated in different combinations, it reads both 'love overules' and 'love over rules.'" Laurel Reed Pavic reviewed Thomas's retrospective addressing the complexity of race in America.



Adriene Cruz woven work at Textile Connections. Courtesy adrieneacruz.com

[Warp, weft, in between and beyond](#). Martha Daghlian took in the woven wonders of the Textile Connections Symposium during Portland Textile Month and found a great deal of forward-looking

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energy: “(T)he most important work seemed to be happening already. Simply connecting fiber and textile artists with each other – sharing their work, traditions, and opinions – might have the greatest impact on the future strength and development of the community.”

[A rare look at the Yunnan School.](#) David Bates dove into the background of a show of Chinese paintings at Newberg’s Chehalem Cultural Center that “emerged from the wreckage of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s.” It was, Bates wrote, “the quintessence of ‘melting pot’ art. The paintings were produced by urban, university-trained Chinese artists who left familiar surroundings to live in an isolated rural area, bringing with them European influences, New Age perspectives and, of course, a knowledge of traditional Chinese art, which dates back thousands of years. Far from the scrutiny of Beijing, the artists found themselves working in a rural region with its own traditions of folk and indigenous art.”

[The view from Portland2019.](#) Laurel Reed Pavic reviewed Disjecta’s fifth biennial: “The art can’t be described as pretty nor escapist nor timeless. Perhaps *timeful* is a better characterization—a snapshot of where we are in 2019 in all its messiness.”

[“What Needs To Be Said.”](#) David Bates caught this fascinating show of work by 13 recent winners of the Hallie Ford Fellowship – it’s been touring the state – at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art in Salem. “There was no directive, overarching conceptual theme to the show,” curator Diana Nawi told Bates. “I think it is more generally a show that evidences the range of ways these artists work and puts an emphasis on the idea of artistic practice.”

[Monica Setziol-Phillips, carving her own path.](#) Weaver and woodcarver Setziol-Phillips is the daughter of legendary Oregon carver Leroy Setziol, a relationship that has sometimes hung heavily on her as she’s made her own way in the art world. But her newest works, at Salishan Resort, sit side by side with her father’s. “They come from the energy of the ocean, the abstract patterns that form in the sand, the weather,” she told ArtsWatch’s Lori Tobias.

[A cityscape in crochet.](#) Sebastian Zinn considered the allure and sheer audacity of a new and highly unusual mural made from parachute chord and adorning the facade of the Slingshot Lounge in Southeast Portland: “Scottish fiber artist and Portland transplant Jo Hamilton endows yarn with the representational properties of paint. Using a traditional crochet technique learned from her grandmother, Hamilton creates staggeringly colorful portraits and whimsical cityscapes.”

FAST & FURIOUS: THE YEAR IN DANCE

AND OF COURSE, IN 2019 WE DANCED THE NIGHT AWAY. All sorts of dances, in all sorts of places. A sampling of some of the year’s highlights:

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[Minh Tran's journey to rebirth](#). When does the personal become the universal? Martha Ullman West found the moment in the veteran Portland choreographer's first new work in eight years, a deeply felt and considered response to the loss of his parents.

[Linda Austin's "Ordinary Devotions"](#). Elizabeth Whelan found deep meaning in the work of another veteran Portland dancemaker, whose "peculiar playground" was "meant to do two things: find glamour in everyday objects and honor the ordinary—and extraordinary—qualities of the aging body."

[Chauncey Parsons' final bow](#). Martha Ullman West wrote a deep appreciation of the Oregon Ballet Theatre dancer, who retired from the stage at 37.



Law and Alvarado hanging out on the Chinese pole. Photo: Beautiful Aberration

[Pole disclosure: Acrobatics meets #metoo](#). Jamuna Chiarini talked with the contemporary circus duo Kate Law and Amaya Alvarado about "climbing up the pole, supporting each other in various death-defying, off-center feats of balance, hanging off of each other in mid-air, and sliding down the pole towards the floor at breakneck speeds and stopping just inches from catastrophe."

[A new festival addresses dance / Union PDX: making the case for dance](#). Jamuna Chiarini talked with choreographer Samuel Hobbs about why he thinks Portland's dance scene is in dire straits and needs a new festival. Elizabeth Whelan looked back on how the festival all came together.

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[At Eugene Ballet, Suzanne Haag plays with fire.](#) Gary Ferrington talked with the former Eugene Ballet dancer about her transition to choreographer and her new version of *The Firebird* for the company.

[The unkindness of strangers.](#) James Canfield's evocation of Tennessee Williams and *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a winner for NW Dance Project: "The funk and sweat and desperate seediness of New Orleans are so thick in the air above James Canfield's new dance *Sketches of Connotation* that you can almost smell them rising from the stage of Lincoln Performance Hall."

THEATER: THE CURTAIN NEVER DROPS

FOR SOME PEOPLE, ANY YEAR ARRIVES IN STAGES. Big stages, small stages, fancy stages, stripped-down stages, all across the town. It's been a busy, fruitful year for theater lovers. Here are just a few highlights – not a "best-of" list – from 2019.

[Inside Fertile Ground: Six Tales.](#) Bobby Bermea got down to the nitty-gritty with the creators of half a dozen shows at Portland's sprawling annual festival of new works. How do they do it, and why?

[Jane Austen, upended.](#) DeAnn Welker came to sing the praises of Portland Center Stage's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, with a few caveats.

[Boom! Big changes as season ends.](#) TJ Acena followed the fortunes of the adventurous presenting company Boom Arts from beginning to end. Some big surprises came along the way.

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Robert I. Mesa (left) and Gavin Hoffman howl at the moon in *Crossing Mnisose*. Photo: Patrick Weishampel/[blankeye.tv/Portland Center Stage at The Armory](http://blankeye.tv/Portland-Center-Stage-at-The-Armory)

[Crossing Mnisose: Standing on a rock](#). Kathryn Nagle’s time-hopping new play at Portland Center Stage leaped from the Lewis & Clark Expedition to the Standing Rock anti-pipeline movement, and back again. “Time warps in Nagle’s plays, or rather, overlaps. The past is prologue to the present, an enduring chord within a freshly written song, the sins of the fathers visiting generations to come.”

[ZooZoo, straight from the polar bear’s mouth](#). Want the real lowdown on the lives and times of Imago’s fabulous costumed critters in its hit *ZooZoo*? Danielle Vermette tells tales from a decade of traveling with the menagerie, inside the suits.

[Musings on behavior, blackness, and what shows to see](#). Theater editor Marty Hughley’s far-reaching column ranged from the etiquette of watching a show (eating chicken? really?) to awareness of race and what it means inside the theater.

[The homesick and the haunted](#). A pair of Thai-American ghostbusters did the haunting at Prince Gomolvilas’s *The Brothers Paranormal* at Theatre Diaspora. Bennett Campell Ferguson declared that it “grips you like a great horror film, but it succeeds because it cares about both the earthly and the unearthly—the anguish of the living and the dead.”

[OUTwright: a Booty Candy tale](#). Bobby Bermea went backstage at Fuse’s annual festival of queer theater to get the lowdown on one of its hits, Robert O’Hara’s *Booty Candy*.

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Lauren Steele as Jacqueline Marie Butler, navigating the tricky terrain of adolescence and the socio-political changes of the '60s in *Queens Girl in the World* at Clackamas Rep. Photo: Travis Nodurft

[“Queens Girl”: a colorful, complicated coming of age.](#) Marty Hughley writes about the black dot syndrome, the reality of race, and Lauren Steele’s gorgeous performance in Caleene Sinette Jennings’ play *Queens Girl in the World* at Clackamas Rep.

[Bakkhai to the future.](#) “Don’t aggravate the gods.” The age-old message came through loud and clear in Shaking the Tree’s visually ravishing contemporary update of Eueripides’ 405 B.C.E. Greek tragedy.

THE LAST BITE
