

Chicago Tribune  
**A+E**  
 Sunday



Craig Trompeter of Haymarket Opera Company, from left, Ciera McKissick of the Hyde Park Art Center and jazz singer Dee Alexander.

ZBIGNIEW BZDAK AND ABEL URIBE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

FALL 2020

# CHICAGO ARTS IN THE PANDEMIC

BY DOUG GEORGE

The fall arts season is here. Not that you would know it, necessarily. From music to theater and everything else in Chicago arts and entertainment, the COVID-19 pandemic cut short the spring season a half year ago this weekend. In the months since, the city's arts community — and we in the audience — have found ways to soldier on. We tried drive-in movies. We donned masks and returned to some of our favorite museums. Chicago's musicians and theater-makers performed from the backs of trucks, or on our screens. So while a lot of arts livelihoods remain in jeopardy, and while this September will not be the usual launch of a new cultural season, A+E nonetheless takes this Sunday to offer a guide to the best of what's out there, as well as profile some people who have made a difference.

**COMING NEXT SUNDAY:** More in pop music from Adam Lukach, Rick Kogan on coping through comedy, and Blair Kamin on architecture for fall 2020.

**INSIDE**

**MUSIC**

Chicago artists to watch in pop, rock and hip-hop **Page 3**  
 Plus talking to Half Gringa **Page 3**  
 Jazz best bets from Howard Reich **Page 7**  
 Singer Dee Alexander goes radio **Page 7**  
 Classical music critic's picks **Page 8**  
 Craig Trompeter of Haymarket Opera **Page 8**

**THEATER**

Best bets for streaming and live shows **Page 6**  
 The Neo-Futurists are having a moment **Page 10**  
**MUSEUMS AND ART**  
 The best in visual art **Page 9**  
 Talking to Ciera McKissick of the Hyde Park Art Center **Page 9**

**MOVIES**

Our film picks for the fall, both wide release **Page 5** and local **Page 4**  
 Challenging times for Chris Johnson of Classic Cinemas **Page 5**

**WHAT YOU'RE SAYING**  
 We asked you, Tribune readers, to share your feelings about venturing back to live entertainment. Here's what you told us **Page 5**

## Existential questions for yet another season

We're still stuck in a liminal space

We spent spring understanding the narrative, getting familiar with the characters, anticipating the resolution that would arrive, as long as we had the patience. Summer came, along with the inevitable second-act complications that delay any happy end-



**CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI**

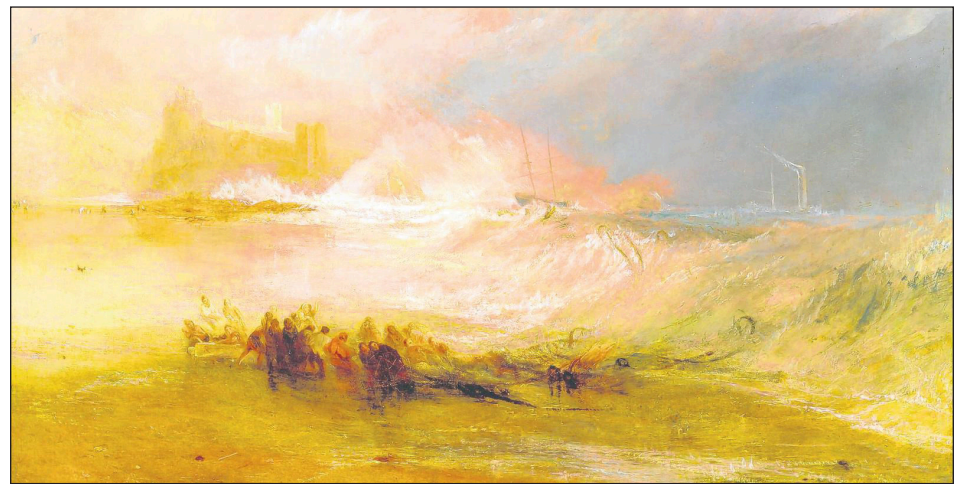
ing. By now though, by the first stirrings of autumn, by the time the air chills, school begins and the arts refresh, that narrative

should be over — we should be on to something new.

On the other hand, so much of 2020 had been as surreal as it was vaguely familiar.

I spent spring in an empty office greeted daily by yacht rock sailing cheerfully throughout the building — just like that zombified shopping mall in

Turn to **Borrelli, Page 11**



SEPIA TIMES/GETTY

"Wreckers Coast of Northumberland, with a Steam-Boat Assisting a Ship off Shore," by Joseph Mallord William Turner (c. 1836). His paintings are a bit like this year — whatever might be going on, it can't all be good.

**MONET AND CHICAGO**

ART INSTITUTE CHICAGO

NOW OPEN  
 Advance Tickets Required

Lead support for *Monet and Chicago* is generously contributed by THE KENNETH C. GRIFFIN CHARITABLE FUND

Lead Corporate Sponsors: CHASE, J.P.Morgan

Major funding is provided by Lesley and Janice Lederer, the Shore Charitable Trust, Richard F. and Christina F. Karger-Mark and Charlene Noyak, and Marzot Levin Schiff and the Harold Schiff Foundation. Additional support is contributed by the Alice M. Leibel Fund for French Impressionism, Alison R. Barker in honor of Ruth Stark Randolph, the Kompef Educational and Charitable Fund, the Rose L. and Sidney M. Shaw Endowment for the Education of the Deaf, and the University of Chicago. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Claude Monet, *Water Lilies* (detail, 1906). The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection.

## FALL 2020: CHICAGO ARTS IN THE PANDEMIC

## MAKING BOLD MOVES

Ciera McKissick wants to do it all in the art world

BY STEVE JOHNSON

Walking through the Hyde Park Art Center shortly before its big “Artists Run Chicago 2.0” exhibition opened early this month, Ciera McKissick was thrilled.

“It’s so nice to see everything together,” said McKissick, the center’s public programs coordinator. “There’s so much art in this building right now?”

She’s not the show’s curator, but she’s put together the mostly virtual public programming for it. And she knows, knows of and even has worked with many of the artists and independent, artist-run spaces that are in the 50-organization show.

“The entire building has been completely taken over by art,” she said, “our major gallery spaces, into the hallways and even the bathroom and kitchen spaces as well. So I don’t think there’s a crevice left that hasn’t been taken over.”

The show is, in a sense, a metaphor for her short but notable career in Chicago, which has been marked by a bold move into opening her own space, AMFM, which is in the exhibition; by putting on events; by moving into steady work at an established arts organization; and by trying to find time to pursue her own, text-based art, currently through a residency at Chicago Art Department, another of the groups in the show.

“She just wants to do it all,” said Kamillah Rashied, the director of education for Court Theatre and a friend and mentor of McKissick’s. “She has a lot of great ideas, and she wants it all to be realized. She’s just prolific. Not everybody has the energy or the know-how or the taste to be that prolific.”

McKissick is also “genuinely interested in artists of color, in centering, in making space for them,” she said.

And her personality and personal style help too. (Indeed, a search for her in Tribune photo records turns up shots where she was photographed for her look at Pitchfork Music Festival and at a gallery opening.)

“I’ve been out gallery



ABEL URIBE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Ciera McKissick, at a gallery show in 2019, is Hyde Park Art Center’s public programs coordinator.

walking with her,” said Rashied, who got to know McKissick because part of her previous job, at the Art Institute, was seeking out and working with young Chicagoans who were on that cutting edge. “Everyone knew her. Everyone. We could not get a foot down the street without five people running up, ‘Hey, Ciera!’ So part of it is that people like her.

“And she always looks really cool. She has impeccable style. And she knows what is on the verge. She knows in Chicago who’s the person to know, who’s doing the very cool thing at that time.”

One of McKissick’s secrets, said Jane Georges, an artist who has known and worked with McKissick almost from the time the latter moved here from Milwaukee in 2014, is that her achievements are not random.

“A thing to know about Ciera is she has a vision board,” outlining her goals for the coming year, Georges said. “As long as I’ve known her, she’s crossed almost everything off that list every year.”

McKissick may be soft-spoken and sunny in dispo-

sition, Georges said, but don’t be fooled: “She may have a quiet voice, but she does not have a quiet voice.”

As Georges said this, she was standing on a ladder on the second floor of the art center, drill in hand, installing her “Pink Tape Wall” that has become a signature piece for AMFM. The acronym stands for Art Music Fashion Magazine. What McKissick now calls “a brand for artists and people” began more as a magazine, an independent study project in her senior year at University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she studied journalism and mass communication.

After school, she moved to Sacramento, California, for a time, then returned to her native Milwaukee, keeping AMFM going and being involved in the local art scene the whole time. She moved to Chicago six years ago, because, she said, “I wanted to really think about the next steps and continue to work in a larger way.”

The plan was to be here a year, “but I really felt in love with the arts community here and just the hus-

tle and drive of the people,” she said.

She spent the first year essentially in the audience, seeing art and music and making connections.

“Wherever I go, I look for where the artists are,” said McKissick, who’s now 33. “I would look for flyers and things that were going on. I would go to shows and open mics and really just observe and talk with people about their work and whatnot. So I don’t think I threw my first show until about a year after I moved here.”

After that little period on pause, it’s been fast-forward since, from the sound of things. To support herself, she worked at a middle school and then a marketing agency. “And then things started to ramp up,” she said. “My focus was elsewhere. So I needed to take the leap of faith and go full time and run my space.”

She quit her steady job and opened AMFM as a gallery/events space in Pilsen and for two years put on shows and events there. It won Best New Gallery in the Reader’s 2017 Best of Chicago survey. “We were booked every weekend with shows and whatnot,”

said McKissick, but there developed what she termed “irreconcilable differences with our landlord” and she had to close.

After some soul searching, she decided not to open another space right away, she said, noting that “sometimes things happen before you know why they happen.”

Instead she landed last October at the established Hyde Park Art Center. “I was really interested in professional development and learning about sustainability and how non-profit institutions work,” McKissick said. “Most of the things I was doing with AMFM over time were self-taught, and I was just kind of trying things and winging it. I wanted to work in a space and get insight on how things worked from the inside as well.”

There was a lot of time to be inside, of course, because the pandemic hit in March, just as planning was ramping up for the original planned launch of the “Artists Run Chicago 2.0” show the next month. Reopening HPAC with the “2.0” show has McKissick grateful to be

welcoming the public back but also a little wistful about the programming she had planned that is moving to a virtual space. But she adapted to the new realities, she said, and tried to make the best of it.

“She’s really talented and has a strong vision for how the art world in Chicago could evolve,” said Mike Nourse, a colleague as the director of education at HPAC and also executive director at Chicago Art Department, which has given McKissick two residencies now.

“I could really see her helping to lead new and innovative programs for institutions here in Chicago like she’s doing for HPAC now but at a more prominent level,” he said. “I could see her as a prominent artist, a prominent administrator, a prominent curator. Maybe the world will help her decide, but she’s definitely destined for some important work — and important work for all of us.”

sajohnson@chicago.tribune.com

Twitter @StevenKJohnson

## Plenty of museum shows worth seeing this fall

Monet, early Frank Lloyd Wright are among offerings

BY STEVE JOHNSON

It’s not a full slate, as we would have seen in previous, pandemic-free Chicago autumns.

But from Claude Monet to two big new Chicago art showcases to a look at early Frank Lloyd Wright, there’s enough going on in Chicago museums and visual arts to make one more than a little bit excited about new happenings. That is a strange feeling at this moment in history, but I kind of remember it from before, and — yes — I like it.

There’s even a bit of breaking news here about text-based artist Jenny Holzer’s first augmented reality work at the University of Chicago this fall. Pay attention to news from the institutions you’re interested in because the situation is, to say the least, dynamic. And remember that several fine shows from the spring have been held over and extended, including the Ruth Bader Ginsburg exhibit at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and “Apsáalooke: Women and Warriors” at the Field Museum.

But here are 11 currently scheduled new exhibitions and events before the end of the year that I’m looking forward to seeing:

“**Renaissance Invention**”: Recently reopened, the Newberry Library is mounting this innovative, three-institution look at new discoveries as envisioned in the late 16th century. Adler Planetarium astronomical instruments and Art Institute armor is shown off alongside the library’s edition of Johannes Stradanus’s widely influential print series “Nova Reperta (New Discoveries),” which “celebrated the marvels of the age,” the Newberry says. *Through Nov. 25, Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton St.; 312-943-9090 or newberry.org.*

“**Artists Run Chicago 2.0**”: A showcase for contemporary thinking about art and the ways independent organizations help creativity thrive, this recently opened exhibition spotlights 50 artist-run spaces from across the city and into the suburbs.

It’s a callback to the 2009 “Artists Run Chicago” show, and, fascinatingly, only a handful of the groups from then are back. In “2.0,” there’s something to look at on virtually every

wall of the Hyde Park Art Center, from a 25-square-inch gallery located inside a clutch to a 10-by-20-foot wall of toilet paper rolls on holders that predated the pandemic. *Through Nov. 1, 5020 S. Cornell Ave.; hydeparkart.org.*

“**Monet and Chicago**” / “**The Flowers of Monet**”: The postponed-from-spring Art Institute look at Claude Monet’s considerable ties to Chicago has finally debuted. Since last weekend, “Monet and Chicago” — now with more space in the galleries than originally planned — has been offering visitors to the reopened museum a chance to commune with the revered French Impressionist. Presciently, Chicago exhibitions showed Monet four times between 1888 and 1895, and the Tribune wrote about an 1888 exhibition, “Why go to Paris since Paris has come to Chicago?”

Meanwhile, Garfield Park Conservatory has reopened its outdoor gardens to show off asters, dahlias, nasturtiums, roses and more in “The Flowers of Monet in the Artist’s Garden.” *“Monet and Chicago,” through Jan. 18, \$7 upcharge and visitors will be queued virtually for controlled capacity, Art Institute, 111 S. Michigan Ave.;*

*(312) 443-3600 or artic.edu. “Flowers,” opened Sept. 5, \$5 timed-entry ticket required, Garfield Park Conservatory, 300 N. Central Park Ave.; www.garfieldconservatory.org/visit.*

“**Elmhurst Art Museum**”: It’s hard to pick among the three recently opened exhibits at the elegant small museum in the near western suburbs (that’s easily accessible via Metra.)

“**A Space Problem**” shows off mid-century furniture and decor in an ideal setting; the museum’s Mies van der Rohe-designed McCormick House. “**Art in the Post**” treats current events, postcard artwork from the community about topics including COVID-19 and racial injustice. “**Wright Before the ‘Lloyd,’**” curated by Chicago cultural historian Tim Samuelson, looks at early work from the iconic architect. *Through Nov. 15 (“Space”), Nov. 22 (“Art”) and Jan. 3 (“Wright”), 150 S. Cottage Hill Ave, Elmhurst; elmhurstartmuseum.org.*

“**Jake Troyli: Don’t Forget to Pack a Lunch!**”: The Florida artist, the mixed-race son of mixed-race parents, gets his first solo show in Chicago, and from the look and sound of things, it’ll be both challenging and rewarding.

“He deals candidly, often humorously, with this sense of otherness in his paintings while remaining aware that as an artist he’s both exploring and exploiting it,” Tampa Bay’s Creative Loafing newspaper wrote about him in 2018. *Sept. 12–Oct. 31, Monique Meloche Gallery, 451 N Paulina St.; (312) 243-2129 or moniquemeloche.com.*

“**A Tale of Today: Nate Young and Mika Horibuchi**”: Chicago sculptor Young adorns impeccably crafted wood cabinets, frames and vitrines in order to conduct an inquisition into his family’s past. Chicago artist Horibuchi, the MCA wrote about a 2018 exhibition of hers, “is interested in tricks and slips in visual perception. The curtains, window blinds and optical illusions she uses as subjects often conceal as much as they reveal.”

Postponed from spring, their joint installation at the Driehaus Museum will be the gilded age mansion’s second show placing contemporary art amid its opulent rooms. *Opens Sept. 26, 40 E. Erie St.; driehausmuseum.org or (312) 482-8933.*

“**YOU BE MY ALLY**”: The first augmented reality

work in the U.S. by renowned text-based artist Jenny Holzer will be viewable on the University of Chicago’s Hyde Park campus this fall and via app and, at times, on the nearby streets.

Commissioned by the university, the main work consists of excerpts from the school’s Core Curriculum that people can project from their phones onto walls. *Oct. 5–late November. An information page is expected to be live by Sept. 10 at jennyholzer.uchicago.edu.*

“**The Long Dream**”: Organized as the MCA readjusted its priorities and trimmed its budget in response to the pandemic, this show, the museum says, will showcase “emerging and established artists” from Chicago as selected by the whole of the museum’s curatorial team.

Labels will be written “in collaboration with youth groups and civic voices” and works will treat “race, anxiety, historical injustice and artistic exploration.” *Opens Nov. 7, 220 E. Chicago Ave.; (312) 280-2660 or mcachicago.org.*

sajohnson@chicago.tribune.com

Twitter @StevenKJohnson