Local organizations push Spokane in a creative direction

By Madeline Keckler

New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Seattle are widely recognized as national artistic hotspots. Artists young and old flock from all corners of the country for the opportunity to leave a mark on the creative consciousness of the country. While cities like Seattle are leading the pack in terms of artistic output, smaller communities are making themselves known; in Spokane, the arts are not only a significant part of the community, but are quickly developing their own culture.

Despite being a city without an official department of arts, Spokane’s arts community is thriving. From public art to small galleries in coffee shops, live theatrical performances to spoken word poetry, creatives of virtually all mediums have found a way to channel the spirit of Spokane into their work.

Much of the city’s enthusiasm for the arts can be attributed to the organizations established solely to foster creativity and support artists. Spokane Arts is one of the most prominent voices in support of the arts. Spokane Arts is a 501(c)3 non-profit, whose goal is to cultivate the artistic community of the Spokane by focusing on four main pillars: arts leadership, advocacy, networking and support.

Shelly Wynecoop, grants administrator for Spokane Arts, explained how the organization uses its resources to nurture the arts, especially through the Spokane Arts Grant Awards (SAGA).

“Some grant proposals come in and are just shy of the mark, Wynecoop explained. The committee is very interested in the work, and the artist has a clear passion for what they do, but the grant itself isn’t quite up to par with what SAGA is looking for. That’s where Wynecoop’s passion for mentorship and empowerment comes in.

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Wynecoop emphasized her dedication to Spokane Arts’ emphasis on programming. Through SAGA, she facilitates grant-writing workshops and meets with applicants throughout the grant-writing process.

Another important aspect of Spokane Arts is their mentorship programs. Wynecoop explained that Spokane Arts wants to help artists with their professional development; to do this, the organization helps to develop relationships within the artistic community.

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While Spokane Arts is one of the most prominent organizations in the local arts scene, they aren’t the only artistic organization actively working to help artists connect with each other and their communities; Terrain, another arts-oriented Spokane organization, is founded on fostering relationships between emerging artists and seasoned professionals.

According to their website, Terrain began as a one-time event in 2008 that focused on bringing artists of all experience levels and mediums together. Since then, Terrain has grown into a non-profit that strives to build community and cultivate a sense of pride in the area.

Terrain as an organization now has three main events throughout the year: Terrain, Bazaar and Uncharted. Additionally, they have three Bagpipe programs: Window Dressing, Range, and the permanent Terrain Gallery space.

Jackie Cans, director of operations for Terrain, has seen the impact the organization has had on bringing the arts community together.

“We’re an active participant in the arts community. Our programs and events are open to all, whether they’re a new artist or they’ve been working for years,” she said. “I think that there’s many other things going in the community, but I think our flagship event continues to grow, and I think that’s where people can have their first touch with the arts.”

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Caro spoke specifically to the growth she has seen in local arts within the past several years. “It’s continually growing,” she said of the artistic community in Spokane, “You can see more and more artists submitting to our events.”

Looking forward, both Wynecoop and Caro anticipate continuing support and need for the arts in Spokane. “Funding is always an issue, and I would love to see funding grow for the arts,” Caro said, “I think people participating in the arts, and knowing that that’s a vital part of our community, that’s where we see the most growth.”

With the initiatives of organizations like Spokane Arts and Terrain, and the construction of Gonzaga University’s Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center (PAC), Spokane is quickly building a reputation as a place for young artists to hone their skills in an environment that welcomes new ideas. Jacqueline Mallonee, a local theatre artist and GU alum, spoke about the new opportunities the PAC presents for young artists. “Having a space like the new PAC is such an incredible opportunity for Gonzaga students to take their art to the next level with a home for creation and an outlet for the greater Spokane public to view their hard work.”

According to the university website, the Woldson PAC is intended to be a space for Spokane and the Inland Northwest as a whole to come together to experience the performing arts. Molly Quillin, a junior political science major and theatre arts minor at Gonzaga, emphasized the impact she believes the new building will have on both the GU arts community and the Spokane community at large. “I am very optimistic for the impact of the PAC on the Spokane arts community,” Quillin said, “I think we have been blessed with an incredible donation to create an incredible space.”

Funding for the PAC was left to the University by Myrtle Woldson, a local entrepreneur who was passionate about the Spokane community and the arts. The Woldson family has also donated to the Martin Woldson Theatre at the Fox, the Edwidge Woldson Park on the South Hill, and the Jundt Museum Art Endowment.

“We have been given an opportunity with this space to leverage its power and sustain the creative atmosphere in Spokane,” Quillin said. Spokane is a rapidly growing city. As new voices and thoughts become more and more present in the community conversation, local artists young and old interpret Spokane’s culture in creative, relatable and impactful ways. Organizations like Spokane Arts and Terrain, along with support from community members like Myrtle Woldson, continue to give artists the opportunity to explore their mediums and channel the spirit of Spokane.