

# Essay'd

Detroit Art + Detroit Artists

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## 160 Ijania Cortez

📅 December 5, 2021 [📁 Artists](#) [🏷️ Black-Figurative-Painters, Painting, Public Art](#) [👤 Steve Pantón](#)



Born Detroit, 1990, Lives in Detroit

In *Transcendence: A Portrait of Corey Teamer*, a 2018 mural by Ijania Cortez at Brush and Baltimore, the eponymous figure rotates to face the viewer through three successive images. Each image is slightly larger and at a slightly higher elevation, and this, combined with the glowing orange, Rothko-esque background, reinforces the ascendant trajectory implied by the title.

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Essay'd is a writing, curatorial, research, educational, services, and advocacy project based in Detroit

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Our mission is to simultaneously transform the creative and economic dimensions of the Detroit art ecosystem

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Detroit Art + Detroit Artists

Our vision is a more productive and equitable ecosystem

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© December 3, 2021 Artists Drawing, Performance, Public Art, Sculpture, Socially Engaged Art

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© December 5, 2021 Artists Black-Figurative-Painters, Painting, Public Art Steve Panton



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In *Transcendence: A Portrait of Corey Teamer*, a 2018 mural by Ijania Cortez at Brush and Baltimore, the eponymous figure rotates to face the viewer through three successive images. Each image is slightly larger and at a slightly higher elevation, and this, combined with the glowing orange, Rothko-esque background, reinforces the ascendant trajectory implied by the title.

Cortez met Teamer at a family bonfire in the North End and told him he was very beautiful – something she says that Black men are reminded of too infrequently. In preparation for the portrait, Cortez photographed and sketched Teamer and held long, deep discussions with him about his background, which had not always been easy.

## Essay'd is an unprecedented survey of Detroit art

It has been publishing short illustrated online essays on Detroit artists since **Dec 2014** and has featured **170 installments** by **over 40 writers**.

Since writers choose their own subjects this wide spectrum of writers helps overcome “network bias” and has resulted in a diverse group of featured artists.

We pay at above market rate and expect writers to go through a rigorous editorial process

## 118 Iris Eichenberg

February 18, 2019 Artists Cranbrook, Sculpture Dora Apel



Born Gottingen, Germany, 1965 / Graduate degree from Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam / Lives in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Both comical and strangely melancholic, two small wooden house shapes attached to a wall are topped, incongruously, by sand bags with patches of wooly embroidery. They make an odd couple, like Oscar and Felix: alike yet unlike, dissonant and consonant, together yet separate. At once amusing and serious, they convey a searching spirit that permeates Iris Eichenberg's work, which often meditates on making home and finding our

## Essay'd broadens and deepens the audience for Detroit art

*"I started reading Essay'd in 2019 after I made a move to Detroit in 2016. .... Early on, I came across an article about Iris Eichenberg in Essay'd, related to the MOCAD show Useless Utility... [Essay'd] really did cover who you needed to know--and then I went out into the art world, and it was like characters in a book, suddenly coming alive."*

**Mariwyn Curtin** , quote in New Art Examiner article on Essay'd, Fall 2020



## **Essay'd puts Detroit artists in front of large (100,000+ people) audiences**

*“Since the completion of the Max in 2003, the DSO dreamt of supporting artists and art of all kinds throughout our community spaces. Thanks to Essay'd’s leadership (and support from the Applebaum Family Foundation) we have been able to bring this vision alive. For five years we have displayed the works of over fifty Detroit artists, offering opportunities for exposure, patron interaction and celebration of our local talent.*

*On behalf of the DSO and the broad and diverse constituencies we serve, we thank Essay'd for their dedication, creativity and perseverance displayed throughout our partnership. **Art @ the Max came alive thanks to Essay'd and we will be forever grateful .”***

**Anne Parsons,  
President Emeritus, Detroit Symphony Orchestra**



**Essay'd informs the decisions of leading  
commercial galleries**

*"I really like your site and often reference it when  
preparing for shows ..."*

**Melannie Chard, Owner, M Contemporary Art**

Unsolicited comment via email, 4/10/2021



**Essay'd informs the decisions of leading curators**

*“Essay'd is a great resource for me as a curator. It is chronicling the history of Detroit artists in real time, which leads to discoveries within our art scene now and for future generations.”*

**Laura Mott, Chief Curator of Cranbrook Art Museum**



## **Essay'd uplifts artists materially and spiritually**

*“My conversations leading up to being written about in Essay'd, help coalesce my thoughts into artist statements for the Kresge Fellowship application and others ... It was hugely important in getting me the Kresge Fellowship.”*

**Saffell Gardner**

## 132 Judy Bowman

© November 15, 2019 Artists Collage, Figurative, Religion+Spirituality LaToya Cross



Born: 1952, Detroit, MI; Studied at Spelman College and Clark College, Masters of Art from Olivet College/ Lives in Romulus, MI

Trading low saturated pastels for eclectic textures of colored paper and acrylic paint, Judy Bowman's recent bold and often jubilant collages have been years in the making. After a

**Essay'd helps build relationships of trust between writers and artists:**

*"LaToya takes my flat thoughts or words and turns them into lyrical and colorful dialog that touches people. As far as the impact on my career, pre LaToya Cross, I was a Kresge applicant. Post LaToya Cross, I am a Kresge Fellow!"*

**Artist Judy Bowman speaking of her relationship with writer LaToya Cross**



## New writer – LaToya Cross

© November 14, 2019 • Writers • LaToya Cross



LaToya Cross is an arts and culture writer and producer whose work has been featured by WDET 101.9FM – Detroit's NPR Station, Essay'd, EBONY, JET, SouthSideWeekly.com, and bikcreatives.com She is passionate about highlighting creatives using their platform to shift, shape and analyze culture through an artistic lens.

**Essay'd gives established art writers the freedom to discover new heights:**

*“Working with Essay'd and having that freedom to explore various artists, forms, techniques and creative approaches - really getting into the psychology behind the making – has been a beautiful and fun growth experience as a writer and creative.*”

***Throughout the process, I've been able to identify my voice a bit more ..... It's layered, it's complex but that's the beauty of the dance. That's the intertwining of creative written and visual language.”***

***LaToya Cross, Writer***



Essay'd builds on the research it does on artist ecosystems to publish articles in large circulation outlets to build up the “big picture” story of the Detroit art world

These type of articles have long shelf lives and are widely referenced. The lower one is the only article featured on “Sacred Spaces,” the annual festival of “authentically black art spaces” during Black History Month.

These articles tell the 75 year story of a multi-generational network of artists and supporters. They investigate the paradox of how Black art in Detroit was/is so vibrant despite a history of exclusion from institutions, commercial galleries, funding, coverage in the art press, etc.





**Essay'd has uplifted the quality of art writing in Detroit through five workshops since the Fall of 2016.**

Writers who have come through these workshops have gone on to write for Essay'd and other publications.

**Essay'd has now published over 40 writers. Since writers choose their own subjects this overcomes “network bias” and has resulted in a diverse group of featured artists.**

*“I’ve attended 3 arts writing workshops, one at MOCAD a few years ago, one at Northwestern University in Chicago last year and this one. This was by far the best!”*

Find more feedback [here](#).





**Essay'd has uplifted cultural production in Detroit through six curatorial workshops since Spring of 2018.**

Intensive, collaborative, and process-based, each workshop typically results in ~2 major projects by new curators

*“I was able to connect my project to much stronger and deeper conceptual foundations. I was also inspired by other projects and shared resources to think about other ways of bringing my project to an audience, to make it sustainable, to connect it with a wider community, and to communicate it to stakeholders.”*

*“This workshop has been so much more than I could have imagined. The level of creativity and generosity that everyone has displayed is truly awesome!”*

Find more feedback [here](#).





Essay'd has uplifted cultural production in Detroit through five curatorial workshops since Spring of 2018.

## Why we run these curatorial workshops

The curatorial role is essential for high quality cultural production, but few arts/culture organizations in Detroit can afford to employ professional curators.

We teach a proven methodology where the role of the curator is represented by a collaborative curatorial process, allowing organizations of all sizes (and independent curators) the potential to create institutional quality programming

Our curatorial methodology is (i) a tool for education, design, and analysis, (ii) collaborative, generative, and replicable, and (iii) scalable and broadly applicable



Find more feedback [here](#).



**Essay'd curatorial workshop participants go on to transform arts institutions in the city**

*“The Essay'd curatorial workshops and continuing support has helped me evolve as an artist, educator, curator, and person. **Since the workshop I joined the Detroit Artists Market Exhibition Committee and have been able to use these skills to bring critical change to a long-established institution. Using the curatorial process from the workshop, I inspired the Exhibition Committee to think critically about the relevance, inclusivity, diversity, and community focus of every exhibition proposal .....**”*

**Jetshri Bhadviya**



**Curatorial workshop participants apply the concepts they learn to elevate their careers to new levels**

*“The Essay’d curatorial workshops gave me the confidence to take my project to the next step. Using the tools and guidelines provided through the workshops I was able to craft a succinct and compelling narrative for a long-running photo series that was finally exhibition ready. **In just a few months after sending out my proposal I was offered my first international solo exhibition at the Czong Institute for Contemporary Art in South Korea** . I have continued to use the principles ever since, whether collaborating with curators or designing my own shows in galleries spaces throughout Detroit and Michigan”*

**Shanna Merola**

## Essay'd advocates for a more equitable, transparent, and productive Detroit art ecosystem

For example, the Wayne County Art Institute Authority (WCAIA) distributes ~\$10M of taxpayer money per year. Essay'd required it to perform public meetings and annual audits (both of which it was required to do by law).

*“I am so grateful for this advocacy work by Essay'd - I have shared the info with several Grandmont Rosedale neighborhood people ..... None was aware of this Service Agreement or the existence of the Wayne County Art Institute Authority. Thanks for getting the word out!! We will all be chiming in on the issue.”*

Unsolicited e-mail comment

Advocacy – Require the WCAIA/WCC to follow a

Advocacy – Require the WCAIA to account for the

Advocacy – Require the WCAIA to conduct open meetings

October 14, 2020 Advocacy Steve Panton

**Objective:** Require the Wayne County Art Institute Authority to comply with the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

**Why we're doing this:** So that the people of Wayne County can hold the Detroit Institute of the Arts to higher standards.

**Actions to date:** we consulted with an attorney specializing in government transparency issues, and on 9/7/20, filed a Freedom of Information Act request with Wayne County for information on Art Institute Authority meetings and meeting minutes.

**Outcomes:** As a result of our actions, Wayne County created a home page for the Art Institute Authority which includes dates for upcoming meetings, members of the authority, minutes from previous meetings, bylaws, governing legislation, ser-

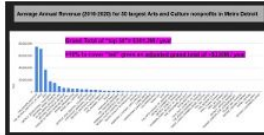
## Overview of the Mural

### DIA Millage Mid-Term

#### Scorecard – Executive

## Metro Detroit Arts and Culture Not-for-profit Sector Financial Overview Part 2 – Tax Returns

May 24, 2023 Research Steve Panton



This report analyzes how economic and cultural capital circulates in the Metro Detroit not-for-profit arts and culture ecosystem by analyzing the tax returns of the 50 biggest art and culture nonprofit organizations. It asks questions such as how big is the sector? What % of it comes from philanthropic sources? What does this fund? What are the prevailing investment strategies?

Essay'd is conducting an unprecedented survey of how economic and cultural capital circulates in the Detroit art economy, beginning with the following three areas

1. The **not-for-profit art and culture sector** in Detroit (which we chose because it is almost certainly the largest sector of the Detroit art and culture economy, estimated at **~\$330M/year**) .... *over 93% of ongoing, publicly reported funding goes to large institutions (>\$1M/year) and only 2% goes to grassroots organizations and cultural producers*
2. The ecosystem around the **DIA Millage** (which we chose because at **~\$30M/year**, it is almost certainly the largest single source of funding for the arts in Detroit)
3. The **mural painting ecosystem** in the city (which we chose because although it is relatively small (**~\$2-3M/year**), it is one in which artists' labor is highly visible and productive

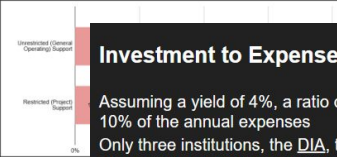
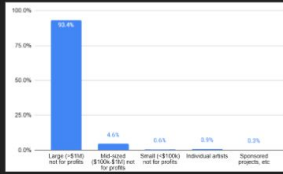
(with funding from the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan)

Based on an analysis of publicly reported, ongoing, arts and culture funding initiatives:

**93.4% of funding goes to large (>\$1M) not-for-profits**

4.6% of funding goes to medium size (\$100k-\$1M) not-for-profits

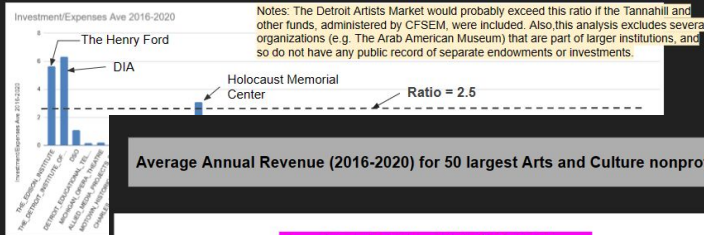
2% of funding goes to small (<\$100k) not-for-profits, individual artists and sponsored projects.



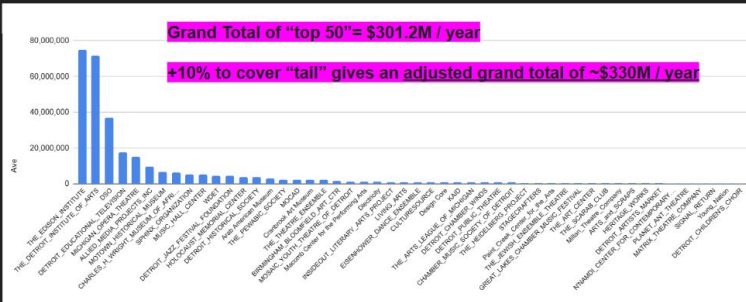
### Investment to Expenses Ratio (ave 2016-2020)

Assuming a yield of 4%, a ratio of 2.5 would provide an annual investment income equal to 10% of the annual expenses

Only three institutions, the DIA, the Henry Ford, and the Holocaust Memorial Center exceed this relatively modest ratio.



### Average Annual Revenue (2016-2020) for 50 largest Arts and Culture nonprofits in Metro Detroit



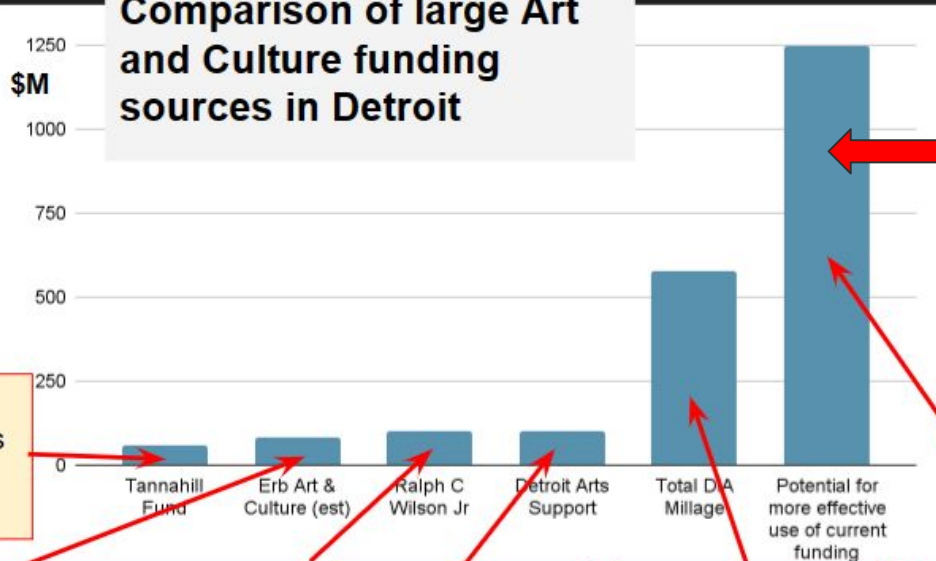
*“Arts organizations will be able to use this research to identify effective programs and program models ..... while funders could use this information to inform grantmaking strategy while keeping arts ecosystem sustainability and fair treatment of artists in the forefront of the discussion. ”*

**Phil Gilchrist, Executive Director, Anton Art Center**



The potential upside of using this research to create “more effective programs and grantmaking strategies” is immense ....

**Comparison of large Art and Culture funding sources in Detroit**



The **Tannahill fund** for A&C has **~\$60M** in net assets

The **Erb FF** spend down will invest an estimated **\$80M** in A&C

The **RCWJF** spend down will invest **\$100M** in A&C

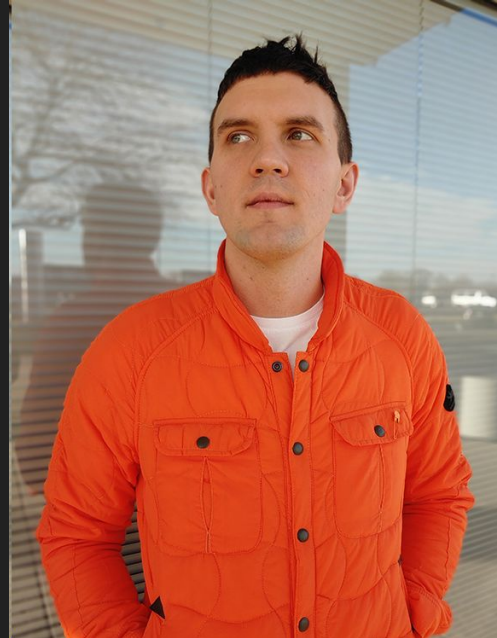
**Detroit Arts Support** is equal to an investment of **\$102M**

The **DIA Millage** will invest **\$580M** (est total) over 20 years

The potential for **more effective use of current funding** is **\$1250M**

For example, a 5-10% improvement in grantmaking (due to data-driven decision making), and a 5-10% improvement in program effectiveness (due to better processes) - both of which should be easily achievable - would be equivalent to an investment in the arts of \$1.25B!

Essay'd is a network of over 200 past and present collaborators initiated by co-founders Steve Panton and Matthew Piper





Essay'd co-founder, **Matthew Piper** a Detroit-based writer and editor with a special interest in modern and contemporary art, architecture, and urbanism.

He is Essay'd's editor-in-chief where he is responsible for mentoring new writers and assuring the overall quality of the core writing project.

He is an inspired editor, and his art writing workshops get rave reviews from participants!



Essay'd co-founder, **Steve Panton** is a highly experienced professional in the tech, educational, and creative industries. He started his technical career as an engineering apprentice and progressed through the ranks to become the business manager for Siemens PLM Quality Solutions.

Over the last 15 years, he has become one of Detroit's most influential independent curators through his innovative approach, his curatorial workshops, and the sixty or so exhibitions he has produced, many of which have travelled to larger institutions and achieved national recognition..

His uniquely diverse background allows him to bring a visionary perspective to both the curatorial and business aspects of any creative endeavour.



Essay'd collaborates closely with our colleague **Halima Afi Cassells** on research, advocacy, education, and community benefits

**Halima Afi Cassells** is an award-winning interdisciplinary artist, mom, and an avid gardener with deep roots in community building in Waawiiyaataanong/ Detroit. She is a tireless advocate for equitable and transparent cultural institutions in the city. She is the co-author of ArtChangeUS's Cultural Community Benefits Toolkit, and has led workshops around the United State on behalf of that organization.



Essay'd also collaborates closely with our colleague **Precious Johnson** on editorial strategy and monetizing our research and publishing activities.

**Precious Johnson** is an artist, writer, dancer, and collector. Born in the American South, she began her journey into the arts during college where she undertook a two-year ethnography exploring Argentine tango's history and gender politics. Precious holds a bachelor's degree with honors from the University of Chicago and a master's degree from the University of Illinois-Springfield. She has worked on the development teams of several large institutions and municipalities.



“Essay’d’s mission is to simultaneously transform the creative and economic dimensions of the Detroit art ecosystem”

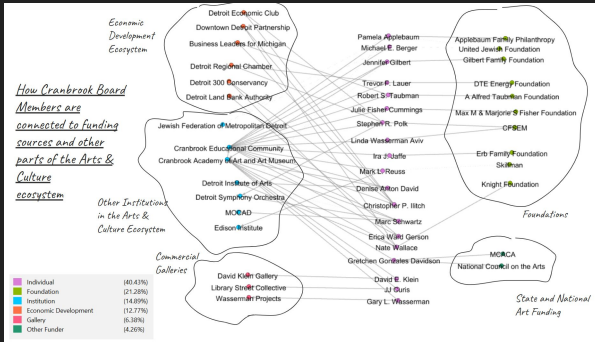
**Some of the services Essay’d can deliver:**

*Creative Transformation*

- Curatorial and Art Writing Workshops
- Art Writing & Editorial Support
- Exhibition and Event Production

*Economic and Creative Transformation*

- Art and Culture Research
- Benchmarking and Strategic/Investment Planning
- Project Management from requirements gathering to implementation



Images: upper, Singular, an installation by Lynn Bennett Carpenter at Detroit's Orchestra Hall; lower, Art Ecosystem Network Analysis

**Essay'd**

**For more information**

**contact**

**Steve Panton**

**313-3005814**

**steve@essayd.org**