

Coalition of Small Arts NYC

In the summer of 2020, thirty-**one** New York City arts organizations joined together to form **Coalition of Small Arts NYC (CoSA NYC)**, aimed to address the unfolding challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to strengthen their commitments to racial, social, economic, and environmental justice. **CoSA NYC** formed in recognition that *together*, small organizations are uniquely resilient and form a cornerstone of the cultural life of New York City. In its first phase, CoSA NYC raised a total of \$1,600,000 that was shared *equally* among thirty-**one** organizations.

Coalition of Small Arts NYC is A Gathering of the Tribes, Anthology Film Archives, Arts for Art, Asian American Arts Alliance, Bidoun Projects, Blank Forms, COUSIN, Danspace Project, Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), Franklin Furnace Archive, Harvestworks, Independent Curators International (ICI), ISSUE Project Room, Light Industry, Luminial Theater, Maysles Documentary Center, MONO NO AWARE, Movement Research, Participant Inc, Primary Information, Queer|Art, SPICY, The Brooklyn Rail, The Chocolate Factory Theater, The Clemente, The Poetry Project, Triple Canopy, Ugly Duckling Presse, UnionDocs, Visual AIDS, and Wendy's Subway.

Individually, the organizations in CoSA NYC are devoted to collaborative relationships with artists and publics, and recognize that the value of *smallness* means placing the needs of communities ahead of institutional needs. Together, they encompass a broad range of disciplines, including dance and performance, music and sound, film and media arts, literature, and visual arts; with services ranging from public exhibitions, performances, and screenings; to publishing, archiving, and preserving artists' works; to facilitating residencies, professional development, education, and advocacy.

In total, the thirty-**one** organizations in CoSA NYC employ more than 170 art workers, in addition to paying more than 622 contracted workers each year, and their programs reach an annual audience of nearly 4 million people. Their annual operating budgets reflect an average budget size of \$560,000, with 80% of the organizations' budgets falling under \$1 million. CoSA NYC represents a wide breadth of experience and cultural histories, from cultural pillars founded as early as 1966 to newly-formed organizations that bring a future-oriented vision to the evolving cultural landscape.

CoSA NYC collectively serves more than 21,500 artists each year. At the core of CoSA NYC's shared values is a commitment to substantially paying artists, with over \$2.8 million in artist fees paid annually. While not a prerequisite for inclusion, many of the organizations in CoSA NYC hold certification from the activist nonprofit W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) in recognition of longstanding histories of paying artists fair and standardized fees. Data collected by W.A.G.E.'s Certification program has shown us that fees and direct production support paid to artists by small organizations such as our coalition members by far outsize larger organizations.

Many of the organizations in CoSA NYC were members of the advocacy group Common Practice New York (CPNY), which conducted relevant research that points to the unique abilities of small-scale organizations to meaningfully engage with artists and publics over sustained periods of time, fostering ideas from which larger organizations consistently profit, and for which the metrics needed to assess value simply don't exist.

As art historian David Joselit argues, in “In Praise of Small,” an essay commissioned by CPNY, “While large institutions canonize – i.e., turn information into history – small arts organizations may pluralize its shapes ... as well as the stories it can tell. To make information malleable and mobile again in unexpected ways, and to resist its enclosure by elites and its reification into dominant narratives is to make art political.”

Despite the essential roles that CoSA NYC organizations play in sustaining the vital work of thousands of artists each year, many were deemed ineligible or declined for public relief opportunities, which in recent years have prioritized medium- to large-scale institutions, including those with endowments and pre-existing access to extensive funding structures. CoSA NYC seeks to bring greater visibility to the unique challenges faced by small-scale organizations and the communities they serve, and **to ensure their survival.**

Since fall 2020, CoSA NYC has received generous grants from **Teiger Foundation**, **The Willem de Kooning Foundation**, and **Henry Luce Foundation** for general operating support for CoSA NYC members. Modeled on extensive research into non-hierarchical, cooperative decision-making gathered by the **Coop Fund**, funds raised through CoSA NYC are **divided equally among all thirty-one organizations.** CoSA NYC’s future plans include defining and advancing its advocacy role, and creating an open system for more small-scale and micro-organizations to join the coalition.

Some notes from **CoSA NYC** members:

“CoSA is the most important development of the year for small nonprofit NYC arts organizations. One for all and all for one trumps self-centeredness every time! We are delighted to be one of 32 equal cogs in this glorious new engine for the arts and culture.”

-- *Franklin Furnace Archive*

“Small arts organizations in NYC provide the types of support that allow working artists to make this amazing city their home. We are the lifeblood of NYC's creative communities, continuously nurturing long-emerging artists, led by and for the artists and writers whose presence ultimately makes this city an artistic epicenter of the world.”

--*A Gathering of the Tribes*

“[...] Since the pandemic shutdown, Danspace - like many of our peer organizations here in CoSA - has committed to prioritizing getting resources to artists regardless of whether there is a final ‘product’ such as a public performance. Compensating artists as thought partners is a priority. We believe that as small organizations we are uniquely positioned to work more collaboratively with artists, providing support and resources outside of formal performance presentations.”

--*Danspace Project*

“Indigenous communities were some of the hardest hit during the pandemic and we hope that our work helped in some way when it came to supporting Indigenous artists already working in a space that is very underfunded. We hope that some of our programming, which pivoted to a more virtual nature, helped increase the awareness of Indigenous artists working in this space.”

--*COUSIN*

“The pandemic has only made the stratification of our society more glaring. This year has made us all reflect on what we value in being a small, nimble arts organization that can function without the overbearing concerns and corruption of capital. We are emerging newly recommitted to our mission and our community.”

--*EAI*

“Both art and social justice suffuse everything that is The Luminal Theater: they are our lifeblood and soul. Film is the mechanism through which we engage social justice. [...] Since early 2019 we have also been working with the volunteer-led Alliance For Action, in which professionals from art houses, film exhibition, distribution, and other sectors work to expose and dismantle inequity and injustice in the film industry, creating safe spaces through peer groups, workshops, and more.”

--*The Luminal Theater*

“There are 38 million people living with HIV worldwide today. Now, those living with HIV are experiencing two simultaneous pandemics. At Visual AIDS, the COVID pandemic didn't slow down our work. Visual AIDS was created to fight a pandemic, so it is in our organizational DNA to adapt to another one, and I'm incredibly proud of our accomplishments. We have been able to utilize our small size and flexibility to adapt to the present moment, growing our programs when possible, reformulating our programs when necessary, but always rising to the challenge - both globally and locally.”

--*Visual AIDS*

“The cultural community is at a major crossroads of comeback and recovery. The Clemente, like so many other small organizations, and the communities we serve, survived an apocalypse. We need culture and art to heal and to thrive, but we won't be able to do it alone. We need to build coalitions that help us rebuild new, generative institutions, and we need government, philanthropy, the public, and each other to do it. CoSA is a multiracial and multidisciplinary coalition that is doing that work.”

--*The Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Education Center, Inc.*

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