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Arts and Education Council announces 2021 Catalyst Conversations

Free program invites St. Louis to experience the arts through a different lens

ST. LOUIS – March 2, 2021 – Today the [Arts and Education Council](#) announced the first two 2021 Catalyst Conversations, a free program for St. Louisans interested in experiencing the arts through a different lens while connecting with others. Catalyst Conversations is a series of virtual casual discussions – some playful, some serious, but all engaging and thought-provoking. Each conversation features people who are using their talents and unique experiences to inspire, connect and shape new perspectives.

“With this new year of Catalyst Conversations, we are offering artists, arts patrons and anyone curious about arts and culture the opportunity to gather and discuss the arts in a new and exciting way. After a year with so much separation, we’re excited to see the connections that develop through this program,” said Cynthia P. Davis, Arts and Education Council director of grants and programs.

The first two conversations will take place virtually in March and June:

- **March 23 at 12:00 p.m. – Arts and Equity** with community organizer and art curator **Kristian Blackmon** will discuss the role the arts have in creating a more equitable society and how all of us can make a meaningful impact. The Arts and Education Council’s equity framework will also be shared. This Catalyst Conversation will be hosted by Arts and Education Council Director of Grants and Programs **Cynthia P. Davis** and Grants and Programs Coordinator **Jessireé Jenkins**.
- **June 15 at 6:30 p.m. – The Business of Art** with Soul Shed University Founder **JerMarco Britton** will highlight his experience of making a living and creating business in the arts. This Catalyst Conversation will be hosted by Arts and Education Council Grants and Programs Coordinator **Jessireé Jenkins**. Following the conversation, join a virtual Soul Shed University Jam Session!

Kristian Blackmon is a native of St. Louis, Missouri and her passion lies in the fight for black liberation, injustice and oppression that negatively impacts ALL people. She is a community organizer, art curator, activist, facilitator, trainer and has done work in both radio and event hosting. She has worked as a teaching artist with the Pulitzer Arts Foundation and Cherokee Street Development Group. She has curated work with at least 30 established and emerging artists and has done leadership development training with up to 300 participants both locally and nationally. Kristian’s work has included organizing around economic justice, racial justice, youth justice, housing justice and LGBTQI+ rights.

JerMarco Britton is a musician, writer and advocate of the arts. With over 10 years of experience as a performer and music curator, he has had the opportunity to perform across the country and open locally for artists such as Chance the Rapper,

Ab-Soul, Teresa Jenee, Terence Blanchard and more. He has also been featured artist for the live music organization Sofar Sounds as both a musician and spoken word artist. He has worked as an event coordinator curating art events in partnership with Stereo Assault, Lyrical Therapy and Blue Light Underground.

In March of 2018, JerMarco founded Soul Shed STL a bi-weekly jam session for musicians to gather in fellowship and have access to an environment that allowed them the freedom to push their musical ideas past their limits and to grow among one another. With the mission to connect and develop his community of musicians through programming centered around music education, music performance, music business and wellness. Britton now aims to push the importance of artist development for all who are seeking professional careers in music and those who simply wish to become the best that they can be through their respective discipline. Soul Shed University, the 12-month introductory program he created was named the winner of the fourth annual stARTup Creative Competition, supported by the PNC Foundation and the Arts and Education Council.

Additional details about Catalyst Conversations in September and December will be shared in the months to come. Catalyst Conversations is free and open to the public, but registration is required. For the most updated information and to register, visit KeepArtHappening.org/conversations.

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About the Arts and Education Council: *Keep Art Happening*. – The Arts and Education Council ensures the 16-county, bi-state region is rich with arts and cultural experiences for all through programs and services that support more than 70 organizations each year, including: general operating grants, arts incubation at the Centene Center for the Arts, PNC Program Grants, the Creative Impact Fund, the Arts and Education Fund for Teachers, Bayer Fund Rural Community Arts Program grants, Arts and Healing Initiative, the Art Education Fund, the Catalyst Innovation Lab which host Catalyst Conversations, the Katherine Dunham Fellowship, Leadership Roundtables, Arts Marketers, the St. Louis Suburban Music Educators Association, the Keep Art Happening Scholarship and the St. Louis Arts Awards.

The Arts and Education Council is entirely funded by individual donors, corporations and foundations in the St. Louis region. Since its inception in 1963 as the region's only privately-supported united arts fund, the Arts and Education Council has raised and distributed more than \$100 million in private funding for the arts – a significant contribution that directly impacts the quality of life in our region. The Arts and Education Council meets all 20 Better Business Bureau Charity Standards and has earned the Wise Giving Seal of Approval, a three-star rating from Charity Navigator and a Guidestar Exchange Gold Participant rating.

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