

# ALMA Workshop

## 2022 Class List & Contacts



Atlanta Regional Commission

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# ALMA Workshop

## 2022 Class Biographies



Atlanta Regional Commission



### **Salondia Aveni** (she/her)

*Cultural Affairs Manager, City of South Fulton*

Salondia is a native of Ft. Gaines, GA and a graduate of Fort Valley State University with a B.S. in Animal Science. She began her artistic career at the tender age of nine as a dancer with Patti Rutland Simpson, a student of the legendary Gus Giordano and director of the critically acclaimed dance company, Patti Rutland Jazz. Salondia relocated to Savannah, GA in August of 1997, began teaching at Maxine Patterson's School of Dance and became a member of Sankofa Dance Theatre.

As a professional dancer she has had the privilege to work with the "Jazz Master" Gus Giordano, Susan & Michael Quinn, Leon Von Brown, Marcus Alford & Annie Day, James Yarborough, Kris Cangelosi, Dawn and Ajile Axam, Carol Bristol, Kevin Veiga, Kevin Iega Jeff, and other world-renowned choreographers. Salondia studied traditional West African Dance in Senegal, West Africa.

Salondia's performances include the 1992 World Jazz Dance Congress, five Black College Dance Exchanges, two International Association of Blacks in Dance Conferences, the Savannah Theater production of "FAME" the musical, four Gullah Festivals in Beaufort, South Carolina, the 2001 Pan-African Festival in Ghana, West Africa, three National Black Arts Festivals in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Joyce Soho in New York City. During her time with Sankofa, she served as choreographer, Rehearsal Director and Assistant Artistic Director for the Company. Salondia is also a former Dance Line Coordinator for the Savannah State University Coastal Empire Sound Explosion.

In 2005, Salondia relocated to Charleston where her choreography debuted in May 2006. In September 2006, she made Atlanta her home and began working in television as Director of Entertainment for Teen City Productions. In 2008 she transitioned back into theater and became the Production Manager for the Fulton County Department of Arts & Culture Southwest Arts Center Performance Theater and Gallery. Salondia was promoted to Arts Center Manager for Southwest Arts Center in September 2018. In 2020, the Southwest Arts Center transitioned to the City of South Fulton. She currently serves as the Deputy Director for Cultural Affairs for the City of South Fulton Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs. Salondia looks forward to continued service in this industry.



### **Tatiana Bell** (she/any)

*Communications Manager, Living Walls*

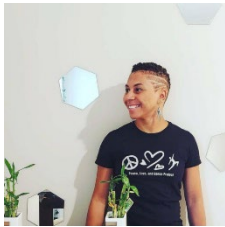
Tatiana Bell is a multidisciplinary artist and interaction designer. She is currently the Communications Manager for Living Walls, and formerly the intern-turned-Creative-Designer for the Atlanta Regional Commission's Community Engagement and Arts team. After graduating from Kennesaw State University with a BS in Interactive Design and a minor in Technical Communication in 2021, and working at the school's Zuckerman Museum of Art for three years prior, she found her passion at the intersection of art, design, and community. Outside of her day-to-day work as a designer and community communicator, she indulges in an artistic practice based around repurposing paper as a medium of self-expression.



**Jasmine Billings** (she/her)

*Community Development Manager, City of Lawrenceville*

Jasmine Billings ((she/her)) is a vibrant, intentional community builder, passionate about growth in the community through building relationships, developing partnerships, supporting youth advocacy, and strategic civic engagement/awareness. Serving as the Community Development Manager for the City of Lawrenceville, Jasmine is experienced in Community Development, Event Management and Community Outreach. Through connectivity and shared experiences, her drive is to educate and engage with youth and create awareness through workforce development, collaboration and community engagement. Her positive, initiative-driven attitude highlights her commitment to creating a holistic approach of self-determination and collective action. Currently serving as the staff support to the newly created Lawrenceville Art Commission, Jasmine seeks to connect art to the community through place-making and collaboration, and continue to build a legacy of leaders. She currently serves as the Chair Elect for Gwinnett Young Professionals, Mainstreet Manager for the City of Lawrenceville, Board Member of Gwinnett United in Drug Education, Young Professional Advisory Board Member of Hudgens Center for Arts and Learning, and is a recent graduate of the Carl Vincent Institute of Government.



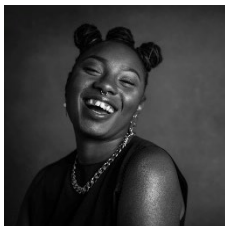
**Indya Childs** (she/her)

*Dancer/ Choreographer, Emory University*

Indya Childs is a dancer and choreographer that hails from Atlanta, Ga. Indya began her dance training at Price Performing Arts Center and The Atlanta Ballet. Indya holds a B.A in Dance from Kennesaw State University and in 2015, was named '25 to Watch' by Dance Magazine. She also attended the Hubbard Street Professional Program under the direction of Alexandra Wells. Indya danced professionally with Ballethnic Dance Company, T. Lang Dance, and Abby Z and The New Utility.

In 2020, Indya founded the Peace, Love, and Dance Project (PLD Project) in response to the many difficult events that were arising in the U.S. including the murders of Black Americans due to police brutality, the COVID-19 pandemic, performing artists out of work, and more. The PLD Project aims to create a safe space for artists to create intentional work that brings awareness to important societal topics through conversation, dance, film, art, and more.

Indya is currently an Arts and Social Justice Fellow at Emory University. Her latest dance work, Tokoliana, premiered in September 2021. Indya's will be developing a new dance work premiering in spring 2022.



**E L Chisolm** (she/her)

*Fine Artist/ Muralist/ Designer, E L Creative, LLC.*

Erica L. Chisolm is a mixed media painter, art activist, and muralist based in Atlanta, GA. She uses acrylic paint, tissue paper, decorative paper, twine, and other elements to create textured portraits, to represent the beauty and imperfections of becoming. She has a bachelor's degree in Sociology, concentrating in Urban Development. In college she minored in fine art. E. L. Chisolm is also a Master Cosmetologist. Her knowledge of beauty and aesthetics helps to inform design decisions in most compositions. She has murals in Atlanta, GA, as well as Birmingham, AL, where she serves as the Creative Placemaking Specialist Fellow for the Historic 4th Avenue Business District and Civil Rights District. Her goal is to help increase public engagement in underserved communities, using tactical urbanism projects and public art to decrease blight.



**Arelious Cooper (he/him)**

*Executive director, Art in the Paint*

Arelious Cooper is a former player, coach and executive turned activist, curator and nonprofit leader. Cooper started an organization called Art in the Paint as an effort to reinvigorate neighborhoods that needed resources and rebranding. A strong believer in the power of community, Cooper regularly collaborates with artists, corporations, politicians, sports teams and healthcare officials to activate projects. He enjoys a good Netflix binge but can also be found singing karaoke randomly throughout the city.



**Stephanie Dowda DeMer (she/her)**

*Executive Director, Atlanta Celebrates Photography*

Stephanie Dowda DeMer is an American photographer, experimental media artist, and arts leader. Currently, she is the Executive Director of Atlanta Celebrates Photography. She was the Iowa Idea Fellow at The University of Iowa. She has taught photography at ASU and VCU. DeMer holds an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. She is a Hambidge Fellow, Idea Capital grantee, and her work has been published in Dialogue, Bad at Sports, MuseA, ArtsATL, BurnAway, among others. She has shown at White Space Gallery-Atlanta, Grizzly Grizzly-Philadelphia, MART-Dublin and others.



**Sandy Feliciano (she/her)**

*Campaign Manager, The Atlanta Opera*

Sandy Feliciano is the Campaign Manager for The Atlanta Opera, where she manages the Opera's \$45 million comprehensive campaign strategy and facilitates over 50 key fundraising and stewardship events each year. In 2020, she planned the Opera's 40th Anniversary Gala, its most successful fundraiser to date, netting over half a million dollars for the organization.

Sandy is passionate about building community and empowering others to succeed. As a volunteer, she serves as the Chair of Marketing and Communications for Hispanic Young Professionals & Entrepreneurs and as President for St. Maximilian Kolbe Toastmasters. She also volunteers as an Adjudicator for the ArtsBridge Foundation's Georgia High School Musical Theater Awards.

Previously, Sandy was the Marketing and Patron Services Manager for the Savannah VOICE Festival for four years, where she led marketing initiatives and managed over 25 events during the three-week festival. Sandy holds a Bachelor of Music Degree from the University of South Florida and a Certificate in Graphic Design from the University of Massachusetts in Lowell.



**Lydia Fort (she/her)**

*Theatre Director/Co-founder, Emory University/Atlanta Green Theatre Alliance*

Lydia Fort is a theatre-maker, educator and arts leader; and has directed over thirty productions across the US at theatres such as Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Bay Street Theater, Actors Express, Cygnet Theatre, Diversionary Theatre, Perseverance Theatre, Women's Project Theatre, Women Center Stage, Urban Stages, New Federal Theatre, freeFall Theatre, and Hangar Theatre. An assistant professor at Emory University, Lydia also serves as the Director of the Playwriting Center of Theater Emory, and is a member of the Resilience & Sustainability Collaboratory, a think and do tank that works to create innovative climate solutions and social interventions that promote healthy and thriving communities



across the region. Ms. Fort is the co-founder of the Atlanta Green Theatre Alliance; and is a member of the League of Professional Theatre Women and the Stage Directors & Choreographers Union where she serves on the Executive Board and is the Southeast Region Rep. MFA in Directing, University of Washington.



**Natalia Garzón Martínez (she/her)**

*Community Engagement and Special Initiatives Director, We Love Buford Highway*

Natalia Garzón Martínez was born in Bogotá, Colombia and has lived in Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama. Passionate about literature, art, and the public humanities, she graduated with a B.A. in English/Creative Writing and French from Emory University. As the Community Engagement and Special Initiatives Director for We Love Buford Highway, she designs and manages programs that engage communities along Buford Highway with art, resources, and story collections to help destigmatize immigrant narratives, improve accessibility, and create sustainable listening cultures in the community.

Previously she has worked with Panamanian children in El Chorrillo designing programs around English language, art, values, and literature. Her projects with RISE (the non-profit she founded in 2014) are further discussed in her TEDTalk: The Power of the Youth. Her literary work has been published by Emory's literary magazine The Pulse, her Spanish poetry published in El Circulo de Poesia (Mexico), and her dramatic monologues appeared in El Informe, a literary magazine based in Antigua, Guatemala. In the US she has served as the Cultural Liaison between the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry and the Club de Lectura at the Latin American Association, as a Research Assistant for Sergio Delgado Moya's literary project *A Nervous Archive*, and now serves as an Advisory Board Member for the Centro Latinx at Emory University. In 2020 she completed the first French to Spanish translation of Catherine Cusset's coming-of-age novel, *Une éducation Catholique* and was the recipient of the Renée Bray Prize for Best Work in French at Emory University.

In her free time she enjoys exploring Atlanta's art and culture scene, reading Latin American literature, working on her collages and paintings in acrylic and oil pastels, codeswitching, and trying new food from different cultures.



**Willow Goldstein (she/her)**

*Founder Owner Operator, The Bakery*

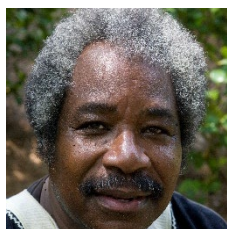
Willow H. Goldstein is an arts administrator, advocate, and consultant specializing in community building and venue operations. She obtained her BA in art and business from Northeastern University prior to moving to Brooklyn where she received her hands-on education in grassroots art and environmental organizing. Born and raised in Atlanta, she returned in 2016 and quickly immersed herself in the South Broad art scene, volunteering at Eyedrum Art & Music Gallery and securing a studio space at Mammal Gallery. After seeing the need for larger platforms for experimental expression, she founded The Bakery in 2017. She has served on the Board of Eyedrum for five years and is also a partner in Culture Labs Consulting, where she has facilitated creative activations at the MET Atlanta and is currently working with Kairos Development on a long-term project in East Point. Brought up between Cabbagetown and her father's organic farm in North Georgia, she now resides in Oakland City with her cat, Mango, and enjoys live music, reading, and riding her bike.



**Brian Hebert** (he/him)

*Executive Director/Chief Curator/Artist, Arts Clayton*

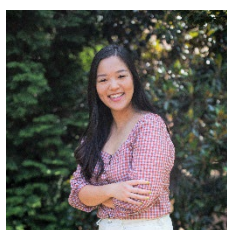
Brian Hebert is a visual artist/educator/curator that was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. Brian studied art at Southern University A&M College under the direction of Robert Cox, Martin Payton and Randall Henry receiving his BFA in 1997. In 2001, Brian and his family moved to Metro Atlanta, to help start and build the visual arts program at the Southwest Art Center accepting the position of Visual Arts Specialist and later Arts Education Coordinator/Visual Arts. After almost two decades, Brian decided to leave the organization in 2018 to pursue outside artistic ventures. While at the Southwest Art Center, Brian organized and curated countless exhibitions and visual arts programs and projects. Brian organized an International Exhibition project titled, Internationalist Spirit: Persistence and Resistance in 2019, taking a group of artists from the US and working with artists in Havana, Cuba. In 2020, Brian taught art in the Henry County School System during the pandemic as a visual art instructor teaching both virtually and in-person, before accepting the position as Executive Director for Arts Clayton Gallery.



**Akbar Imhotep** (he/him)

*Vice President, Kuumba Storytellers of Georgia*

Akbar Imhotep: Storyteller/Poet/Toastmaster. I have worked as an artist my entire professional life. I withdrew from graduate school to become an actor & a writer. found work as a puppeteer at Center for Puppetry arts and discovered a new passion. Puppetry led me to storytelling where I found my calling. Toastmasters is a perfect compliment for my storytelling and writing.



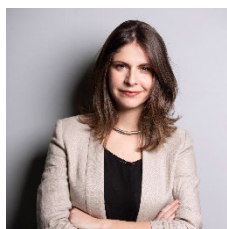
**Nicole Kang** (she/her)

*Artist*

Nicole Kang is a Korean-American artist based out of Gwinnett County. Nicole is a painter, illustrator, muralist, and a storyteller. While her styles and subjects vary widely, her works often delve into familial relationships, the Asian American identity, grief, love, and loss. Through the supportive relationships made within Atlanta's art community, her art career has grown over the last few years. It's an exciting time to be a creator in Atlanta, with the city's growth and the increased opportunities in the arts.

Through the recent rise in hate crimes against Asians in America, Nicole is most interested in uplifting and empowering silenced voices through the arts. She is looking forward to her participation in ALMA to connect and strategize with other makers and thinkers.

Previously, Nicole worked at Alliance Theatre, learning the in's and out's of the performing arts industry. She currently works at her alma mater Oglethorpe University in Career Development. She lives OTP in Peachtree Corners with her husband, daughter, and rescue dog.



**Margarita Kompelmakher** (she/her)

*Director of Community Partnerships and Engagement, Alliance Theatre*

Dr. Margarita Kompelmakher is the Director of Community Partnerships and Engagement at the Alliance Theatre, where she runs programs that connect theater to issues that matter most to communities across Atlanta. She holds a PhD in Theatre Historiography from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and her

writing on political theater and human rights theater appears in *Modern Drama* and various scholarly anthologies.



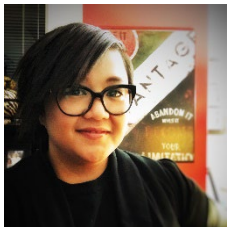
**Katherine Lehman** (she/her)

*Executive and Artistic Director, Spivey Hall at Clayton State University*

Katherine (Katie) Lehman has built a multi-faceted career as a violinist, arts leader, and educator, bringing a new vision for music in our communities where our creativity elevates and empowers us all, making the arts open, invitational, and equitable.

Katie is the newly-appointed Executive and Artistic Director of Spivey Hall at Clayton State University, a venue renowned for its acoustic excellence and legacy of great artistry, alongside deep campus and community engagement. Katie comes to Spivey Hall from the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, where as Interim Artistic Manager she oversaw the 2021 return to live concerts. Previously, she was Executive Director of the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, and prior to that Director of the Sewanee Summer Music Festival and the Sewanee Performing Arts Series at The University of the South (Sewanee), achieving unprecedented artistic and financial growth with new educational models rooted in innovation and access. Her work has garnered NEA and League of American Orchestras grants and an ASCAP Adventurous Programming Award.

An active violinist, Katie performed with the St. Luke's Trio at Sewanee, the Nashville Chamber Orchestra, and orchestras around the country. A recording artist in Nashville, she appears on hundreds of recordings and films. Katie studied at the Eastman School of Music, the University of Kansas, and Northwestern University.



**Vivian Lett** (she/her)

*Marketing Operations Specialist, City of Union City*

Vivian Lett loves maximizing the brand potential of companies and clients she works with through various methods: brand strategy development, captivating print and digital content, or a good old-fashioned handshake.

When approached with projects, Vivian embraces the opportunity to get creative and deliver stellar results. She enjoys connecting with people from diverse professional backgrounds and engaging in conversations that lead to creative projects and collaborations. As the Marketing Operations Specialist for Union City, Vivian is currently working on programs to strengthen the arts community and culture where she lives, works, and plays. She spearheaded the City's first-ever community art show and is currently working on a public art project to install hand-painted trains around City Hall and Mayors' Park by local students and residents.

Before joining Union City, Vivian worked in post-secondary education and served on numerous program advisory committees for multimedia and culinary arts. She was instrumental in planning portfolio shows, industry-focused workshops, and community service events.

Outside of work, Vivian provides creative design services to businesses and private clients in fashion, health and beauty, home improvement, and beverage distribution.

Her superpowers include (but are not limited to): social media marketing, graphic and web design, and brand strategy.





**Rosie Mafe** (she/her)

*Planner II, Pond*

I am an urban planner with Pond and Company who works with communities on long range planning projects including comprehensive plans, master plans, and zoning ordinance rewrites. Prior to joining Pond, I worked in local government where I was able to work with residents, community organizations, elected officials, and developers to enhance the residents' quality of life. I earned my bachelor's degrees in history and ceramics from Piedmont College and graduated with my Master of Public Administration from the University of Georgia. I am passionate about incorporating the arts into planning and understanding communities' experiences and needs from the beginning of the process.

Outside of work, you can find me exploring parks with my husband and dog, trying new breweries, or working in my neighborhood's community garden.



**Romy Maloon** (she/her)

*Director of Programs, Dash Studio, Dashboard*

Romy Aura Maloon is an artist, event planner, and programming queen living in Atlanta, Ga. She first exhibited with Dashboard in 2010 as a featured visual artist in *Let's Make it Big* and from there continued to work for Dash.Studio, the for-profit studio of Dash, as their Events Director on a project basis for over nine years. In 2018, Romy was hired full-time by Dash.Studio to support national operations as their Program and Events Director and currently manages a varying selection of projects and budgets of all scales for them from Atlanta to Los Angeles and everywhere in between.

Romy has worked in arts programming, event direction, and marketing for over ten years. In 2017, she worked as the Los Angeles Marketing Manager for Jamestown Properties, handling the organization's arts programming and events for their Los Angeles properties in Little Tokyo and Malibu. Additionally, Romy consulted on programming for its San Francisco properties, including planning and creative execution of their now annual Ghirardelli Square Festival. Romy also handled arts administration for the American Jewish University's Whizin Center for Continuing Education.

In 2013 through 2016, she worked as the Events Manager for Atlanta Contemporary producing their award winning annual fundraiser ART PARTY. While there, Romy increased attendance by 66% and the net income 160%. She developed their continuing Contemporary Cocktails program, inviting local artists, musicians, and beverage crafts-folk to participate in the institutional programming and come PAR-TAY in an institutional setting.

While living in Los Angeles, Romy was on the ArtShare LA "Connectors" Board and was selected to participate in The Institute for Jewish Creativity's 2019 "Reciprocity Artist Retreat" in the Simi Valley. Romy's art work has been exhibited throughout the United States, including Atlanta Contemporary and "Tomorrow Stars, the Verge Art Miami Beach" in conjunction with Art Basel Miami. She is a 2015 Walthall Artist Fellow. She has produced large-scale art work for the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs Elevate Atlanta, which exhibited in One Times Square New York, Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco, and Brunswick Square in Los Angeles.

Romy holds a BFA from the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, where she majored in fine art sculpture and minored in business. She attended the New York Studio program, in DUMBO,

Brooklyn in 2008 and studied the monastic artistry of Thangka painting and stone carving with Tibetan monks in Tibet in 2007.

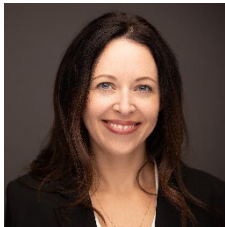
When not making snow angels in a bed of synthetic flowers or covering plastic molds in silicon, Romy likes to cook for friends, has a religious yoga practice, and is a RuPaul's Drag Race super fan.



**Kirby Meng** (she/her)

*Coordinator of Fine Arts, Rockdale County Public Schools*

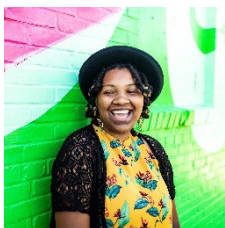
Dr. Meng has worked as an art educator for 34 years teaching kindergarten through college in public, private, and alternative settings. She is currently Fine Arts Coordinator for Rockdale County Public Schools. Dr. Meng has served on the board of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) as Elementary Division Director and the Georgia Art Education Association (GAEA) as President, Finance Chair, District President, Airport Art Chair, Youth Art Month Chair, Conference Chair, and numerous committees. She also served as project manager for art standards and instructional resources for GaDOE. Dr. Meng presents at state and national conferences annually and has won numerous awards including Georgia Art Educator of the Year, GAEA Distinguished Service Award, NAEA Southeastern Art Educator, and Woodruff Salutes GA Arts Education Leader. She believes that the arts are in integral part of every community with the power to positively impact society and should be accessible to all.



**Kristin Norton** (she/her)

*Theatre Events and Facilities Director, City of Canton- Canton Theatre*

Kristin is a Cherokee County native with a background in dance, music, and theatre. She lives in Canton with her husband, 4 children and dog. In her spare time, Kristin likes to read, write, exercise, practice yoga, and paint. Kristin has been with the City of Canton for 3 years. In this time, her job has changed to reflect the City's growing desire for Art. Beginning in Special Events, Kristin quickly moved over to managing the City's Historic Canton Theatre. Here at the Theatre, Kristin oversees all programming and events. Kristin also serves as staff liaison to the City's Cultural Arts Commission, managing Public Art projects such as murals, art installations in City Parks, and an upcoming film festival.



**Aysha Pennerman** (she/her)

*Muralist & Founder, Impactful Brush Inc*

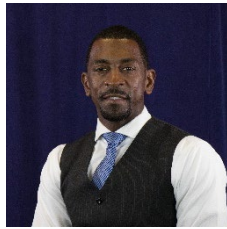
Aysha Pennerman's art is a light in the world, turning what's ordinary or overlooked into a colorful and culturally relevant source of pride. The Atlanta-based artist has been exploring the arts since childhood: sketching cartoon characters while her mom did her hair, drawing flowers with her grandmother, and watching her aunt make black dolls.

In college, Aysha served as the design editor for Georgia State University's newspaper, designed books and other graphics for the APEX Museum, and assisted Chloe x Halle with design projects for their competition in Radio Disney's Next Big Thing (which they won).

After graduating with a B.A. in Fine Arts and working in the corporate world, she realized her calling as an artist. After not being creatively fulfilled and dealing with microaggressions, it motivated her transition to full-time freelancing and her inspiration to illustrate black women's resiliency and beauty through art.

Combining more than 10 years as a graphic design artist with her paintings on murals and canvases, Aysha's current work uses typography, color symbolisms, or silhouette figures to inspire. From back when she rebranded The Signal into a first-place, award-winning college newspaper to her present-day public and commissioned artwork, Aysha has a long history of making people proud of who they are and where they're from through art.

In 2020, Aysha launched Impactful Brush, a nonprofit organization with a mission to empower disinvested communities and youth through community-based murals that reflect the community's voice.



**Jason Redmond (he/him)**

*Director of Parks, Recreation, and Senior Services, Rockdale County*

Jason Redmond has been with Rockdale County Recreation and Maintenance Department since April 10, 2017. In his role as the Director of Parks, Recreation, and Senior Services he is responsible for planning, organizing, coordinating, and directing the functions and activities of the Parks and Recreation Division.

Prior to joining Rockdale County, Jason worked as a Recreation Program Supervisor for the City of Atlanta. There he was responsible for the day-to-day operations of 10 of the city's 30 recreational facilities. Jason is a former School Teacher, Football and Basketball Coach. Jason is a current member of the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association (GRPA) and a member of National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). He is a Certified Public Manager through the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute. Also, he is a Leadership Rockdale graduate; class of 2019.

Jason received a Bachelor of Science in Education from Georgia Southwestern State University and his Master of Education from Troy University. Jason has been a Rockdale County Resident since 2014 and is a native of Savannah Georgia. He enjoys spending time with his family, working out, coaching, and playing basketball.



**Tiffany Ricks (she/her)**

*Community Engagement Coordinator, Museum of Design Atlanta*

Tiffany is a North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University alum, currently pursuing her Master of Professional Studies in the Business of Art and Design at MICA. She has spent the last five years working in community development through an Atlanta-based nonprofit, Hue Collective, Inc. she co-founded with several other creatives to spearhead the annual Hue Design Summit.

Tiffany has demonstrated success developing growth strategies for small firms, building effective public & private partnerships, and advocating for employee belonging and equity-centered improvements. Her high regard for design as a practice extends to her personal portfolio of creative branding projects for emerging businesses. In August 2021, she joined the Museum of Design Atlanta's team as Community Engagement Coordinator to develop adult programming. Tiffany also serves as the Business of Design Chair for AIGA Atlanta.

She enjoys hiking, vinyl collecting, and spending time at home with her family.



**Mala Sharma** (she/her)

*President, Georgia Music Partners*

Sharma has been consulting in the creative industries since 2015, working with clients in all aspects of the entertainment industry. Clients include, Wabi Sabi Sound, Callonwolde Fine Arts Center, Avatar Events Group, Sound Diplomacy...

With 20+ years in the music & entertainment industry, Sharma has collaborated on some of the most successful albums of our time. Her work with GRAMMY-winning music producers Rick Rubin and Brendan O'Brien has resulted in timeless, multi-platinum recordings by artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Pearl Jam, Johnny Cash, Tom Petty and more.

Sharma also established City National Bank's presence in Atlanta as VP by building and fostering successful relationships with high-profile entertainment clients. Sharma oversaw marketing and sponsorship for the bank's flagship Atlanta office. Sharma's career also includes tenures at Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Def American Records and Fifty Seven Records (a Sony label).

In 2010, Sharma helped found Georgia Music Partners (GMP), a non-profit music advocacy coalition. As GMP's executive director and president, she led the group's lobbying efforts resulting in 'The Georgia Musical Investment Act, signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal in 2018.

In 2019, Sharma was appointed to the Georgia Film, Music and Digital Entertainment Commission by Governor Kemp. Additional board service includes US IP Alliance, Georgia IP Association Entertainment, Arts and Sports committee, the Board of Governors for The Recording Academy Atlanta Chapter and the advisory board for the UGA's Music Business Program.

A recognized leader in entertainment advocacy, she frequently brings her industry expertise to speaking engagements to conferences, meetings and summits.



**Amber Smith** (she/her)

*AMP Academy Program Coordinator, Atlanta Music Project*

Amber Smith is an emerging singer/songwriter/arts advocate hailing from the South Suburbs of Chicago. Amber's experience with music goes as far back as 1995 singing in her church. Amber mastered her skills at Mount Holyoke College where she was also a Five College Ethnomusicology Certificate Recipient. During her collegiate experience, Amber had the privilege of participating in a domestic exchange at Spelman College where she was a featured soloist for the Annual Morehouse and Spelman Christmas Carol Concert in 2011.

After graduating from Mount Holyoke College, Amber returned to her hometown to create and collaborate with influential artists along with civic agencies to advocate for social equity to those who are disenfranchised or overlooked both in the creative scene and elsewhere. Amber currently resides in Atlanta, GA where she serves as the Program Coordinator and vocal teaching artist for the Atlanta Music Project's Academy. There Amber manages logistics for a program composed of 12 music studios serving over 50 students and families.

Amber is excited to be joining this year's ALMA class to fuse her passions for the arts and civic engagement in a way that is innovative and wholistically transformative in the Metro Atlanta Area.



**Charles Stephens** (he/him)

*Executive Director, The Counter Narrative Project (CNP)*

Charles Stephens is the Founder and Executive Director of the Counter Narrative Project (CNP). He is also the co-editor of the anthology *Black Gay Genius: Answering Joseph Beam's Call*. Stephens has been a CDC Institute for HIV Prevention Leadership Fellow, an Arcus Foundation Executive Director Fellow, and a Rockwood Leader in the HIV movement Fellow. Stephens has previously served on the Alliance Theater Advisory Board, Historic Atlanta LGBTQ Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, and the Joan P. Garner Library at Ponce De Leon Renaming Committee. Stephens has been recognized by POZ Magazine as part of the POZ 100, and was named by the OUT Georgia Business Alliance as one of the Most Influential LGBTQ+ Georgians. Stephens has also received the Georgia State University College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Alumni Award. His writings have appeared in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Atlanta Magazine*, the *Advocate Magazine*, and the anthology *For Colored Boys*. A native Georgian, Charles received his B.A. from Georgia State University.



**Ayanna Thompson** (she/her)

*Art Teacher*

Ayanna Thompson is an elementary school art teacher in metro Atlanta. She enjoys bringing joy to people through art and aspires to expand this practice into creative placemaking. She believes that public spaces can provide excellent opportunities to engage, uplift, and unite communities in many ways. Ayanna holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Armstrong State University and a Master of Arts in Teaching, Art Education, from Piedmont University. In her teaching career thus far, Ayanna has received a 2021 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion scholarship from the National Art Education Association and a 2021 Professional Association of Georgia Educators grant. Both of which reflect her dedication to improving her teaching practice. Ayanna is passionate about being of service to others both inside and outside the classroom. As a part of the ALMA 2022 cohort, she will develop her passion into strategy as the group continues to serve the communities of metro Atlanta through the arts.



**Onur Topal-Sümer** (she/her)

*Choreographer, movement artist, educator, producer, Da Vinci International School*

Onur ((she/her)) has a B.F.A. in dance from Istanbul Yildiz Technical University and a M.F.A. in dance & digital technology from University of California, Irvine. She has professionally performed over a decade as a dance company artist and an independent dance&multimedia artist, staged her original dance works for almost two decades, her dance films and her video installations at many acclaimed festivals and events across Europe, USA & Asia. As a teaching artist, Onur taught dance, performance and dance & media all around Turkey, USA, Germany, Holland, Italy and Romania. Along with Onur's international curatorial projects; in Atlanta, she has curated dance film screenings and taught as a visiting artist/lecturer at many acclaimed universities and international festivals. Onur has extensive experience and passion for working with dance and technology, organizing and creating events, festivals, and leading administrative work. Her most recent accomplishment and interest is exploring the interdisciplinary world of extended reality (XR) technologies focusing on the interaction and developments of the performing arts creations through the IMMENSIVA artist residency program. She is interested in building international collaborations on creating projection & body mapping and immersive environments for dance performance and film with XR. Onur just received Arts & Entertainment Atlanta 2021 Grant for her upcoming project on summer 2022.



It is dearly important for Onur to support her diverse community of all abilities and identities, defend equal human, animal & environmental rights, keeping her creative urge alive and finding like-minded curious minds of interdisciplinary collaborators around the world.



**Rosemary Watts** (she/her)

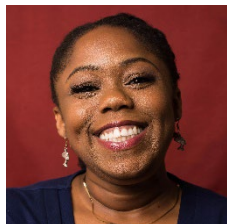
*Business and Cultural Development Manager, City of Dunwoody*

Rosemary Watts is City of Dunwoody's Business and Cultural Development Manager within the Economic Development Department. She helps new businesses get established and current businesses grow and get connected with the community with marketing and social media campaigns as well as visits and communications.

She managed Dunwoody's Painted Picnic Table Project which won the Visionary City award in 2021 from GMA by working closely with non-profits to enhance their visibility through the artistically painted tables and with local businesses struggling during the pandemic. This project helped bring the community together during a difficult time of isolation and social distancing.

She manages the Dunwoody Art Commission to carry out the goals outlined in the City's Public Art Implementation Plan and is the liaison for the Create Dunwoody organization. She organized the first City job fair, several pop-up events including the AAPI and Hispanic/Latino Heritage Cultural Celebrations and the Dunwoody Fine Art Association Exhibit.

Her work experience includes commercial and residential property management. Previously she worked at UPS in Corporate Technology Marketing as a Senior Marketing Analyst. She has a degree from Georgetown University and MBA from Georgia Tech. Her hobbies include teaching piano, embroidering, and playing tennis.



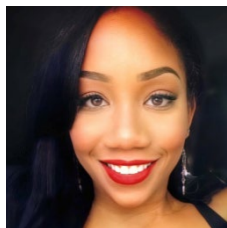
**Julissa White Smith** (she/her)

*Executive Director, MINT*

Summer 2021 Julissa White-Smith joins MINT as executive director, contributing her experience as an executive manager and skill in driving and maintaining operational results across local government, private and nonprofit organizations.

Julissa's tenure in arts & culture began at 15 when she was accepted into the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. She returned to Georgia to be program director for radio station 89.1 WBCX before transitioning into her postgrad career contributing brand management, event planning, and communications in her roles at the DeKalb Economic Development Authority and community development firm APDS.

Julissa works strategically with executive management team members to provide business analysis, effective growth strategies, processes, communication strategies, and internal controls to increase operational efficiency. Julissa has a B.A. in Integrated Marketing Communication and Broadcast and obtained a Master of Public Administration focusing on Nonprofit Management from Georgia State University.



**Alexis Whitehead** (she/her)

*Artist, Fulton County Arts & Culture Department* Alexis Whitehead is native of Georgia and is an Alumni of DeKalb School of the Arts. She is more commonly known by her students as Mrs. Lexi. She has been an active advocate for creating experiences in space throughout Metro Atlanta. With her unique set of skills acquired over the years through professional training and experience she has developed a relationship as an Artistic Instructor. In the past Ms. Whitehead has worked as a Production Coordinator at the West End Performing Arts Center and also has worked for The Atlanta Ballet Center Dance Education for 10 years. Ms. Whitehead is dedicated to exposing, inspiring and awakening the inner creativity of all individuals. Artistically using movement, theatre, visual arts and music to fill the space engaging and captivating her students and audiences. Ms. Whitehead is currently a team member of the Fulton County Arts & Culture Department.

‘ Remember the possibilities are endless when you are actively aware of the space around you.’-Alexis



**Wlanvi Zinsou** (she/her)

*Owner/Director, Musical Strings LLC*

With joy, Wlanvi Zinsou teaches people of all ages, abilities, and aspirations how to achieve their musical goals. Her students have performed at a variety of events including: Halal 2019 International Music Concert; Strands Fiber Arts Showcase; Chick-fil-A's Daddy Daughter Night; Tales and Tunes; City of South Fulton's historic inauguration.

Her inter-generational orchestras won Gold and Silver Awards at the Heritage Festival in Vancouver, B.C. (Canada).

Wlanvi started her career as a music therapist. She worked with clients, both privately and through Babies Can't Wait. Eventually, she transitioned to Fulton County Schools and taught orchestra and guitar. Limited outlets for her home-school, adult, private and public-school students to further their musical studies was the impetus for the creation of her orchestra program in 2016. Currently, she runs Musical Strings LLC with a focus on building her private music studio in person and online and curating a youth, adult, and professional orchestra for the City of South Fulton.

Wlanvi holds a Bachelor's degree in Music Therapy from Florida State University and a Master's Degree in Music Education from the University of Georgia.

# ARC Community Engagement and Arts Team

Part of the ARC's Community Development Group



**Marian Liou** ((she/her))

*Community Engagement and Arts Program Manager, Atlanta Regional Commission*

Marian Liou is the Community Engagement and Arts Program Manager for the Atlanta Regional Commission's Community Development Group. In this role, she is responsible for inclusive and equitable community engagement and supervises the agency's arts and culture and creative placemaking initiatives. Marian formerly managed the ARC's annual LINK leadership and policy program.

She is the founder of We Love BuHi, a nonprofit organization that serves and celebrates metro Atlanta's multicultural Buford Highway community through storytelling, art, and public events.



**Josh Phillipson** ((he/him))

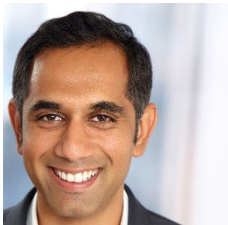
*Principal for Arts, Culture and Creative Placemaking, Atlanta Regional Commission*

Josh Phillipson is the Principal for Arts, Culture and Creative Placemaking at the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). In this role, he manages the Arts Leaders of Metro Atlanta leadership development program, the ARC's cultural forums, and the implementation of the ARC's Arts, Culture, and Creative Placemaking strategic plan.

Through the plan, the ARC seeks to encourage a metro Atlanta that values arts and culture as essential for building a thriving, inclusive, and economically healthy region, and recognizes the transformative role of art in addressing broader civic issues.

Prior to the ARC, Josh worked at the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta on the Foundation's Metro Atlanta Arts Fund, which provided grants and capacity-building assistance to metro Atlanta's small and mid-sized arts organizations. In addition, he managed the Foundation's Grants to Green program providing grants to improve the water and energy efficiency of nonprofit's buildings and served as a liaison for philanthropic work throughout the 23-county region.

Josh has a theater degree from Emory University and has since served as the chair for Friends of Theater at Emory board. He was a Southeastern Council of Foundations Hull Fellow and is an Arts Leaders of Metro Atlanta graduate. He is currently on the board of Dad's Garage Theatre Company and serves on MARTA's Artbound advisory committee.



**Samyukth Shenbaga** ((he/him))

*Manager, Community Development Group, Atlanta Regional Commission*

Samyukth Shenbaga is manager of the Community Development Group at the Atlanta Regional Commission. In this role, he leads a team of planning professionals working with cities and counties throughout metro Atlanta on a range of issues ranging from housing affordability to historic preservation. Some of the most locally impactful programs within ARC including the Livable Centers

Initiative, Community Development Assistance Program, and Community Planning Academy are led by his group.

Shenbaga comes to ARC from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), where he served as a principal planner in the agency's local planning division. Prior to CMAP, Shenbaga worked at private consulting firms in Chicago and Madison, Wis., where he helped private developers and municipalities develop neighborhood and site-specific plans.

Born and raised in New Delhi, India, Shenbaga holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Michigan and a bachelor's degree in architecture from the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi. Shenbaga is a LEED accredited professional and a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).



**Rachel Will** ((she/her))

*Senior Planner, Atlanta Regional Commission*

Rachel Will is a Senior Planner in the Community Development group at the Atlanta Regional Commission. In this role, she is involved with the Community Development Assistance Program, Livable Centers Initiative, Comprehensive Plan Updates, and Community Engagement and Arts work. Rachel also leads an equity and community engagement group within Community Development, and is part of an interagency Climate Action Group. Throughout her work, Rachel strives to center equity and meaningful community engagement.

Prior to joining ARC, Rachel received her doctorate in Geography and Integrative Conservation from the University of Georgia. Her research was informed by critical and feminist methodologies and focused on the intersections of urban planning, urban ecology, climate, gentrification, and social justice. Concurrently, Rachel was an instructor at UGA, conducted stormwater management and public art research for Athens-Clarke County GIS and Planning departments, and worked at an environmental nonprofit. She also holds a master's degree in Geography, and a bachelor's degree in Social and Environmental Geography and Art History. Outside of work, Rachel is an active cyclist and dabbles in art.