

CRITICAL GROUND

June 22 + 23, 2023
Granary Arts / Ephraim, UT



**RURAL
IS
RADICAL**
GRANARY ARTS

Introduction + **Welcome**

Welcome to Granary Arts CRITICAL GROUND, an initiative exploring how the dialogue of art critique might shift towards communities and artists working outside the frameworks of NYC and LA. An experimental venture, the intention is to create a platform and space for this conversation in Utah, and to serve as a model for other places in the country with like-minded vision.

CRITICAL GROUND explores the impact of art criticism and the democratization of art critique through the sharing of ideas and experiences with the intention of mapping an alternate way forward that is more inclusive of the spectrum of work created across the country.

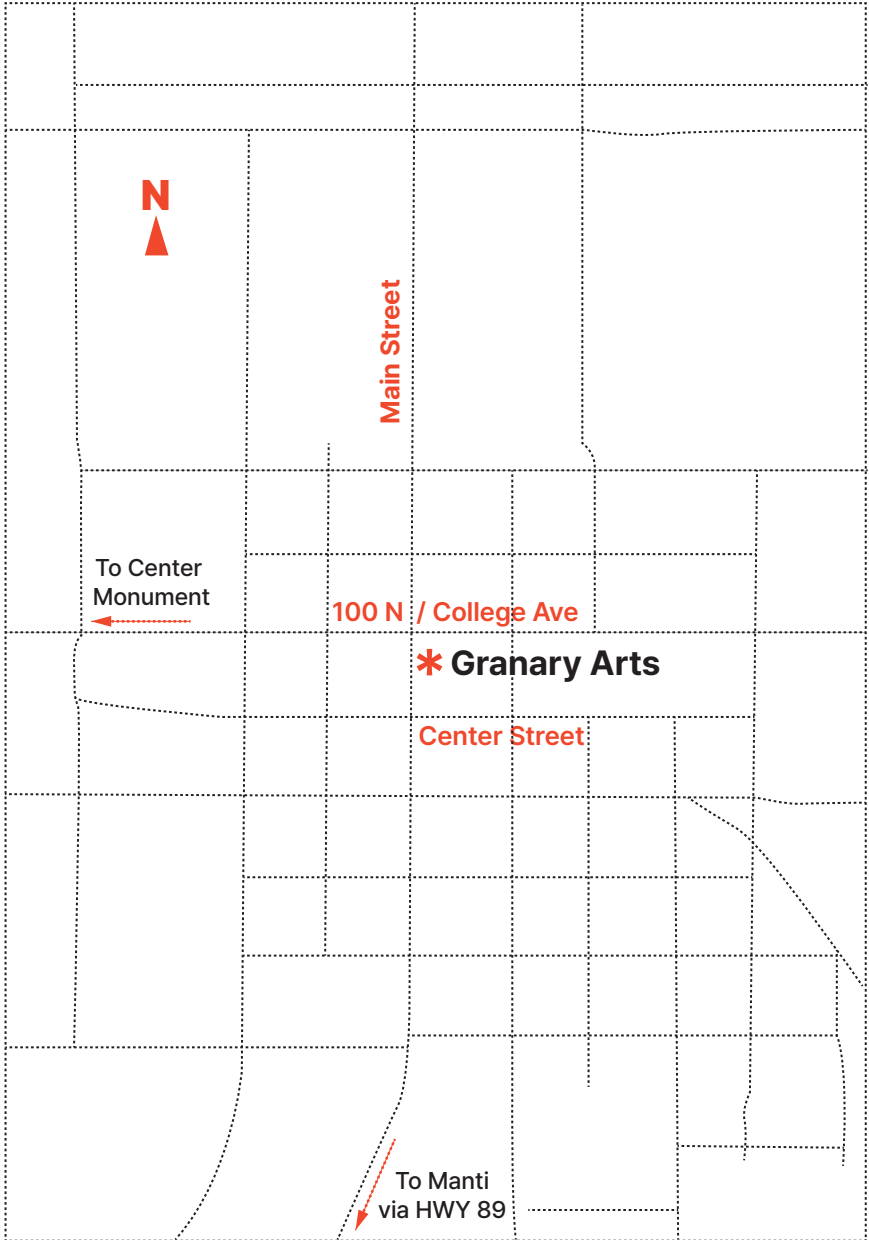
The day-long event is a series of conversations and brainstorms between visiting critics and artists, curators, writers, and other stakeholders from the region. Through formal and informal discussion, this gathering is a space where strategic thinking meets creative action with the intention to shift the current framework of art critique hierarchy to highlight work outside metro-centered locales.

We're thrilled to host you on-site at Granary Arts, and we're honored to have you join the conversation. Please use this opportunity to create new connections and explore this place we call home. THANK YOU for being part of our community in the arts!

schedule

DATE/TIME	EVENT DESCRIPTION	LOCATION
THU 6/22		
7:00 PM	Dinner	Granary Lawn
FRI 6/23		
9:00 AM	Check-in + coffee	Main Gallery
10:00 AM	Welcome: Amy Jorgensen, Darren Jones	Main Gallery
10:15 AM	Southwest Contemporary: Lauren Tresp, Steve Jansen, Scotti Hill	Main Gallery
11:15 AM	Shana Nys Dambrot	Granary Lawn
12:00 PM	Lunch	Granary Lawn
1:00 PM	Carpool to Center Monument	Granary Parking
1:30 PM	Walk to Center Monument	Center Monument N 39 23.200 W 111 41.100
1:45 PM	Hikmet Sydney Loe	Center Monument
2:30 PM	Carpool to Granary	
3:00 PM	Bianca Velasquez, Alexander Ortega	Main Gallery
3:45 PM	Wrap up: Amy Jorgensen	Main Gallery
4:00 PM	Carpool to Rat Fink Museum	Granary Parking
4:30 PM	Rat Fink Museum Tour Ilene Roth Family	Rat Fink Museum 404 E 300 N, Manti, UT

map + event locations



* Granary Arts / 86 N Main St, Ephraim

* Center Monument / N 39 23.200 W 111 41.100

* Rat Fink Museum / 404 E 300 N, Manti

sessions

Lauren Tresp + Steve Jansen + Scotti Hill / Art Writing as Ecosystem Building

Southwest Contemporary contributors will present an open discussion of art criticism, arts journalism, and art media more generally as mechanisms that bolster regional arts ecosystems. In this conversation, Lauren Tresp (SWC publisher and editor), Steve Jansen (SWC news editor), and Scotti Hill (SWC contributor and arts writer) will introduce *Southwest Contemporary's* approach to establishing a regional hub for arts discourse, resource-sharing, network-building, and professional development, and share a tracking tool designed to qualify the impact of these activities. Lastly, the team will present an expansive editorial project that will examine various support structures within the arts ecosystem through a rigorous, critical lens and facilitate open dialogue around these topics, including asking for feedback on the concept and collaboratively brainstorming key guiding questions.

Shana Nys Dambrot / Natural Friends of the Arts

For Critical Ground 2023, I envision my session as an organic combination of readings, presentation, and conversation. I plan to center empathy and literary style in a discussion of how I practice art criticism, related to the overall conversation on its definitions and functions—with the goal of a more inclusive discourse, both in terms of demography and geography. I'll illustrate the case with some of my favorite selected passages from writings by historical voices like Charles Baudelaire, Gertrude Stein, and Frank O'Hara. As part of this presentation, I'll visit central questions as to criticism's evolving powers in the current media landscape—the difference between “critique” and “art writing,” the value of negative reviews, the literary voice, the authoritative voice, the duty to the present moment, the responsibility to art history—arriving finally, but most urgently, at the main question before us. That is, how we get folks to read “the art section” in the first place, so that more people—and crucially, more kinds of people in more places—both feel and truly are part of the conversation.

Hikmet Sidney Loe / The Center's Circumference

This field session explores ideas of center while making a site visit to Utah's Center Monument located in Sanpete Valley. The recent exhibition *The Center Can Not Hold* (Granary Arts) asked architects to consider Ephraim—Utah's geographical center—through a conceptual lens. Their investigations led to generous and

open-ended interpretations of how the meaning of place changes for each of us. Identifying a center assumes consensus and shared values, a more homogenous view. Each center includes a circumference, an expanding region where multiple interpretations can exist. As a scholar of land art, ideas of "the center" are frequent, postulating a place for one to stand, view, experience. Yet we can never stand in the same place, our experiences are colored by many factors. Possibly the most engaging artistic statement from this movement was written by artist Nancy Holt, who stated "the center of the work becomes the center of the world" in her essay on *Sun Tunnels*. The center expands through tunnels that frame the landscape; from one spot to celestial orbs. Infinite circumferences are found in this statement, providing multiple entrees into the world and into the interpretation of art. The poet Emily Dickinson wrote "my business is circumference," indicating a space where ideas can live and germinate. The idea of the center is complicated by our unique experiences; how to translate those experiences to transcend boundaries is akin to crafting art criticism. Decentralizing geography and decentralizing writing each allows for a richer place within which to live and communicate the essence of art.

Bianca Velasquez + Alexander Ortega / Writing Across Disciplines, Bridging Community

What kinds of writing and rhetorical practices can help art criticism thrive in small communities? In this session, Critical Ground Fellows Alexander Ortega and Bianca Velasquez tackle this question in terms of their nontraditional career paths and what they've learned. The pair worked together on SLC A&E publication *SLUG Magazine's* editorial team, with each writer now contributing to Southwest Contemporary and Velasquez to *Hyperallergic*. Their experience of foregrounding local voices has not only sharpened their art writing but has also helped them democratize their coverage in order to pitch in for a more robust local arts culture at large.

Ortega and Velasquez will investigate how the distinct needs of a non-coastal place found them covering myriad disciplines within their local arts scene. In doing so, the two writers have been able to extrapolate varying writerly thinking across art disciplines, practices, and contextual situations for their audience. Ortega and Velasquez exercise yet query the ways in which this Swiss-army knife approach allows communities to converse with themselves through multidisciplinary cross-pollination in order to form an inimitable cultural sense of place.

contributors



Shana Nys Dambrot is an art critic, curator, and author based in Downtown LA. She is the Arts Editor for the *L.A. Weekly*, and a contributor to *Flaunt*, *Artillery*, and other culture publications. She studied Art History at Vassar College, curates and juries exhibitions, writes prolifically for exhibition catalogs and monographic publications, and speaks at galleries, schools, and cultural institutions nationally. She is the recipient of the 2022 Mozaik Future Art Writers Prize, the 2022 Rabkin Prize for Art Criticism, and the LA Press Club National Arts & Entertainment Journalism Critic of the Year award for 2022.



Scotti Hill (she/her) is a Utah-based arts journalist, critic, and lawyer. She's a former staff writer for 15 *Bytes: Utah's Art Magazine* and has contributed to *Hyperallergic*, *Deseret News*, *New Art Examiner*, and the Center for Art Law.



Steve Jansen is the news editor at *Southwest Contemporary*. An Albuquerque-based investigative news reporter and arts writer, he has won and been nominated for various state, regional, and national awards. In 2013, his long-form story about two crumbling Houston dams attained first place for Best Print News/Feature Story in the Texas statewide Lone Star Awards. Prior to joining *Southwest Contemporary*, Jansen completed a two-year Center for Sustainable Journalism fellowship investigating New Mexico's child welfare and foster care systems. A former staff writer for *Phoenix New Times* and *Houston Press*, he's written for *Hyperallergic* and contributed news reporting to *The New York Times*.



Hikmet Sidney Loe (she/her) is part-time instructor in art history at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her first book, *The Spiral Jetty Encyclo: Exploring Robert Smithson's Earthwork through Time and Place* (2017) won the 15 Bytes annual Art Book Award (2018) and was a finalist for the Utah State Historical Society Best Book Award. She is currently writing *The Sun Tunnels Encyclo: Exploring Nancy Holt's Earthwork through Perception and Site* (2026). Loe's curatorial practice focuses on ideas of place, most recently in the exhibitions *The Center Can Not Hold* (Granary Arts, 2022-23) and *Modern Desert Markings: An Homage to Las Vegas Area Land Art* (Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, UNLV, 2023). She was a staff writer for *15 Bytes* and currently writes for *Southwest Contemporary*.



Alexander Ortega is a Salt Lake City-based arts journalist and fiction writer, currently writing for *Southwest Contemporary*. He was a longtime editorial staff member of *SLUG Magazine*, where he was Editor and wrote about various arts practices. With a local focus, he investigates artworks' rhetorical resonances, asking how artists forge new ideas and communicate them through visual media. Ortega's fiction has been published in *Quarterly West*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Moss* literary journal, and an anthology called *EVERGREEN: Grim Tales & Verses from the Gloomy Northwest*. He was also a 2022 Summer Fishtrap Fellow.



Lauren Tresp is the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Southwest Contemporary*, an independent contemporary art publication dedicated to the American Southwest she has helmed since 2016. She is passionate about fostering empathy and critical thinking through arts journalism and cultural criticism, connecting national and international audiences to contemporary art of the Southwest, and creating opportunities and resources that help propel creative work forward. Lauren also offers consulting services to artists and arts organizations, and has prior experience in arts administration. She has a Master of Arts in Humanities from the University of Chicago, where she studied Medieval and Renaissance art history, and a Bachelor of Arts in art history and history from UCLA. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



Bianca Velasquez (she/her) is a Salt Lake City native who has been involved with the arts and music community for more than a decade. Velasquez is currently a freelance writer for several publications including *Southwest Contemporary*, *Hyperallergic*, *SLUG Magazine*, and *Visit Salt Lake*.

Aside from her work as a writer, Velasquez hosts the Localmotive arts and culture podcast and works as a multidisciplinary artist.

sponsors

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staff

Amy Jorgensen, Co-founder, Executive Director, Chief Curator
Kamilla Earlywine, Manager of Programs and Marketing
Elisabeth Fitch, Manager
Julia Dixon, Programs Assistant

mission

Granary Arts is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to support the contemporary arts through exhibitions, education, and cultural programming, and serve as an anchor for artistic activity and community. We support and exhibit regional and international artists; provide educational opportunities through programming, outreach, and cultural events; and foster collaborative relationships with individuals, organizations, and communities.

