

Art

Tucked Deep in Rural Utah, an Arts Center Reaches Out to the World

Granary Arts brings contemporary art, international discourse, and a different lens into a traditional landscape.



by Bianca Velasquez
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The Granary Arts building, built in 1876 by the Mormon religious community's women's organization Relief Society (all photos courtesy Granary Arts)

Most of Utah's natural and timeless landmarks are valued for the recreation they offer. However, there is a county in Utah where solitude, luscious scenery, and peaceful lifestyle attract the more creatively minded. Perhaps unsuspectingly, Sanpete County — specifically the town of Ephraim — is known for its rich history of traditional artists and, at one point, boasted the highest number of artists in the state. Today, it is home to **Granary Arts**, an organization bringing contemporary art, international discourse, and a different lens into a traditional landscape.



Established in the fall of 2012, Granary Arts began as a passion project between Amy Jorgensen and Kelly Brooks, both professors at the nearby Snow College. The general goal was to create a nonprofit art center at the heart of Ephraim and its eclectic community, but it expanded into being so much more. Today, Granary Arts offers Sanpete County, as well as the greater country, experiences that reach beyond their contemporary exhibitions. The organization’s mission is centered on being a creative and educational hub for all through extensive programming that includes events, workshops, community projects, and its own publications.



Interior of Granary Arts's Upper Gallery during the exhibition of Sara Lynne Lindsay's *Inherited Ground* installation

Executive Director and Chief Curator Amy Jorgensen’s extensive background in the arts has contributed immensely to the vision and success of Granary Arts. Jorgensen has immersed herself in the arts as an educator, facilitator, and artist who has curated over 50 exhibitions. “Having this multi-tool set to pull from has been totally critical to the success of Granary Arts — but also its programming approach and its ability to thrive in a rural place,” Jorgensen says. “When you are in an urban area, you have everything at your fingertips. In a rural space, you usually have to create those resources yourself.”

Granary Arts exhibits works by local artists as well as those from around the world. For example, the organization hosted *LAND + PLACE + PERFORMANCE* in 2015, comprising six contemporary artists (including some locals) who explored and investigated landscapes through photographs, installations, drawings, sculpture, and video. In 2017, Granary hosted Alejandro Durán’s *Washed Up*, an installation and photography exhibition featuring the debris washing up on Mexico’s Caribbean coast. The most recent show, on view through May 6, is Tomiko Jones’s *Hatsubon*, a memorial exhibition for Jones’s father.





Granary Arts's Co-founder, Executive Director, and Chief Curator Amy Jorgensen

“Everything we do and that we program is not only meant for a local artist community but also for our international artist community,” says Jorgensen. “It is important that we recognize that all places are relevant regardless of whether you’re in a thriving art, urban mecca space, or in a beautiful remote valley.”

The Granary Arts programming is integral to its mission to recognize voices from all over the world. For example, the Film Feast program features films from both international and local filmmakers to bridge the gap between regional issues through documentaries and experimental films.

While the integration of global voices is a large part of their programming, their calling still includes enriching and fostering their local community. “I think Granary Arts and its mission and its vision is very much in line with the concept of working on behalf of our place and working on behalf of our community,” Jorgensen says. “We think of the community very broadly ... artists, creatives, researchers, our patrons, our audience, our neighbors, and who is on the other side of the planet doing similar work.” Granary’s Fellows Program supports selected local creatives by offering them resources, such as time and space; this is not limited to visual artists but includes musicians, critics, and creative collectives.



Granary Arts Fellow Darren Jones (center) leads the discussion during the program Critical Ground



The organization’s penchant for collaboration and, even more so, conversation is evident in the community-based events they execute, such as the Spring Summit they co-hosted with [Epicenter](#) this year. The summit took place in the visually striking town of Green River and brought together artists, architects, curators, and community organizers for a three-day retreat featuring peer-run workshops, conversations, and interactive group experiences. Another program putting conversation at the forefront is Critical Ground, “an initiative to expand the dialogue when it comes to art criticism and to democratize art criticism,” says Jorgensen.

Throughout this last decade, Granary Arts has fulfilled its goal to develop the role that art and community play in Ephraim and beyond. “I love the idea that this structure came from a robust community of women working on behalf of their community,” says Jorgensen about the Granary Arts building built in 1876 by Relief Society, the Mormon religious community’s women’s organization. “It is almost like the building has this kind of spirit that draws a type of work to it.” Brought back to life by a group of artists in 1990 with renovation efforts led by Kathleen Peterson, the Granary Arts building has always fostered a space for female-driven community building.



Interior of Granary Arts’s Main Gallery during Richard Gate’s *Anthology* reception