



JENNIFER WILSON
Mayor

ERIN LITVACK
Deputy Mayor &
Chief Administrative Officer

HOLLY YOCOM
Department Director
Community Services

**MATTHEW
CASTILLO**
Division Director
Arts & Culture

50 West 200 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

385-468-1010 - Phone
385-468-1005 - Fax
TTY: 7-1-1

October 29, 2021

Dear Mayor Wilson,

Please accept this request to appoint one new member to the Arts & Culture Advisory Board. With a recent resignation due to an out-of-County move, we currently have three vacancies for our 15-member board. Our current vacancies are all full-term openings and therefore the terms would start the day of approval by County Council and last for 3 years.

The current recommendation is the second candidate to come out of Arts & Culture's new Nomination and Recruitment Subcommittee, formed in early 2021 to engage the board to help meet the board recruitment needs within the County and Division's recruitment priorities. Through this new process we have identified new board members that reflect the recruitment priorities of the Mayor's Office and increase the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives on the board. For the remaining two vacancies, we will focus on recruitment from District 2.

The following recommendation is for your consideration:

Mahihonon "Esther" Aboussou – District 1

Esther brings unique experience to our board that we do not currently have. As a queer African American artist, she has extensive experience in creating visual art as well as organizing community exhibitions and building community art spaces. According to Esther, "With my involvement in the POC art community, as well as the professional art scene, I am in a unique position to bridge gaps and help provide opportunities for other Black, Indigenous, and POC artists to showcase their talents to a wider audience." This background and experience will help Arts & Culture fulfill its mission and recommendations from the recent 10-year master plan to support and expand opportunities for new and emerging artists.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Matt Castillo,
Director, Arts & Culture

Holly Yocom
Dept. Director, Community Services

Attachments: Mahihonon Aboussou Board Application
Mahihonon Aboussou Resume
Arts & Culture Advisory Board Roster

Application Form

Profile

Mahihonon _____ E _____ Aboussou _____
First Name Middle Initial Last Name

Home Address

Conrad Law _____ Legal Assistant _____
Employer Job Title

_____ _____
Home Address Suffix or Apartment

_____ _____ _____
City State Postal Code

Primary Phone

Which Boards would you like to apply for?

Arts and Culture Advisory Board: Submitted

Referred by:

Jordan C. Brun

Qualifications

Please tell us about yourself.

I am a mixed media artist, photographer, and queer African-American activist living in Salt Lake City, UT. Since 2013, I have used art as an outlet to explore marginalization and intersectionality through different materials and mediums. I often paint on unconventional surfaces and incorporate textures, found objects, ceramics, and 3D elements to create my works of art. I strongly believe that art can be used as a creative tool for activism. It's important to me that the things I create reflect the values I believe in.

Why are you interested in serving on a board or commission?

As a Black woman living in a predominantly white state, most of the art that fills the galleries in Salt Lake City does not speak to my experience. I know that this is the same for many folks in the POC community. I feel that when an opportunity arises to have a seat at a table where I can help bring about change for the greater good of the community, it's important to not let it pass by.

What education, work experience, or volunteer experience do you have that applies to the board you are applying for?

I studied film and media arts at the University of Utah, and I was able to use what I learned during my time in school to start my own photography business and work full time as a videographer and photographer for some years. During the past two years, I have focused much of my time on active participation in the Utah art scene. At the beginning of 2020, I along with 3 other women opened a QTPOC Art collective. Though the project was closed early due to Covid, when it was open it served as a safe space for many Queer Utahns. I was also privileged to curate an LGBTQ+ art show for the Urban Arts Gallery in October of last year. For many of the artists that I featured in the show, it was the first time being a part of a gallery exhibit. We had a successful turnout for the show, and it brought in family members, and friends, many of whom had never been to a gallery show. Some were even long residents of Salt Lake County that had never visited the Urban Arts Gallery before. Because I enjoyed the experience of curating and bringing communities together through art, I have actively sought out more opportunities. I will be curating 2 exhibits at the beginning of 2022 at the Urban Arts Gallery. Both of these shows will highlight artists from underrepresented communities, and feature work that touches on topics of identity, gender, race, and human connection.

What unique perspectives could you bring to the board?

With my involvement in the LGBTQ+ art community, as well as the professional art scene, I am in a unique position to bridge gaps and help provide opportunities for other Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ artists to showcase their talents to a wider audience.



[Upload a Resume](#)

Demographics

Some boards and commissions require membership to be racially, politically or geographically proportionate to the general public. The following information helps track our recruitment and diversity efforts.

Are you a Salt Lake County employee?

Yes No

Are you a current member of another Salt Lake County board or commission?

Yes No

Race/Ethnicity *

Black or African American

District *

District 3

Gender Pronouns *

She/Her/Hers
 Other

Age Range *

25-34

Languages *

Eng sh

Political Affiliation

Independent

M. Esther "Essie" Aboussou

Artist Profile and Summary Statement

Years Active: 2013 - Present

In my early years as an artist, I spent far too much time trying to create what I thought others wanted to see. Now, I have learned to create with an intention that honors who I am as a person. I am an African-American Queer Woman, living in one of the most conservative states in the country. When I feel too afraid to speak my truth, my art serves as a visual representation of the things that I carry in my heart.

My art is loud and large, unapologetic and unrefined. I create, to take up space, and represent others like me. I think of myself as a visual storyteller. If I can succeed in capturing your attention, I hope that it will cause you to stop and think, then learn and do. I believe that art is more than a creative outlet. It is a form of activism.

As an artist, I am always on a journey of discovery. I am constantly seeking out materials that challenge me and push me to think outside of the box. I use anything from acrylics to ceramics, to photography to create and express myself. I love incorporating textures, found objects, 3D elements, and using unconventional surfaces to bring a work of art to life.

Education

The University of Utah – Salt Lake City, UT

Bachelor of Arts: Film and Media Arts - Class of 2017

Projects and exhibitions

Black Faces Project – June-July 2021

Tea Zaanti - Salt Lake City, UT

- Solo exhibit

LOUD! A POC Art Showcase - June 2020

Urban Arts Gallery - Salt Lake City, UT

- Curator

SLC Queer Art Show - June 2020

Urban Arts Gallery - Salt Lake City, UT

- Participating artist

Xochi Kalli Community Art Collective January 2020 – April 2020

Midvale, Utah

- Co-founder and co-owner

A Burlesque Affair to benefit Planned Parenthood of Utah February 2019

Salt Lake City, Utah

- Organizer, Co-host and photographer

Bibliography

[“Local artist uses her art as a creative tool for activism”](#) - ABC-4 Good Things Utah, June 23 2021

[“Artist-activist Essie Shaw's Black Faces Project, SLC Queer”](#) - KRCL’s Radioactive, June 16, 2021

[“Spotlight on grassroots activists, featuring: Essie Shaw and Dirk Thomas, co-chairs of the LGBT Committee - Black Lives Matter Utah.”](#) - KRCL’s Radioactive June 20, 2020

[“Pride for Black Lives Matter: A Celebration of Intersectionality”](#) - June 15, 2020 by [Ivana Martinez](#) and [Natalie Colby](#)

[“Thousands gather in Salt Lake City for joint Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ rights rally”](#) - June 14, 2020 by [Alex Vejar](#)

[“Former dance studio on Main Street transformed into community art space”](#) - April 23, 2020 by [Sarah Morton Taggart](#)

Related work experience

Owner/ Operator November 2015 – Present

- Essie Shaw Photography - Salt Lake City, UT

Executive assistant and staff photographer May 2018- September 2020

- Purple Moss Photography - Salt Lake City, UT

Wasatch Magazine Staff Writer- August 2016 - December 2017

- The University of Utah Student Media- Salt Lake City, UT

Video Team Manager- August 2016 - May 2017

- The University of Utah Student Media- Salt Lake City, UT

Video Team Producer- Sept 2015 - August 2016

- The University of Utah Student Media - Salt Lake City, UT

Art Assistant/ Secretary May 2010 - Sep 2010

- Appalachian Arts Studio-Ridgway, Pennsylvania

Salt Lake County Arts & Culture

Current Advisory Board Roster

As of 10/29/2021

Arts & Culture Advisory Board Member	District	Term	Info
Bing Fang	4	2017-2020 2020-2023	Background in finance, marketing, management, ethics and business strategy; Off-Broadway Theater board member; NHMU board chair; Asian/Pacific Islander community
Daphne Williams	4	2017-2020 2020-2023	Visual art expert
Gordon Wolf	3	2017-2020 2020-2023	Taylorsville Arts Council; Mid Valley Performing Art Center design committee member
Maria Chumbita-Garcia	4	2018-2021 2021-2024	Engineer; Hispanic/Latino community; young professional
Annastasia Kaessner	1	2018-2021 2021-2024	Downtown commercial real estate broker; young professional
Erik Christiansen	4	2018-2021 2021-2024	Lawyer; huge arts supporter; board experience
Brian Van Ausdal	4	2018-2021 2021-2024	IT Business Analyst and huge arts supporter.
Don Tingey	5	2018-2021 2021-2024	Director of Strategic Services for City of South Jordan
Ryan Riches	5	2019 - 2022	Ryan is a retired project manager from Lockheed Martin and a member of the Beehive Statesmen Barbershop Chorus and Stayin Alive Quartet.
Megan West	1	2020-2023	Involved in the mental health/substance abuse industry. Meghan background in budget management, event production
Emily Emmer	6	2020-2023	Marketing strategist with 15+ years experience. Practicing artist, musician, and patron of the arts
Natosha Washington	1	2021-2024	Dancer, founder of Penguin Lady Dance Collective, dance teacher