Welcome

What is the story of your community? What are the songs, dances, foods, and practices that connect you to the people around you? These shared practices are what we call the traditional arts—they tell us what it means to be human through collective aesthetics, values, and experiences.

At ACTA, we support the work of artists and organizations who engage with the transformative and restorative impact of collective traditions in their communities. We craft programs and services in direct response to the needs of California’s cultural communities, providing opportunities for exchange, collaboration, and connection to new resources.

In these pages, we take a look back at our work across 2018 and 2019, saluting the artists, organizations, and communities that we serve, as well as the funders who make our work possible.

Amy Kitchener
Co-Founder + Executive Director

This report summarizes activities from July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019. Please contact us at info@actaonline.org with questions or comments.

COVER IMAGE—2018 ACTA Apprentice Jasmine Orpilla performs pangalay dance from the Philippines at a Traditional Arts Roundtable Series event. Photo: T. Saarelma/ACTA.

ABOVE—Afro-Colombian percussion students at Chuckawalla State Prison. Photo: Peter Merts, courtesy of the California Arts Council. INSET—Amy Kitchener. Photo: Craig Kohlruss.
Mission

The Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) promotes and supports ways for cultural traditions to thrive now and into the future.

Founded in 1997, ACTA is a 501(c)3 non-profit and the California Arts Council’s official partner in serving the state’s folk and traditional arts field.

California is at the forefront of the country’s shift toward racial and ethnic plurality. We hold the key to breaking the race-based discrimination, injustice, and bigotry that has infected our democracy. The culture-bearers of our state are leading the way in reimagining a country that embodies multiplicity, equity, and mutual respect.

The more we cultivate a space for cultural practices to thrive in, the closer we get to a national consciousness that affirms our shared humanity.

We all belong here.

Above—Daria Chaikovsky (R) of the Ukrainian Art Center, a 2019 Living Cultures grantee, shares a traditionally decorated pysanka Easter egg with 2019 mentor artist in Korean folk dance, DaEun Jung (L). Photo: T. Saarelma/ACTA. Inset—A dancer from the Lan Nartthasin Thai Dance Group performs at the Promise Zone Arts Live! event in Los Angeles. Photo: T. Saarelma/ACTA.

In California you will find:

• 1 in 8 U.S. residents
• One fifth of U.S. Indian tribal entities
• More than 200 spoken languages
• The nation’s largest immigrant and indigenous population
• The world’s fifth largest economy

Since our founding, ACTA has distributed more than $5.5 million to more than 1,200 artists and organizations throughout 50 counties in the state.
Sustainability
We provide financial support to practitioners and organizations to advance their cultural practices across generations.

Relationships
We produce events that bring together culture bearers and the public to learn, celebrate, and organize.

Transformation
We foster healing from trauma through collective cultural practice for incarcerated and returning individuals.

Social Justice
We engage traditional arts as a force for change in our neighborhoods.

Belonging
We listen to how communities identify their cultural resources and help them to transform the findings into action.

Visibility
We amplify the value of the traditional arts in everyday life through stories, documentation, and public advocacy at the local, state, and national levels.
“Traditional arts are a way of creating new social relations. People are speaking up, standing up, and fighting back against the world that has been handed to them. They are creating a picture of the world that many of us want to live in.”

—Dr. George Lipsitz, Professor of Black Studies, UC Santa Barbara, describing ACTA’s Building Healthy Communities projects
By providing financial support to artists and organizations, we help ensure the lasting impact of shared cultural traditions in communities.

2019 FUNDING SNAPSHOT

$251,000 awarded
117 total applications across two funding programs
57 applications awarded

LIVING CULTURES GRANTS PROGRAM

Providing project-based funding to non-profit organizations to ensure cultural continuity in California.

14 years of programming
$3.6 million dollars awarded
634 projects supported

“ACTA makes it possible to live our dreams. They have been integral to our musical lineage—without ACTA’s support, some of our songs would be on the edge of dying out.”

—Tsering Wangmo, Chaksam-pa Tibetan Dance & Opera Company, 2019 Living Cultures grantee
APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Encouraging the continuity of the state's traditional arts and cultures by contracting mentor artists to engage in intensive, one-on-one training with qualified apprentices

19 years of programming  
Nearly $1 million dollars awarded  
348 artist pairs supported

“It was not long until playing and sharing kulintang music and Maguindanaon culture became a passion of mine. Through it, I found my identity as an artist, as an ethnic Maguindanaon Filipino, and as a young woman.”

—Kimberly Kalanduyan, 2019 ACTA apprentice in kulintang music from the Southern Philippines under mentor artist Bernard Barros Ellorin

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP—Performers from 2019 Living Cultures grantee organization Senderos perform a Mexican traditional dance at a Bay Area artist gathering. Photo: J. Jameson/ACTA.  
OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM—Tsering Wangmo. Photo courtesy of the artist.  
THIS PAGE, TOP—Mentor artist in the Indian classical dance form Bharatanatyam, Soumya Tilak (back), adjusts the posture of her 2019 ACTA apprentice Vibha Raju in San Jose. Photo: S. Saraswat/ACTA.  
THIS PAGE, BOTTOM—Kimberly Kalanduyan. Photo courtesy of the artist.
Relationships

By gathering around cultural expression, we weave the threads that bind all of us.

ACTA creates opportunities for traditional artists and administrators to gather together and share not only art, but resources and ideas to build a more connected and robust traditional arts field.

These kinds of gatherings—created in collaboration with the traditional arts community for the traditional arts community—are rare. ACTA has led the way in creating meaningful spaces for practitioners, institutional partners, and the general public through:

STATEWIDE CONVENINGS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PUBLIC SHARINGS AND PERFORMANCES

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

STATEWIDE CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS OF COLOR

Over the last year ACTA provided services to the Cultural Pathways grantee cohort of the California Arts Council designed to strengthen the capacity of new and emerging arts organizations. We developed programming that included in-depth training and practical tools for the arts leaders within the grantee cohort. ACTA’s unique perspective and skill set as a statewide organization in service to culturally-rooted arts organizations and practitioners is deeply aligned with the distinctive needs of the Cultural Pathway program’s focus on funding and supporting “small, new, and emerging organizations rooted in communities of color, recent immigrant and refugee communities, and tribal or indigenous groups,” as described by the California Arts Council.
On December 1, 2018, ACTA launched its 2018–2019 Traditional Arts Roundtable Series (TARS) in Los Angeles around the theme of “Ritual and Improvisation.” In this first of five events, we invited students and teachers from the LA chapter of the Urasenke School of Chado to share the process and values of the traditional Japanese chado tea ceremony with a mixed audience of artists, advocates, and community members at Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (JACCC). Throughout the event, we honored the life and work of the late Madame Sosei Shizuye Matsumoto, National Heritage Fellow and one of the most influential and prolific tea masters in the United States. After the tea ceremony and a participatory chado tea brewing workshop, ACTA staff members moderated a discussion on the needs of traditional artists in cities like LA alongside our colleagues from the JACCC.

On Sunday, June 9, 2019, ACTA held the 2019 Bay Area convening of Living Cultures Grants Program (LCGP) and Apprenticeship Program (AP) participants at BrasArte World Dance Center in Berkeley. We shared collective dialogue, presentations, and performances where Bay Area neighbors could learn about each other’s work and deepen their local artistic network. Among the presenters from the ACTA family were Youngmin Lee, bojagi (Korean wrapping cloths) artist, dan tranh musician Vanessa Vo, mridangam (South Indian percussion) musician Rohan Krishnamurthy, dancers from Dancing Ci(y)phers, and performers from Senderos.
Transformation

By bringing traditional arts practices inside our state prisons, correctional facilities, and reentry spaces, we open a pathway toward communal expression for some of California’s most vulnerable populations.

Engaging in art forms that are built on the bedrock of cultural knowledge and shared skills offers participants powerful self-affirmation, deep understanding of one another, and an overall sense of belonging.

ARTS IN CORRECTIONS

18 prisons served
8,427 instruction hours
26 weeks of programming
33 artist residents reflecting
19 expressive forms

REENTRY THROUGH THE ARTS

18 weeks of programming
92 participants
2 public events
4 artist residents reflecting 2 forms
174 instruction hours

“Yeah you come in here and you can beat the drums and everything, but it’s more than that. I like it because I learn more about myself. We all think we are different, especially coming from a system that separates us racially. It teaches us that we are all actually interconnected with each other.”

—Aisha Estrada, Reentry Through the Arts student in Afro-Colombian drumming
Social Justice

By connecting deeply rooted traditional arts processes with localized social justice efforts, ACTA helps counter the forces of structural racism which manifest in disparities in health, education, jobs, and individual freedoms.

Our Building Healthy Communities - Boyle Heights initiative employs five local artist fellows and four mentees who integrate cultural arts into community-wide efforts against systemic inequities in their neighborhoods. Key issues include:

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
YOUTH SERVICES
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

“Quilting is a way of uniting ourselves and healing, from our ancestors to the present. In the workshops, we have had the confidence to speak and take out what we have been carrying from way back. One person told me that thanks to the workshop, she had the courage to let go of something that was burning her. She was able to break that chain and ask for help.”

—Juana Mena, ACTA Artist Fellow and master quilter with the Building Healthy Communities’ Health Happens in Schools initiative
Belonging

By listening to communities identify their cultural resources, we help them create responses to challenges and opportunities on the local level.

Over the course of ten years, we have refined a Participatory Cultural Asset Mapping Methodology: a way of understanding a specific community that recognizes and lifts up its inherent strengths, values its wisdom, and prioritizes its self-identified needs.

In 2018–19, we employed this methodology in Los Angeles’ federally-designated Promise Zone with the City of Los Angeles’ Dept. of Cultural Affairs and LA Commons. The collected data is shared with the public, and the process is set to conclude in late 2019.

35 site visits

1000+ cultural assets identified

5 public gatherings

PEOPLE  *  PLACES  *  PRACTICES

Photos from Promise Zone Live! event at Levitt Pavilion. ABOVE—Performer from the Imperial Court of Los Angeles and Hollywood. INSET—Interactive drumming workshop led by the indigenous Filipino cultural organization BIBAK. LEFT—Performer from Chervona Kalyna Ukrainian dance ensemble. Photos: T. Saarelma/ACTA.
Visibility

By championing traditional arts in California and beyond, we foster understanding and appreciation of our state's exceptional cultural wealth.

Harnessing our position as a leader in the field, we advocate for the traditional arts in the private and public sphere. In 2019, Executive Director Amy Kitchener was named Chair of the Board of Trustees for the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, where she led a convening exploring questions of traditional arts infrastructure at the national level. On a daily basis, our staff members provide individualized counsel and referrals to practitioners and organizations throughout the state.

Our newly-redesigned website serves as an increasingly valuable resource for the field and the general public, featuring articles, interviews, photo essays, reports, and videos. ACTA centers the stories of traditional arts and artists in our own editorial work and in our engagements with the press.

BRIAN TRIPP RECEIVES ACTA’S CALIFORNIA LIVING HERITAGE AWARD

On October 4, 2018, ACTA had the honor of recognizing one of Native California’s most prolific and beloved artists: Brian D. Tripp. Brian is a Karuk visual artist, a poet, a ceremonial singer and dancer, a regalia maker, and a pillar in the indigenous community of Humboldt County. He has committed decades of his life to revitalizing ceremonial life in the Klamath River region, helping usher in a new era of artistic engagement in local indigenous culture. As the recipient of the third-ever California Living Heritage Award, Brian represents the dedication, vision, and courage that allows California’s cultural traditions to thrive for generations.

ABOVE—ACTA Board President Dan Sheehy, artists Marion Coleman and Ofelia Esparza, and ACTA Executive Director Amy Kitchener at the 2018 NEA National Heritage Fellowships Award Ceremony at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. ACTA played a strategic role in the successful nomination of both these artists. Photo: J. Carrillo/ACTA. RIGHT—Karuk artist and ceremonial leader Brian D. Tripp accepts ACTA’s California Living Heritage Award. Photo: S. Saraswat/ACTA.
People

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Julián Antonio Carrillo, Program Manager
Lily Kharrazi, Special Projects Manager
Jasmin Temblador, Arts in Corrections Program Manager
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Former Chief of Programs, California Arts Council

ABOVE—ACTA staff, board members, and community partners gathered at the historic Requa Inn on the banks of the Klamath River in Humboldt County. Photo: S. Saraswat/ACTA.
In 2017–18, ACTA adopted new accounting rules resulting in greater deferred revenue in that year and subsequent years. At the same time, ACTA is completing projects with funds received in previous years, resulting in the appearance of a deficit. In fact, ACTA has no deficit and maintains an unrestricted cash reserve. In FY 18–19, ACTA received $1 million foundation contribution and recognized the total amount of this revenue. ACTA is holding a portion of these funds to spend in subsequent fiscal years.
Join us
in supporting California’s thriving cultural communities!

When you give to the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, you support work that tells us what it means to be human.

Make a contribution today at actaonline.org/support