

# VCReporter

NEWS, ENTERTAINMENT, ENVIRONMENT

## The best of times, the worst of times

The year in local arts

By [Michel Miller](#) 12/31/2015



From closures and openings to accolades, awards, financial hardships and crowdfunding successes, Ventura County's arts sector was busy in 2015. In a year that saw ordinary people crowding into restaurants and other venues to paint pretty pictures while sipping wine — not to mention the adult coloring craze —

everyone seemed to be unleashing their inner artist, and there was no shortage of quality theatre, visual art and performance.

While there was a tremendous amount of output from locals, we also benefited from special appearances by a variety of outside artists, including Lydia Lunch and Admiral Grey at Gallery 525, Eugene Chadbourne at E.P. Foster Library, Richard MacDonald at TRAC2015, earthscape artist Andres Amador (a feather in the cap of the Ventura Visitors Bureau), L.A. TheatreWorks at Oxnard Performing Arts Center, revolutionary artist Abby Martin who appeared at The Lab in Ventura, Laddie John Dill at Focus on the Masters talk series and the world's greatest pumpkin carver, Jon Neill, at Oxnard Farmers Market.

New faces took leadership roles countywide. Among them were Michael Lattanzio who was appointed CEO at Studio Channel Islands, Chelsea Reynolds who travelled all the way from Maryland to become the new manager of Oxnard Performing Arts Center and Marcelo Lehninger who signed on as New West Symphony's music director (before announcing his impending 2016 departure) as well as Maureen Feldman who became Cabrillo Music Theatre's director of development, Edward Clift the new president of Brooks Institute and Patti Mullins the CEO of the Museum of Ventura County.

Just as there were new faces in the county's arts community this year, there were new places. They included The Brayer contemporary art space in midtown Ventura, V 4 Arts at the Improv Company, and Gamut art collective, which has been making a big splash with its charitable work and cutting-edge brand headquartered at the Compound in Camarillo. The year also saw the NAMBA performance space in downtown Ventura come alive with performance art (including John White's First Friday 5X5X5 series), dance, music and theater.

It was a year of expansion with Brooks Institute getting into the foreign student exchange game and Museum of Ventura County partnering with the Santa Cruz Island Foundation, gaining it access to a large collection of artifacts, maps, furniture and more. The museum also partnered with Bell Arts Factory to curate its Tool Room Gallery. Cal Lutheran University announced plans to build a 25,000- to 30,000-square-foot art complex and learning facility, thanks to a \$4 million gift from art collector William Rolland. The Oxnard College Performing Arts Center welcomed the Institute of Latino Performing Arts, which, through various talks and special events, is building a bridge between Oxnard and Hollywood, while Simi Valley Cultural Arts Center celebrated 20 years of top-shelf stage production. This year also gave Ventura County its first Steampunk Festival and its first and only maker space when MAKE Ventura opened at the beginning of the year.

2015 was also the year Ventura County appointed its first poet laureate, Mary Kay Rummel. Longtime county literary czar and editor of Askew Poetry Journal, Phil Taggart, has been named 2016's poet laureate.

Not everyone was as fortunate this year, and some beloved venues were forced to close. Among them were House of Magic — which reorganized as a nonprofit and changed locations — Gull Wings Children's Museum, All American Ballet and Green Art People which, despite numerous last-minute fundraising campaigns, couldn't gather enough resources to sustain its celebrated free arts and music programming for the low-income community it served. The Ventura Film Society, while not going completely dark, held its last screening before going on hiatus for an undetermined period of time. There were also some setbacks, including the city of Ojai's decision to backburner a rock concert series at the Libbey Bowl and the apparent death by attrition of the concert series planned for the Ventura City Hall parking lot.

Ventura County said goodbye to some treasured arts figures in 2015,

including Micheline Sakharoff — who served on various boards and contributed to Focus on the Masters, **Ventura County Ballet**, New West Symphony, Ventura Music Festival, Rubicon Theatre Company and others — and Oxnard literary sensation Michele Serros. Through their achievements and generosity they will continue to touch lives and inspire greatness.

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