



U N I O N H A L L A R T S

UNION HALL ARTS: UNLOCKING THE POWER OF LABOR AND THE ARTS

A Project of the UNITE HERE Education and Support Fund (501c3)

WE'RE UNLEASHING THE WORKING-CLASS CREATIVITY DESPERATELY NEEDED FOR OUR TIMES.

Every successful movement for lasting social change requires arts and culture. Artists give us joy and life in dark times, cutting through the noise and fostering the creative thinking that allows us to imagine a better future. So much of the most enduring and popular forms of art and culture have come from working-class communities. Detroit's autoworkers made Motown. Spirituals sustained the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Quilters unveiled the truth about HIV/AIDS.

THIS YEAR, WE'RE IGNITING A NEW WAVE OF ART THROUGH THE LABOR MOVEMENT.

We are tapping into the countless numbers of artists within the union movement and thinking broadly about where creativity lives. Union Hall Arts brings emerging and established artists together to make art for our movement and become the labor arts leaders for our time.

“While I have a deep love for coffee, my true passion lies in art. Despite my supervisors initially discouraging me from sketching during work, I couldn't resist the challenge and started using coffee cups as my canvas. The clients were amazed by my artwork, and it even got displayed at my station. I realized that my art could also be my voice.”



Gordon Osborne, a barista in NYC, draws Black history on the coffee cups at work with the same ink pens customers use to sign receipts.

IT'S BEEN DECADES SINCE THE LABOR MOVEMENT HAS CENTERED THE ARTS, BUT THE NEXT BEST TIME IS NOW.

Authoritarian regimes past and present—and the ruling classes that support them—have understood the power of culture to keep workers divided and distracted, using art and new technologies to create mass appeal for anti-worker politics.

BUT WORKERS CREATE A BETTER WORLD.

Unions keep us human, mobilizing worker power so that people can lead full, healthy lives with time to do the things we love. Culture is how people make life livable, creating joy in otherwise oppressive systems. Art is how we survive and thrive. We are making space to create again.

OUR VISION INCLUDES:

- **Sponsoring cultural opportunities for workers** as part of a broad campaign of storytelling to bring new voices to light.
- **Collaborating with creatives** in our communities (music, visual arts/design, fashion, film and more) to create art that inspires a broad coalition of people to join together.
- **Bringing together workers across different sectors of the economy** to explore new forms of powerbuilding.
- **Establishing a multi-media creative studio and maker space in Detroit** that is a home for collaborations and innovation.

To launch this program, UHESF is working with two leaders based in Michigan:

Annemarie Strassel, a Director at UNITE HERE, is a Detroit-based labor leader with 25 years of union experience. Her responsibilities at UNITE HERE include 10 years as the Director of Communications for the International Union. She holds a Ph.D. from Yale University with expertise in cultural history, art and design.

Wesley Taylor is an interdisciplinary artist and co-founder of Emergence Media, the Design Justice Coalition, the Hip Hop collective Athletic Mic League, and Talking Dolls Studio in Detroit. He is also a member of the AAUP-AFT as a Professor of Graphic Design at Wayne State University.

UPCOMING EXPERIMENTS

- Landscape Analysis & Outreach
- Summer 2026: Worker Residencies in Detroit at Talking Dolls Studio
- Embedding Artists in Worker-Led Campaigns
- Reimagining the Union Hall: Labor Day Arts Installation in Detroit