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Cindy Ornstein, Director of Arts and Culture, Retires After 13 Years Leaving Legacy of Artistic Growth in Mesa



High-res image can be found [here](#).

Mesa, AZ — After 13 years as the City of Mesa’s Director of Arts and Culture and Executive Director of Mesa Arts Center, Cindy Ornstein is retiring from the City of Mesa. Her last day in the office will be June 29. As department director, Ornstein oversees the i.d.e.a. Museum and the Arizona Museum of Natural History and has led day-to-day operations of Mesa Arts Center, the largest multidisciplinary arts center in the Southwest.

“Under Cindy’s leadership, Mesa’s arts and cultural destinations have received national and international recognition, expanded their programming and doubled down on their central role in civic life,” said Mesa Mayor John Giles. “I commend Cindy for her commitment to ensuring residents of all ages have access to arts and cultural experiences and appreciate her partnership in helping to fully realize the role of arts and culture in the evolution of our downtown core.”

“Cindy has contributed greatly to cement Mesa as an arts destination in the Southwest. Under her leadership, we have seen many world-class performers, artists and exhibits fill our theaters and museum galleries, bringing in more patrons than ever before,” said Mesa City Manager Chris Brady. “More importantly, Cindy has engaged our community through initiatives and art education programs which will have a lasting impact in our city.”

Ornstein has expanded Mesa Arts Center programs and services significantly, and she has achieved remarkable milestones. Notable accomplishments include navigating the challenges of COVID-19 by supporting staff, rehiring most laid-off employees and leading a successful recovery. Ornstein helped launch Creative Aging, now known as Opportunities for Ages 55+, and initiated grassroots community work that resulted in Mesa Prototyping Project, MABEL (Mobile Art-based Engagement Lab) and The Collective. Additionally, Ornstein spearheaded impactful community projects like Street Pianos, “Play Me, I’m Yours,” the Mesa Prototyping Project, and “Strange Encounters,” an outdoor art experience that brought the community together during the pandemic.

“Cindy has done an amazing job carrying Mesa Arts Center into the 21st century. She led initiatives at the forefront of arts programming that are part of the lives of the citizens of Mesa and surrounding communities,” said Mesa Arts Center’s Deputy Director of Theaters Randy Vogel. “Her impact will be felt for decades to come.”

Ornstein’s contributions extend beyond Mesa, as she has actively supported Arizona’s creative vitality through various initiatives and board memberships. Additionally, Cindy has served as a Faculty Associate for the Herberger Institute of Art and Design at Arizona State University. Her retirement marks the end of an era characterized by immense growth and artistic engagement in Mesa and the wider community. In retirement, Ornstein looks forward to relaxation, travel, more time with family and many new adventures.

A national search is in process for Ornstein’s successor. Until that person begins their tenure, interim management has been named from the department’s senior leadership, with Ornstein’s duties to be split between two people, Assistant Director of Arts and Culture — Operations and Administration Illya Riske will serve as Interim Arts and Culture Director and Deputy Director of Mesa Arts Center — Visual Arts and Engagement/Education Mandy Tripoli will serve as Interim Director of Mesa Arts Center.

About Mesa Arts Center

Mesa Arts Center, owned and operated by the City of Mesa, is a unique, architecturally stunning facility located in the heart of downtown Mesa. Arizona's largest arts center is home to four theaters, five art galleries and 14 art studios. Guests, patrons and students come to Mesa Arts Center to enjoy the finest live entertainment and performances, world-class visual art exhibitions and outstanding arts education classes. Mesa Arts Center’s mission is to inspire people through engaging arts experiences that are diverse, accessible and relevant. For more information, visit [mesaartscenter.com](https://www.mesaartscenter.com).

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