CREATIVE CITY
21 local artists share their favorite things about Seattle
FROM THE MOMENT YOU SET FOOT IN SEATTLE, YOU CAN FEEL IT: ART IS EVERYWHERE.

Buskers play live music at the airport and Pike Place Market, sculptures adorn street corners and public parks, and marquees promise performances from ballet to Broadway plays. The thriving arts scene is a priority in this city—in fact, Seattle has been recognized for having more arts-related businesses and organizations per capita than any other metropolitan area in the U.S., according to Americans for the Arts.

So who are the people doing all this painting, acting, dancing, sculpting, singing, filming, writing and music making? In this guide, we introduce you to a small but mighty sampling: 21 artists from all genres who live and make art in Seattle. Looking at the city through an artistic lens, they share their favorite places for relaxation, inspiration and celebration.
You’ve lived in a lot of cities. How does Seattle compare?
Seattle is a special place—it’s the only place I feel like I can be part of a city and surrounded by nature without even thinking about it. There are great things happening here, and an especially strong push to support emerging artists.

How would you describe your work as an emerging artist?
My work is about me being a bold black woman. But my work is more introverted right now, as I’m finding the voice to speak. I see dance as a communication tool. I don’t want audience members, I want witnesses and collaborators.

What do you like about living in the Beacon Hill neighborhood?
It feels like a community. Whenever I walk around, people talk to me, we have block parties here in the summer, El Centro de la Raza is a gathering space for people and kids. I’m always interested in supporting black- and brown-owned businesses, like The Station cafe. I frequent Jefferson Park, and I golf at the Jefferson Park golf course. And the light rail station makes it easy to get around.

As a dancer, where have you enjoyed performing in Seattle?
I’ve danced in all kinds of spaces—at the Seattle Art Museum during the Kehinde Wiley show, on stage at The 5th Avenue Theatre, and in the Northwest African American Museum, surrounded by history. I also like performing at the Cornish Playhouse because it feels both intimate and formal.

What should dance fans check out while they’re visiting?
Spectrum Dance—director Donald Byrd is always creating new things. Definitely On the Boards and Velocity Dance Center. Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute also does wonderful programming. If you want to go dancing, I’d suggest Motown Mondays at Bar Sue, on Capitol Hill.

How does Seattle’s famous weather affect your creativity?
I’ve been here for five years. It took a couple years to acclimate, then I started to appreciate the gloominess. Seattle is a great place to marinate. It allows you time to create and not feel like you have to be social. You can build something during those six months of rain, without feeling like eyes are on you. And then the sun comes out and you get to shine.

How did you end up in Seattle?
My mom and I came here to escape Russia when I was 16 years old. We ended up living in Fremont, right near the Troll. We were close to the Lenin statue, too. My mom didn’t like that, but I thought it was funny—Lenin right next to a Taco Del Mar! He would be rolling in his grave.

Where should film fanatics get their fix in Seattle?
If you love film you have to go to Scarecrow Video. It’s a paradise for film—the largest collection of videos in the country! Central Cinema is a really cool place to see older movies and have a beer. The Majestic Bay is the best multiscreen movie experience here. The Ark Lodge isn’t fancy, but it’s great. Farther north, the Crest shows art films and second run movies. And Northwest Film Forum is awesome for finding films you wouldn’t see anywhere else.

What keeps filmmakers in Seattle, as opposed to Los Angeles?
Each region has its own culture, and artists need to represent their area onscreen—otherwise all the stories come out of LA and New York City. We’re like our own kind of Portlandia here, and that story needs to be told too.

When you aren’t making movies, what do you like to do?
I love the Triple Door. It’s such a world-class venue. I especially love the burlesque shows there. All my work is genderqueer, and that’s a big part of Seattle burlesque culture—it’s a free for all! I also love taking friends to the Center for Wooden Boats. I don’t know how to sail, so I just get a rowboat. I love hiking too—you can hike to these alpine meadows at Mount Rainier and it doesn’t even seem real. You can imagine Snow White running around with her little animals.

Any hidden gems you recommend?
The Georgian restaurant at the Fairmont Hotel is a treasure. It’s so not Seattle—it’s fancy looking. But the lunches are reasonable and it always feels like a special occasion. Also: Café Mox in Ballard. It’s attached to a board game store [Card Kingdom], so you can borrow a game and bring it over to play. And I love going to the Pretty Parlor vintage clothing store—it feels like I’ve been swallowed by a bubblegum monster.
As a Cairo native, how do you find the Seattle weather?
I love the gray! I love the drizzle, the clouds. Clear blue skies bore me to tears.

Your plays are often immigrant stories. How does that fit with living in Seattle?
Seattle wasn't established until the 1850s—that's nothing! Unless you're Native American, everybody here basically just got here. Immigrants like me have a sense of being on the edge. So it makes sense to venture here, to the edge of the continent.

What neighborhoods do you hang out in?
I live on Capitol Hill, so I go to the Broadway Farmer’s Market, or walk through Cal Anderson Park—it has a nice vibe, people walking dogs and playing bike polo on the tennis courts. Seattle has burst out of its small-town clothes but it's still a place where people hang out in coffee shops. I like Little Oddfellows at Elliott Bay Bookstore, Caffe Vita and Victrola.

Which tourist activities do you think are worth doing?
On a warm, sunny day, it’s great to go to the International Fountain at Seattle Center, where the music is playing and people are splashing around—I’ve never gone in but I will some day. I also point visitors to the Space Needle. The revolving restaurant is good for special occasions, and going up at night is really nice for a different kind of view. And of course you have to take a ferry—anywhere, just take a ferry.

Do you have favorite places to see theater in Seattle?
I like ACT Theater and 12th Avenue Arts. For smaller-scale productions I like West of Lenin and Theater Schmeater, and for unique, off-kilter visions, I go to tiny Annex Theater. I've been seeing plays here for 23 years, and what I absorb is the audience reaction—if you're paying attention, it affects your writing. Seattle audiences have a generosity of spirit and a "why not?" openness.

What keeps you from moving to a “theater town” like NYC?
The environment: the Puget Sound, the Olympic Mountains, Mount Rainier. In New York City people are always saying they need to “get away.” Here, I never feel like that. Seattle is the getaway place.

What do you like to do in Seattle when you aren’t holed up writing songs?
I love nature. I love going to the Ballard Locks, Discovery Park, Carkeek Park, hanging out with my dog Mochi at Golden Gardens. A little further south, the Kubota Gardens are really beautiful. I love being on Lake Union in a sailboat, which you can rent at the Center for Wooden Boats.

You wrote your first solo album, Fog on the Lens, while in residency at Town Hall Seattle. How did the civic and cultural event space affect your songwriting?
I had been writing in a pastoral mode, with a lot of nature imagery. But when I started the residency at Town Hall, I started going to a lot of the talks there, and spending more time downtown, at nearby cultural centers like the Frye Museum and the Central Library. It made me think more about human relationships and communities—which showed up in the songs.

How have you liked playing free shows to passersby for the live local music program at Sea-Tac Airport?
I really enjoy playing those long sets, because every once in a while I have intense moments of connection. I play my songs mixed with covers of Simon and Garfunkel, and the Beatles, which has raised the bar on my own writing! My new solo album, Pieces of Sky, was inspired by playing at the airport and visiting Iceland, Sweden and Japan—which, like Seattle, have a laidback, modest way about them that I connect with.

Where do you like to hear and perform music?
When I first started playing shows I spent a lot of time at The Vera Project, the all-ages venue. Now the Triple Door is one of my favorite places. I also love the Fremont Abbey, and the Chapel at Good Shepherd Center—that room is really great for experimental and jazz music. I've played in the KEXP gathering space, where I also just like to hang out, drinking coffee at La Marzocco and reading a book. You can see the DJs through the glass, and there's a little record store there. Sonic Boom Records is also great—one of the best record stores on the West Coast.

Playwright. Writer

Yussef El Guindi

facebook.com/yussef.guindi | photo: Broadway Farmers Market, Capitol Hill

Tomo Nakayama

Musician. Songwriter

tomonakayama.com | photo: KEXP Gathering Space, Queen Anne
The art in your store 8th Generation depicts everything from salmon to the Seattle Seahawks. How did this mix arise? For many native artists, nature is a major inspiration, but sometimes you have to reconcile with living in a city. I grew up on the rural Nooksack reservation, but I always visualized myself in a city. My first designs were on Vans sneakers. The art in the store reveals influences from both nature and the urban environment. That’s why it looks and feels different from other “native art” stores. Our focus is to be honest and challenge stereotypes.

What’s the significance of your design featuring three hummingbirds fighting? I’m Nooksack, Chinese, French and Scottish. All my work is about identity. If you watch hummingbirds, you know they’re territorial—they’re proxies for people. In this design there’s a bully, a victim, and a hero. I think we can revisit these roles—have new conversations about identity and race—with a lighter tone through the artwork.

What’s your advice for visitors looking to purchase Native American art? Make sure the artist’s name is attached. There is a market for this cultural art, and native artists have been kept out of the profit loop. Avoid “native-inspired” art, which means native people weren’t involved. In our store we use the term “inspired native,” because native artists are creating the work.

Where else in Seattle do you recommend buying art? You can buy art directly from all kinds of artists at Pike Place Market. And Inscape Arts, where my studio is, has regular open houses, where you can buy work directly from the 30-50 artists who work there.

What do you wish people knew about Seattle? I want people to know that the native art of Seattle area is Coast Salish. It’s distinct from Northwest Coast peoples, who stretch from Northern California to Alaska. Traditionally, Coast Salish art was utilitarian, carved into things people actually used. That’s why our art is on phone cases and tote bags. It’s more accurate.

Where can visitors learn about Coast Salish history? It’s really worth a trip to the Suquamish Museum, which you can get to by the Bainbridge ferry. It’s tribally run, so native people are in control of the story. Or the Hibulb Cultural Center in Tulalip—that’s another really beautiful, authentic museum.

Where do you hang out when you aren’t working? I’m perpetually kicking myself for not spending more time in nature. But when I do get out, I like to go to Seward Park. The International District has so much great food—I go to Eastern Café for breakfast, Hoho Seafood for Chinese, and Phnom Penh Noodle House. The Wing Luke Museum is another favorite spot, especially the Bruce Lee exhibit.
What do you love about living in West Seattle?
West Seattle feels like a small town. I know all the people who work in the places I frequent. I wrote my first book *Confessions of a Latter Day Virgin* at Freshy’s coffee shop. Now I’m writing a lot at Admiral Bird. I love that there are two used bookstores (Merryweather and Pegasus) on the main street, plus Easy Street Records, and Virago, my favorite place to look at beautiful jewelry. Circa restaurant, where I waitressed for years, feels like home—it’s more a part of my writing career than anywhere else in Seattle because of all the relationships that stemmed from working there. It’s a lovely, close, friendly feeling.

How does the Seattle landscape play into your writing?
I live near the Fauntleroy ferry dock, so I have a great view. I can write for a few hours, then walk along Alki Beach to Jack Block Park and work out creative problems along the way. The sea air must have some healing properties—or maybe the salt in my body is connected to the salt in that water. The view never stops being stunning. I’ve been in this neighborhood for 12 years, and every time I see it, it’s breathtaking. I also love Hamilton Overlook Park—it’s a beautiful grassy knoll that looks across Elliott Bay toward downtown Seattle.

What’s the best way to get from downtown to West Seattle?
The West Seattle Water Taxi. It’s foot passengers only, but there’s a free shuttle to the main shopping area. The boat lands near Marination Ma Kai, which has an amazing view and such good food.

And where do you go when you head into Seattle?
I never tire of going to Oddfellows Cafe for happy hour, then wandering through Elliott Bay Books next door—browsing while buzzed. I go to readings at Hugo House literary center. And on first Wednesdays, the Silent Reading Party in the Fireside Room at Hotel Sorrento makes you feel fancy while reading a book.

Why do you think there are so many writers in Seattle?
It’s really cozy to sit inside and look out at the grim yet gorgeous landscape. It’s conducive to creativity. You can think deeply. And winter feels like a Victorian novel here—it’s moody. Artists appreciate moodiness!
When you first moved here from Austin, what were you most excited about?
I’m in love with the Space Needle! I love that it’s quirky. I love everything it represents—history, the future, creativity and innovation. It’s a celebration of technology and ingenuity. The whole World’s Fair idea was envisioning how technology might lead to a more equitable society, a utopian society—that’s something I think about with my own creative work. Seeing the Space Needle encourages us to use our imaginations. The Space Needle is a reminder to dream.

How do you reconnect with your Mexican roots?
One of my first jobs when I got here was bartending at the Century Ballroom on salsa dance nights. The Latin American community really comes out for those events, so I got to speak Spanish and experience that warm family vibe. I also like the Seattle Fandango Project, which plays Veracruz style music. When it comes to Mexican food—Baja Bistro has really good chilaquiles, and Fonda La Catrina is great too. Fogon Cocina Mexicana has dishes like my grandmother used to make. Plus, I grew up picking tamarind in Mexico, and they have a tamarind margarita! But the only place that makes a sauce spicy enough for me is Rancho Bravo.

Where do you like to take visitors?
I love the downtown library—that incredible building!—especially the corridor that’s painted entirely red. Fremont Antique Mall is one of my favorite spots for vintage shopping. I love the Monorail. And MoPOP—I can never get enough of photographing that building. The Museum of History and Industry does a great job of making history interactive. And I love taking people to Westward at the top of Lake Union. The bar looks like a Wes Anderson set, the view is spectacular, and you can have oysters and drinks by the fire pit.

How else do you engage with the city?
I love playing pinball—so the Pinball Museum in the ID is a must. Also Flip Flip Ding Ding in my favorite neighborhood, Georgetown. I also love Skee Ball, which you can play at King’s Hardware in Ballard. I go to the Crescent Lounge for karaoke. For live music, the Tractor Tavern feels like home. Oh, and the Hot Tub Boats! Renting one with a bunch of friends is an amazing way to see the city.

Your work with Intiman Theatre means you spend a lot of time at Seattle Center. What do you recommend there?
Sometimes I forget how much Seattle Center has to offer because I’m inside the theater all the time. But there’s great stuff for kids: the Children’s Theatre, and the Children’s Museum. MoPOP always has fun exhibits. The Festal cultural festivals happen year-round. And I always take out of town guests to the KEXP gathering space, because it gives a good glimpse of what Seattle feels like, with music and coffee.

When you emerge from the theater space, where do you go?
My partner loves being outside, so we go to a lot of parks—Magnuson, Discovery, Seward, Volunteer. I also love walking through Olympic Sculpture Park—you’re by the water, you can see the mountains and the ferries... and from there you can walk or bike all the way to Ballard if you go through Myrtle Edwards Park. It’s also really fun to pack a picnic, rent canoes from UW and paddle around. We have so many hills—that can be a deterrent for people exploring the city. But you’ll see so many more things if you walk up the hills!

Dragon Lady, your autobiographical play, is a cabaret-style musical with a live band. Where do you like to see musicals and other theater?
For big musicals I’d recommend The 5th Avenue Theatre. For smaller cabaret shows, definitely check out the Can Can Cabaret at Pike Place Market. And the Rendezvous [Jewelbox Theater] in Belltown has a lot of cool stuff. The Triple Door has great burlesque—which always makes for a fun night on the town. And Pioneer Square’s Café Nordo—they serve dinner and drinks, there’s live music, people dress up, and it’s always a really fun show.

Any cultural institutions you recommend?
The Wing Luke Museum—as an Asian person, to walk among the actual rooms of people who lived in the boarding house there... wow. But the best way to experience culture is to get out and support small businesses in the neighborhoods. Take Light Rail to Columbia City, in the zip code where more than 50 languages are spoken! Try Banh Mi in Little Saigon, Filipino sweet breads, Indian food, Ethiopian food, Caribbean, Mongolian hotpot. When I think about food I think about community.
What’s it like waking up insanely early to host your 6am Morning Show?
This is the most beautiful city in the world, and on my drive in to work, I get to see it in a way almost no one else does. There’s no traffic, no distractions. I drive by the stadiums, the Great Wheel, the waterfront. I see the mountains, the ferries, the water—it’s inspiring.

What’s the best way for visitors to experience Seattle?
You should definitely go to Pike Place Market, the Space Needle, take the Monorail. But if you only do that, you’re going to miss the neighborhoods—which is where Seattle is really experienced. Every neighborhood really has its own vibe, and even the music venues reflect that. Ballard is twangy, Capitol Hill is more rock and electronic, Columbia City is jazz. West Seattle is where the old rockers (like me) go to retire.

Seattle has a reputation as a music city. How does that play out in reality?
I think Seattle over delivers. You get off the plane at Sea-Tac, where you hear local musicians making PSAs, local bands playing on the speakers, local musicians busking on the concourse, and there’s a great SubPop store. You can tour KEXP at Seattle Center—where even the International Fountain music is curated—hang out in our gathering space, watch the DJs work, and buy a record at the Light in the Attic store.

Where else can visitors experience the music scene?
Sonic Boom Records and Easy Street Records are pillars. There’s Daybreak Records, near Fremont Abbey, and Jive Time records just down the street. A lot of neighborhoods have two music venues—High Dive and Nectar in Fremont, Sunset and Tractor Tavern in Ballard, Neumos and Chop Suey on Capitol Hill. The Crocodile, Showbox, and Triple Door downtown. And people should try to make it to the Sound Garden sculpture at Magnuson Park. Soundgarden brought the city into their songs, and the band really represents Seattle.

How do you like to spend time with your kids in the city?
Pacific Science Center is great—we go to the exhibits and the IMAX theater. And the new playground at Seattle Center is amazing. But my family loves going to parks. Our life used to be centered on Green Lake. Now we’re in West Seattle, so we go to Lincoln Park, which is incredible. It’s on the Sound, you can walk the wilderness trail to Colman pool, and the Fauntleroy ferry dock is right there, so you can hop over to Vashon Island. We also love going to see the Sounders play. Those games are a really fun, family friendly experience. The March to the Match starts in Pioneer Square, with live music and chants. Nothing represents our community better.
In what ways do Seattle and the Pacific Northwest show up in your films?
Seattle, for me, has a very low-key confidence about it. The city knows what it has to offer and stands behind it without being too showy. I think my work is similar. On a more concrete level, the region is also extremely versatile, filled with cinematic views of all kinds. I’ve been able to shoot stories set in Seattle itself (Lucky Them), set in the southwest United States (Eden) and in Anytown, USA (The Off Hours, Sadie).

Any favorite locations from famous Seattle movies?
I have a soft spot for the Singles apartment building at 19th and John on Capitol Hill. I saw Singles on opening weekend when it came to the small town in Idaho where I lived at the time, and it’s fair to say it was a driving force in my decision to move to Seattle.

When you aren’t playing shows with your band Industrial Revelation, where do you go hear music?
We play all over—the Crocodile, Neumos, Royal Room, Blue Moon Tavern. I hear a lot of music from the other bands on the bills, so when I go out I usually want to go dancing. I like Nectar Lounge in Fremont—they have all kinds of bands: Reggae, salsa, hip hop. I also love ‘90s dance night at Lo-Fi on Eastlake. They have theme nights there, like Emerald City Soul night. Just make sure to check the calendar in case you don’t like psychedelic doom metal.

How would you spend a free day in your neighborhood?
The coffee shop is integral to the Seattle experience, so you have to start the day there. I’m in Columbia City so I usually go to Empire Coffee or Café Vita. I’d also recommend the Columbia City Bakery—anything you get there is incredible. Then go for a walk or bike ride. Lake Washington is so beautiful, and you can walk around it on the path, or hang out in Seward Park. My daughters love walking around Columbia City. We end up at Full Tilt Ice Cream and play old-school video games.

Which major tourist attractions do you enjoy?
The Underground Tour! When I had a day job, we went there as a company, and even as a work event it was really enjoyable.

Any hidden gems you care to reveal?
The Polar Bar in the Arctic Club hotel has a great happy hour. It feels so glamorous in there, and you can play pool for free.

Seattle is steeped in rich jazz history. Where can people experience jazz today?
To be from the same city as Quincy Jones, Jimi Hendrix, where Ray Charles got started—there’s not another city whose music legacy I’d rather be a part of. The Royal Room is my favorite jazz club. It feels like such a neighborhood place. The Owl & Thistle in Pioneer Square has a Tuesday night late-night jam session that features some of the best jazz musicians in Seattle. And I’m excited about the new Black and Tan music hall in Hillman City—which is within a quarter mile of Columbia City. To have multiple music venues in one area is always a good thing.
After establishing The Seattle Group Theatre company in the 1990s, you moved away for a couple decades. How does it feel to be back?
Seattle was my artistic birthplace and I’d always hoped to return. Being near this much nature is amazing. The Native American cultures inhabiting this region instilled something in the ground, air, water, trees, mountains—it’s a spiritual hotspot.

What do you like about working on the University of Washington campus?
All the old-growth trees, the flowering cherry trees in the spring, the fountain, the view of Mount Rainier—the UW campus is like an arboretum with buildings. I love the historic Penthouse Theatre (the first theater-in-the-round built in the U.S.), and the Jones Playhouse is great too. I like the vibe at the Burke Museum café. I also love Magus Books near the Ave.

How does the local theater landscape look these days?
There’s so much interesting theater in so many corners of the city! The 12th Avenue Arts facility is terrific, as is the small 18th & Union theater for solo shows. So is ArtsWest. On the Boards, ACT, Seattle Rep, and Washington Hall have great spaces. The Center Theatre was built for my old company, and now Seattle Shakespeare Company and Book-It Theatre put on plays there.

Any other cultural institutions you frequent?
I like jazz and I think KNKX public radio is one of the best jazz stations around. Jazz Alley is a really nice place to hear music. I also love the Daybreak Star Cultural Center in Discovery Park. I’m part Cherokee and Cree, and I used to go there all the time for pow-wows and salmon bakes. It feels really good there.

What else do you enjoy doing in Seattle?
I’m nature oriented—I like hiking, camping, fishing in the Puget Sound for salmon. I love walking through the Arboretum, Seward Park, Discovery Park. In Volunteer Park you can go up in the water tower and get a great view of the city, or explore the flowers in the Conservatory. I also love sports. I highly recommend going to a softball game at UW—the team is nationally ranked, the tickets are inexpensive, there’s a view of Lake Washington. Everybody knows about Husky football, but the softball games are great. Also: Seattle Storm basketball!
**Where do you find inspiration for your work?**
The Seattle Art Museum’s African art collection. It’s a huge, significant collection that remains vital and relevant. African art is my passion, and at SAM I get re-inspired. I also enjoy visiting Mariane Ibrahim’s gallery—she features contemporary African photography and mixed media work. I’m fascinated by contemporary art, especially at the Frye Museum, and at Facèré Jewelry Art Gallery (which carries my jewelry), for their unusual pieces from all over the world. And even though it has nothing to do with African art, I love glass art. It’s beautiful! I use glass in some of my mixed media figures, which you can see at Traver Gallery—where you can also see work by Dale Chihuly, Preston Singletary and other contemporary glass artists.

**What gets you excited as an artist?**
I’m a junkie for the colossal. Like Mount Rainier! I’m such a fan of big installations—like John Grade’s huge tree installed in the SAM lobby—because they put me in my place. They put humanity in its place. Mad Art Studio has wonderful, big installations. Echo, the giant head at the Olympic Sculpture Park, is amazing. Bainbridge Art Museum, which you can walk to from the ferry, always fills its big front window with huge pieces. And one of my favorite places is the Porcelain Room at SAM. It’s floor to ceiling! I love being overwhelmed by art. We should all be overwhelmed.

**How is the Northwest reflected in your work?**
I use discarded, recovered, recycled materials—people give me all kinds of stuff. So there is an environmental spin. I grew up in Seattle when the Keep Washington Green campaign was going on. Littering was not allowed! Also, while I mostly create figures, I include a lot of greenery—flowers, trees, leaves. My work has an African focus, which folks don’t associate with the Pacific Northwest. But the Northwest does have a folk art tradition. This place feels like it’s at the outer reaches of mankind, so that sense of remoteness plays into the art.

**What do you do when you aren’t making art?**
I go rollerblading on Alki Beach! Or along Myrtle Edwards Park. The views are beautiful and I love feeling the breeze.

**What sounds do you use to signify Seattle when you perform live radio theater with Sandbox Radio?**
We always have a harbor bell, a ferry horn, seagull calls. We use a sifter in a tub of water to sound like the sea sloshing against a pier. And lots of “slurrrp... mmm” for drinking coffee.

**What do you love about living on Queen Anne?**
It’s such a great walking neighborhood. You can walk all around the “crown” on historic streets, looking at old houses and big trees. There are an amazing number of little parks and playgrounds, like Ward Springs Park, which has a great view of downtown. And we have a lot of stairs! You can get a good map of all the staircases at QAstairs.com.

**What are your favorite destinations to build a walk around?**
You can walk to many performance venues—On the Boards, Seattle Rep, Pacific Northwest Ballet—and good restaurants, like Taylor Shellfish. How to Cook a Wolf, and Eden Hill. There’s also Mercer Books used bookstore, and Queen Anne Books, attached to El Diablo coffee shop. If you walk to the top floor of the parking garage across from McCaw Hall, you’ll see the UpGarden P-Patch—a big community garden built on the concrete. Very Seattle.

**You’re a bit of a movie hound. Where do you like to see films?**
My favorite places to watch movies are at Northwest Film Forum, Majestic Bay, and Cinerama. I love going to the Seattle International Film Festival every year and I’m lucky to have two of SIFF’s year-round venues in my neighborhood: SIFF Cinema Uptown and SIFF Film Center.

**As a performer, which stages you like?**
I really appreciate Seattle’s intimate stages, like West of Lenin and On the Boards. And the Falls Theater at ACT, which is small enough to feel intimate but big enough that you can feel the energy of the crowd.

**What’s the best tip you have for tourists?**
Salumi. They have the best meatball sandwich ever, but also the biggest line, and it seems like they’re only open when the butterfly lands on a tulip in a rainstorm. Weird hours. But you have to go, and be there when it opens. There will already be a line, but it will move. Oh my god it is so good.
If Seattle were a dance piece, what would it feel like?
It would be meditative, organic, pretty progressive—and process oriented! Seattle choreographers love taking all the time it needs (even years) to make a piece great. There might be a seven-hour rehearsal, and one hour is spent lying around on the floor together. That’s why the art made here is so good.

Where do you like to perform in Seattle?
Historically I’ve made work for the stage, but lately I’ve been more interested in using the Pacific Northwest setting and the environment of the city. I want dance to be accessible to the public. I’ve staged pieces on tennis courts, on a rooftop in Belltown, at the Olympic Sculpture Park. Recently I did a piece on a floating sauna and a speedboat in Lake Union—people rode up in the electric boats you can rent on Westlake, and took breaks for tacos at Agua Verde. It was vessel choreography.

Where should visitors go to see dance?
If you’re looking for challenging work—maybe even freaky territory—definitely try On the Boards. For contemporary dance and beautiful movement that isn’t ballet, Velocity Dance Center. For European flair, check out Whim W'him. And I love Pacific Northwest Ballet—it’s one of the best in the country. [Director] Peter Boal presents such strong work, and it’s not your typical story ballets. He is really pushing the repertory further.

Any favorite places to go dancing?
Dance Church is the dance party/workout I lead every Tuesday night and Sunday morning at Velocity. People of all shapes, sizes and backgrounds show up. It’s really fun, and helps me ensure I can pay my dancers when we have a show. For a night out on Capitol Hill, I’d recommend Q nightclub for house music, and Havana for the ‘90s night, soul night and really good drinks.

Where else can people get a good sense of Seattle?
I love the Henry Art Gallery because it’s so contemporary and interdisciplinary. The Frye Art Museum’s gift shop is really well curated, with lots of locally made art and jewelry. Tallulah’s for brunch. Rachel’s Ginger Beer. And Bar Melusine for Washington state oysters. Last time I went I found a pearl!

If you could stage a dance piece anywhere in Seattle, where would it be?
On a ferry. Definitely. I’ve already started visualizing it.
How and when did you land in Seattle?
I came here from New York in 1989, and I still feel like I just got here. I lived there and in D.C. for years, but I’d always had my eye on the Pacific Northwest. I had backpacked and hitchhiked through years before, to Mount Rainier and the Olympics, so I thought of it more as an outdoorsy place. But as soon as I got here I fell in love with the music and the musicians I met through Cornish College—Reggie Watts, Eyvind Kang, Tim Young. I was the “old guy” at age 32. Bill Frisell, who I knew from New York, visited me, then moved here a year after I did.

Besides your own venue, The Royal Room, where do you like to hear music?
My favorite Seattle music venue is the Tractor Tavern—it’s just the right amount of together and loose. At The Royal Room, I’ve tried to create a version of that, but one where you can sit down while you listen. Café Racer is known for “out” music and experimental jazz improvisation, with its Sunday Racer sessions. The Seamonster is also a really important place, particularly for jam sessions. I’ve recently played Nectar Lounge, which I think is comfortable and not too slick. And the Sunset Tavern is also great for rock and indie bands.

What do you like about your neighborhood, Columbia City?
I don’t stray from The Royal Room much because I can eat and drink here for free! But the movie theater here, Ark Lodge Cinemas, is awesome. And even though it’s a pizza place, I think Tutta Bella has the best coffee in Seattle. We’re all excited about the new music venue, The Black and Tan. You’d think we might not be happy about the competition, but there’s a strong community feeling here. There are so many great places in a just a few blocks, and it’s all less than a 5-minute walk from the Light Rail station. I love it here.

What parts of the city do you like to explore with your son?
I’m really fond of Ballard—my son was born in my old apartment there. We’d often go to Sunset Hill Park, which faces the Olympic Mountains and overlooks Shilshole Marina. Sometimes you can hear the sea lions singing. I also love going to Golden Gardens, especially in the summer when the beach naturalists from the Seattle Aquarium come out and talk about the tidepools. And the Ballard Locks are really fun! Also: Carkeek Park, with its historic Piper Orchards. Another great spot is the Beacon Hill Food Forest—seven acres of edible forest, free for the picking, and right next to the world-class kids park, Jefferson Park.

What are some great literary places?
I’ve lived in a lot of cities, and Seattle has a very strong book culture. Open Books is one of the only poetry bookstores in the nation, so that’s a must for poetry fans. Elliott Bay Books, of course. Secret Garden Books, in Ballard, has a great kids selection. Also, Kinokuniya, the bookstore next to Uwajimaya grocery, has an incredible collection of Asian literature and J-pop magazines. And Fantagraphics, for graphic novels.

Where do you like to take out-of-towners?
I like to show people the International District—it has such a long and preserved history. I take them to the Panama Hotel and tea house (featured in Jamie Ford’s book, Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet), and the Wing Luke Asian Museum, where you can tour the actual bachelor’s quarters where young immigrants lived (and find good books in the gift shop too). I like visiting Kobe Terrace Park and the Danny Woo International Garden, and shopping at KOBO and MOMO.

Any favorite spots you’ve visited as head of Seattle’s Atlas Obscura Society?
There are a couple of great cemeteries here—both rich places to learn about Seattle history. Mount Pleasant cemetery, on Queen Anne, houses many people who were involved in the founding of the city, in civil rights and labor struggles. Lakeview, on Capitol Hill, is more of a “celebrity” cemetery, with the graves of martial artist Bruce Lee and his son Brandon Lee, poet Denise Levertov, sculptor George Tsutakawa, John Nordstrom, and Mother Damnable, madam of Seattle’s first brothel.
How did you get interested in murals?
I came of age in the Mission District of San Francisco, which is known for its vibrant cultural murals. In addition, I’m a Mexico-phile (of Mexican and Irish heritage) and the mural tradition is really strong in Mexico as a way to teach history. The first mural I painted was through Urban Artworks, a Seattle nonprofit that gets murals on walls, signal boxes, underpasses—quietly championing the revolution.

What are some of your favorite Seattle murals?
We’re spoiled—there’s a robust mural culture here. The historic mural at Colman Pool in Lincoln Park is a good example of traditional style (Also: is there a more beautiful public pool in the world?). I love the heron mural in the parking lot at 20th and Jackson, the girl planting ginger root on Beacon Hill, and the sci-fi scene above Cinerama.

What makes public art successful?
Successful art is site specific—it should be created with an idea of who will experience it and how. The interactive sculpture “Revolution,” in Georgetown, employs cogs and gears that speak to the neighborhood’s industrial past. Noguchi’s “Black Sun” sits on the horizon of the reservoir at Volunteer Park, like a stand-in planet. Pretty extraordinary!

What do you like about living in Beacon Hill?
Beacon Hill feels like a little village where you always run into people—at The Station, which is a hub for political dialogue, or El Quetzal, which has stellar Mexico City-style food. I’m raising a kid, so I go to Jefferson Park, which has amazing views, a skate park, playground, lawn bowling and the Food Forest.

What other neighborhood do you frequent?
Georgetown. There are so many little independent art galleries there. Go to the second Saturday art walk and explore Equinox Studios, Bridge, The Alice, Oxbow. And Studio E, which feels like a Chelsea gallery. I take people to Fantagraphics Bookstore and Fonda La Catrina—my favorite Mexican food, where you hear the Boeing planes right overhead and see the old Rainier Beer buildings. You really get a sense of Seattle history.

What’s your favorite tourist attraction?
I’m a sucker for the Great Wheel! It’s a precipice over the Puget Sound where you can see the Olympics and downtown—it instantly orients you in the city.

What are some of Seattle’s best places for poetry?
Seattle has a strong slam poetry scene, which you can experience Tuesday nights at Re-bar downtown. Elliott Bay Books brings local, national and international poets in to read. Hugo House is another great community for poets and writers. The used bookstores in Pike Place Market are phenomenal—many tourists don’t see them because they’re down under. And Open Books: A Poem Emporium is one of the only poetry bookstores in the country.

Your poetry is often based on deep research on African American history. How do you re-engage with the present?
I’m always living in the research, so it’s hard to take a break from it. When I do, I often go to The Station on Beacon Hill. It’s very neighborhoody. I always see the same people here, having discussions about everything from Afro-futurism to social justice to graphic novels. There are so many great restaurants on Beacon Hill, too—El Quetzal for Mexican, Bar del Corso for pizza, Baja Bistro for breakfast.

People say Beacon Hill has finally come into its own as a neighborhood.
Yeah, my parents moved to Beacon Hill when I was one. I’m pretty sure it’s been a thing for a while! I don’t write specifically about the neighborhood, but so much about living here has shaped the way I’ve thought. At one time, Seattle had very strong lines drawn around certain neighborhoods—black and brown people were not welcome above the Ship Canal. Historically, this was a place where I would’ve been allowed. I feel community here.

Where else do you feel community?
The Northwest African American Museum is cool. Tariqa Waters has the Martyr Sauce art space in Pioneer Square. The Black Dot cultural center brings together black artists, tech people and entrepreneurs to collaborate on projects. And the Northwest Film Forum on Capitol Hill is a wonderful space that’s doing a lot of community work.

Is the natural beauty what draws poets to Seattle?
There is something about the access to nature that writers love. And there’s nothing like going to Volunteer Park to read a book in the grass—especially on one of the first sunny days in Seattle, when everybody is out there going crazy. But for me what’s most stimulating is the way people act and interact here.
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Visit us on the web at visitseattle.org for updates and printable guides, and additional information on featured cultural sites. The website also offers a comprehensive searchable calendar of cultural events including exhibits, performances and festivals. In Seattle, stop by the Seattle Visitor Information Center at the Washington State Convention Center on Pike Street, between 7th and 8th Avenues, for a full range of service and expert advice to enhance your visit.

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Longtime local photographer Hayley Young loves exploring Seattle’s parks—from Discovery, with its incredible views, to Seward, with nearly 360 degrees of waterfront. At night, she can usually be found at a local music venue, such as favorite haunt The Tractor Tavern.

Brangien Davis has been writing about arts and artists in Seattle for the last 20 years. One of her favorite places in the city is Lake Washington, where she loves to swim, kayak, or just stare at the serene, silvery surface.